If you're doing database application development in the Oracle environment, you're going to have to know PL/SQL, the company's extended query and update language. If you want your programs to exploit the special capabilities of Oracle software, you'll need to know the language well. That's where the third edition of Oracle PL/SQL Programming comes into play. Its an absolutely comprehensive reference (as well as a rather extensive tutorial) on PL/SQL, ideally suited to answering your questions about how to perform some programming tasks and reminding you of the characteristics of functions, triggers, and other elements of the database programmers toolkit. The new edition covers calls to Java methods from within PL/SQL programs, autonomous transactions, object type inheritance, and the new Timestamp and XMLType data types. There's also more information about server internals—the way PL/SQL programs are run—than before, better enabling readers to optimize their code for fast and safe execution. Steven Feuerstein takes care to explain, with prose and example code, the characteristics of PL/SQL elements. In explaining number conversions, for example, he explores Oracle's different ways of formatting numbers, then details the behavior of the to_number function under different conditions (with and without a specified format model, and with National Language Support information attached). It's a helpful approach that will have readers using the index to locate places in which Feuerstein mentions language elements of interest. --David Wall

Topics covered: How to use Oracle PL/SQL in all its manifestations through Oracle9i. Fundamentals of program structure (loops, cases, exceptions, etc.) and execution get attention, as do data types, transaction management, triggers, and the object-oriented aspects of the language. There's also coverage of calls to external Java and C programs.

My Personal Review:
Most of us have had to learn PL/SQL at some point in our Oracle careers, and I am sure many of you have become quite expert. On the other hand,
some of you may be new to this world of PL/SQL and are looking for a basic text that will educate you in the use of this language. The Bible for PL/SQL programming has long been the earlier editions of this book, and Steven Feuerstein has been considered the guru of PL/SQL programming for as many years as I can remember. Steven has completely revised his best-known work into a new, third edition. I thought that it was time to take a look at this new edition and see what it has to offer both groups. Here is what I found. Steven now provides complete coverage of PL/SQL from Oracle RDBMS version 7.3.4 through Oracle9i Release 2. He has incorporated all the information from his book PL/SQL Guide to Oracle8i New Features into this book. He has added a new chapter on database triggers and included especially useful information on DDL triggers and database event triggers. He has added new content on the PL/SQL runtime architecture, creating and running PL/SQL programs, and calling Java methods from within PL/SQL. He has integrated all the new Oracle9i features throughout the text, instead of placing them in a separate chapter. In order to make the book fit into 1,000 pages, some of the example code was removed and can be found on OReillys Web site at www.oreilly.com/catalog/oraclep3 as a zipped file. About 300 files are available. Approximately 200 pages that were pruned from the second edition that still have some utility are also available there. The book is organized much the same way as previous editions, with a few changes. There are 23 chapters divided into six parts: Part I: Programming in PL/SQL. These three chapters orient you to PL/SQL, its history, utility, and basic programming constructs. Part II: PL/SQL Program Structure. Conditional, sequential, iterative control structures, and exceptions are covered in these three chapters. Part III: PL/SQL Program Data. Six chapters cover how to manipulate data within PL/SQL procedures and functions. Strings, numbers, datatypes, including the new Oracle9i datatypes, and records and collections are also discussed. Part IV: SQL in PL/SQL. There are three chapters that cover transactions, data retrieval, and the use of dynamic SQL. Part V: PL/SQL Application Construction. The four chapters in this part discuss procedures and functions, packages, triggers, and managing PL/SQL applications. Part VI: Advanced PL/SQL Topics. There are four final chapters that cover the runtime architecture, object-orientation in PL/SQL, PL/SQL and Java, and external procedure calls. Steven states in his preface that the three objectives of this book are to 1. take full advantage of the features of PL/SQL, 2. use PL/SQL to solve your problems, and 3. write efficient, maintainable code. Each chapter has been crafted to address these three objectives. His writing style is clear, succinct, and reads like he is sitting next to you chatting about the new things hes learned. The book is absolutely full of code examples. Most of the examples are posed as practical programming problems. He carefully walks you through the lines of example code,
clearly explaining the logic used for each step of the program, and points out version-based differences. Steve is also not afraid to express an opinion and will tell you exactly why he chooses a particular method for solving a problem. Notes explaining tips and traps proliferate the book. So, what do I think about this new edition? His book has the most comprehensive coverage of PL/SQL that I have ever seen. The code examples achieve a level of sophistication that is truly elegant. For a PL/SQL beginner, this book can be the source of all PL/SQL wisdom. Even if you have been programming with PL/SQL for a time, I think you will find the information on Oracle9i new features useful and will find many nuggets of information that can be used immediately to improve your code.

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