Setting the Tab Order in an Epi Info™ 7 Form

Introduction:

The tab order is the order in which the cursor moves from field to field as data are entered. Initially, the order in which the cursor visits each field is set automatically based on each field's position in order from left to right, then top to bottom. However, as fields are moved around the canvas, or if a specific tab order is desired (as when fields are arranged in vertical columns), the tab order must be reset. The tab order can be automatically, manually, or partially assigned. Tab order needs to be assigned for each page individually.

Setting the Tab Order

In order to see the tab order in a page, follow the steps below:

1. Navigate to the desired page in your form.
2. Right-click the canvas. A context menu appears.
3. Select **Tabs > Show Tab Order** from the context menu (Figure). The tab number for each field appears (Figure 2).

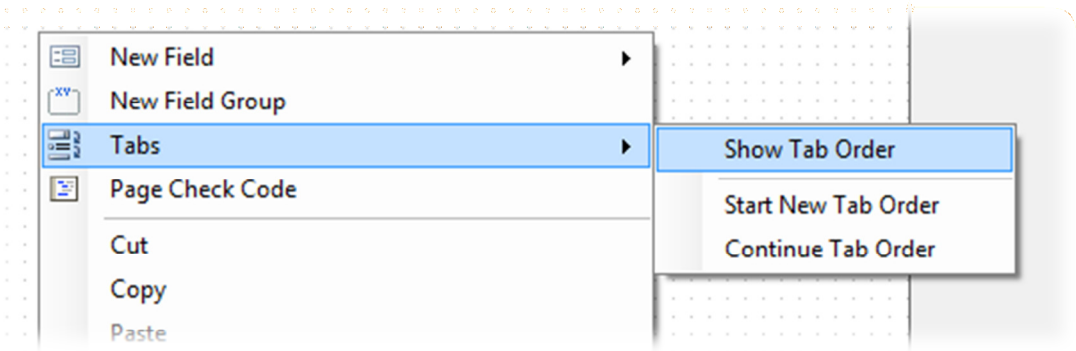

Figure 1

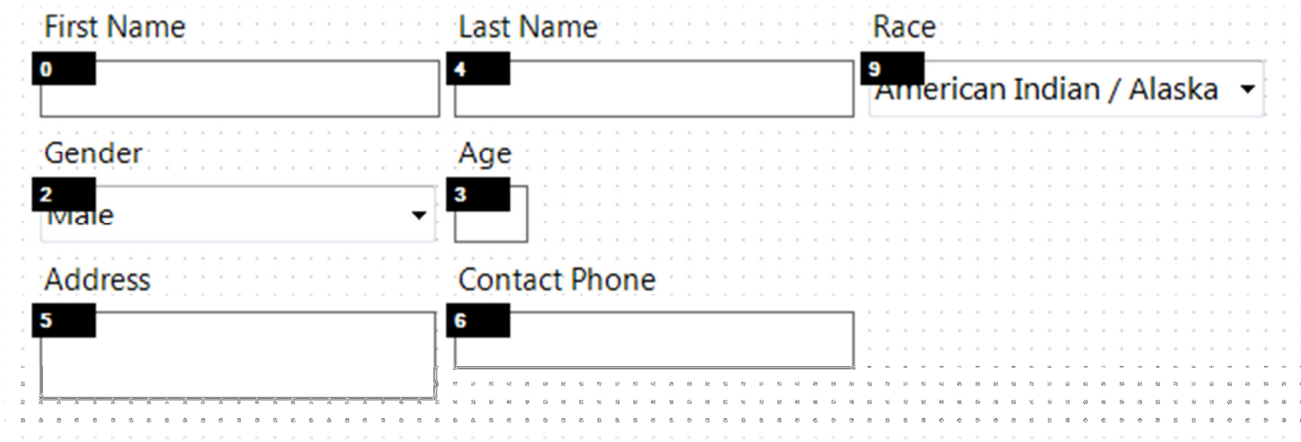

Figure 2

As you can see, Figure 2 shows the tab stops aren't numbered in logical order. The cursor would automatically move from First Name to Gender instead of from First Name to Last Name. This behavior occurs because the tab stops are numbered based on *the order of creation*. You can choose a few different ways to assign a more logical tab order.

Automatically assigning tabs

You can automatically re-assign all the tabs on a given page based on a left-to-right, top-to-bottom sorting algorithm. Follow the steps below to do this:

1. Navigate to the desired page.
2. Right-click the canvas. A context menu appears.
3. Select **Tabs > Start New Tab Order** from the context menu. The program calculates the new tab numbers and displays them for each field (Figure).

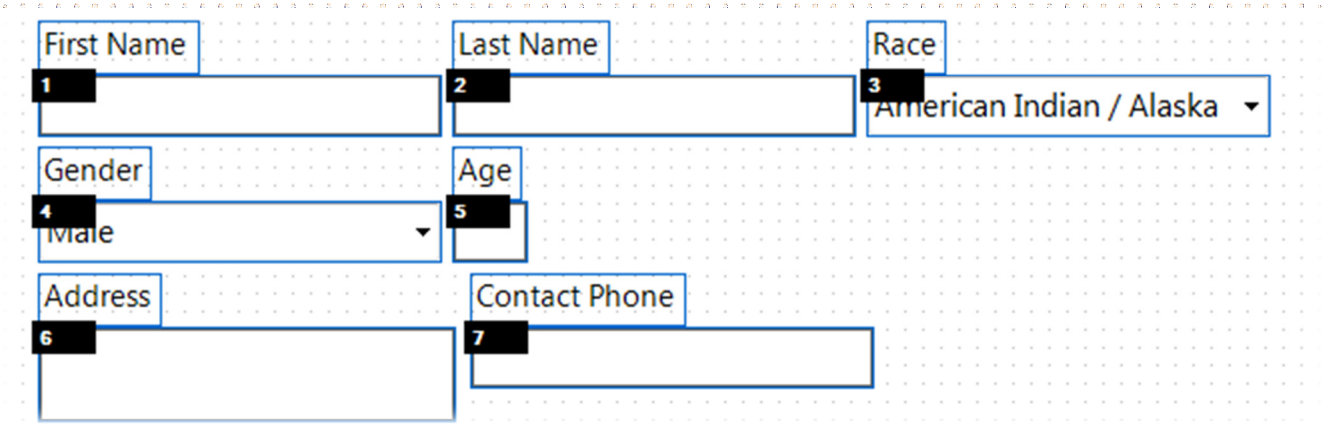

Figure 3

The cursor will now move from the top of the form to the bottom of the form, and left-to-right if

more than one field is on the same line.

Manually Assigning Tabs

You might want to modify the ordering of the tabs manually depending on the circumstances. For instance, **assume** that the tab stops should be numbered by column (top-to-bottom) first instead of by row (left-to-right). In this case, you would do the following:

1. Navigate to desired page.
2. Right-click the canvas. A context menu appears.
3. Select **Tabs > Start New Tab Order** from the context menu. The program calculates the new tab numbers and displays them for each field.
4. Click *once* inside of the black box for the field that should be first in the tab order (First Name). You could also right click on the black box and select the *Set as First Tab* option.
5. Click once inside of the black box for the field that should be second in the tab order (Last Name).
6. Click once inside of the black box for the field that should be third in the tab order (Race).
7. Continue clicking each black box on the form for each subsequent field. i.e., Last Name, Age, Contact Phone, and then Race.

It is possible that two fields might temporarily have the same tab numbers when the tabs are manually assigned. For example, after completing step 5, but before starting step 6, both Last Name and Gender would have the number 2. Two fields *are* allowed to have the same tab number, but this isn't recommended as it will be impossible to determine where the cursor will go during data entry creating possibly error messages. This ambiguity is one reason why you should always double-check the tab order on each page of your form.

Partially assigning tabs

The **Continue Tab Order** feature allows you a greater degree of freedom over automatic tab ordering. Follow the steps below to see how you can use this feature to set the tab order by columns.

1. Navigate to the desired page.
2. Right-click the canvas. A context menu appears.
3. Select **Tabs > Start New Tab Order** from the context menu. The tabs are re-calculated and arranged in left-to-right, top-to-bottom order as shown in Figure .
4. Drag a selection box around the three fields shown in Figure 4. The three fields are selected as shown in Figure . (Ensure *only* the fields in the first column are selected. Often, field selection can result in other fields being unintentionally included in the selection depending on how close the fields are placed together).
5. With the three fields selected as shown in Figure , click on the canvas. A context menu appears.
6. Select **Tabs > Start New Tab Order** from the context menu as shown in Figure 1. The tabs

are re-calculated *only for the selected fields* as shown Figure .

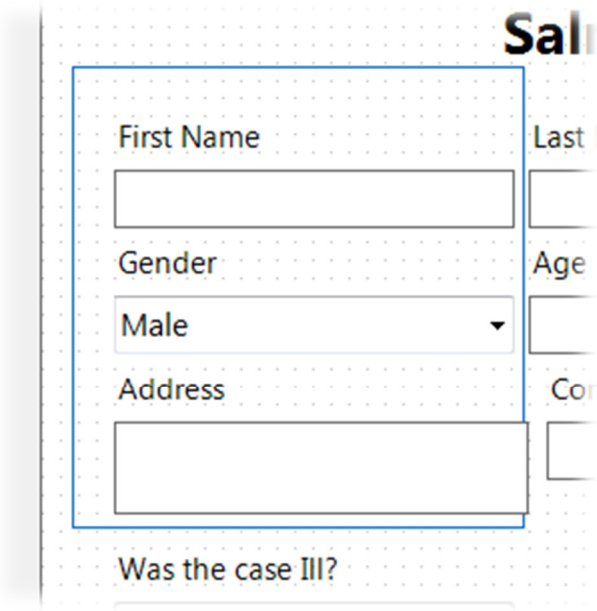

Figure 4

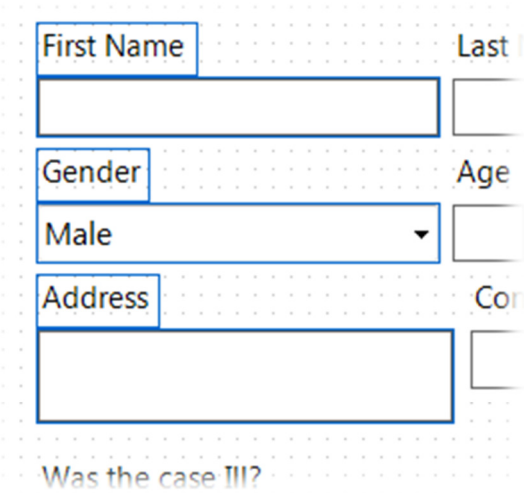

Figure 5

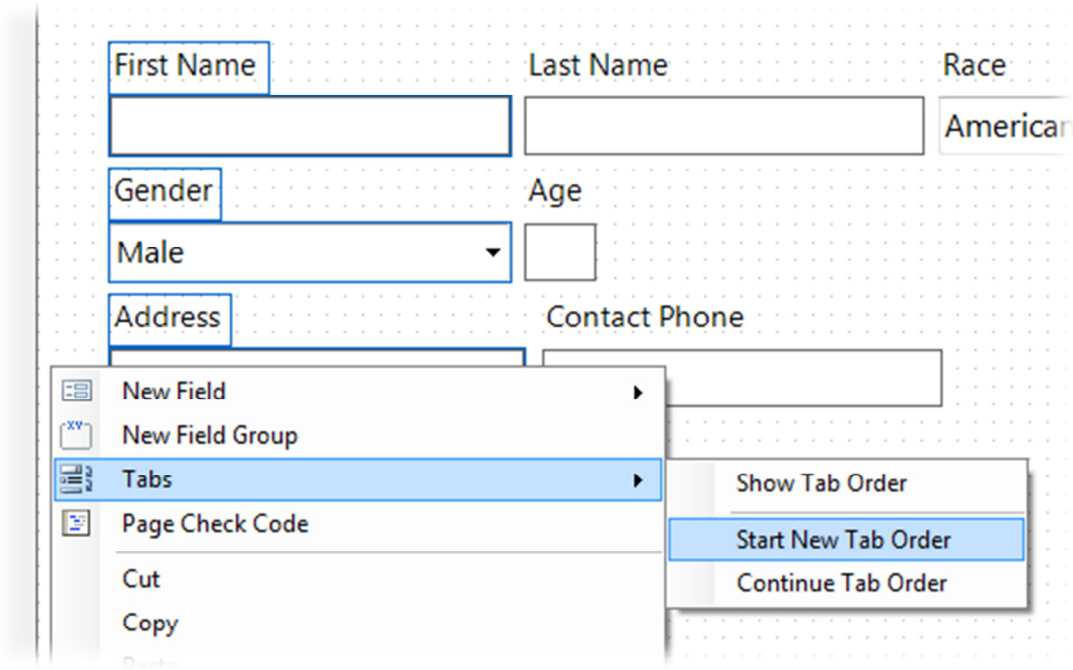

Figure 1

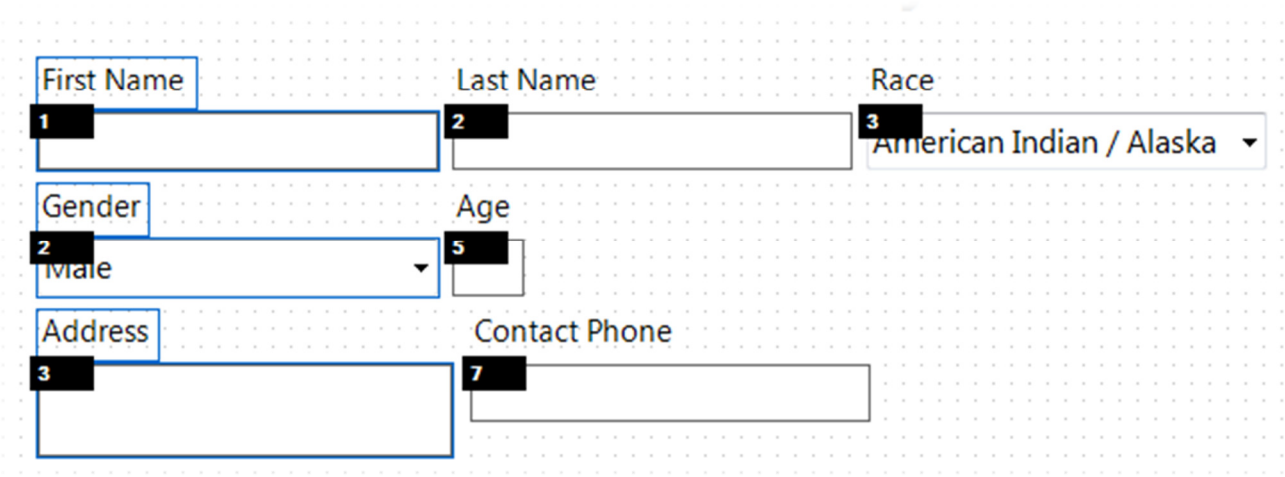

Figure 7

You need to continue the process of selecting columns and setting the tab order on those columns until there aren't any fields left. In this example, you would need to process two more columns.

However, you cannot use the **Start New Tab Order** option for the next columns because this would start the tab order over again at 1. Instead, from this point forward, you will use the **Continue Tab Order** feature.

1. Click the blank canvas background to de-select any fields that might still be selected from the prior set of steps.

2. Drag a selection box around Last Name, Age, and Contact Phone. The three fields are selected.
3. Right-click the canvas. A context menu appears.
4. Select **Tabs > Continue Tab Order** from the context menu as shown in Figure . The tabs for only the selected fields are calculated and displayed as shown in Figure .

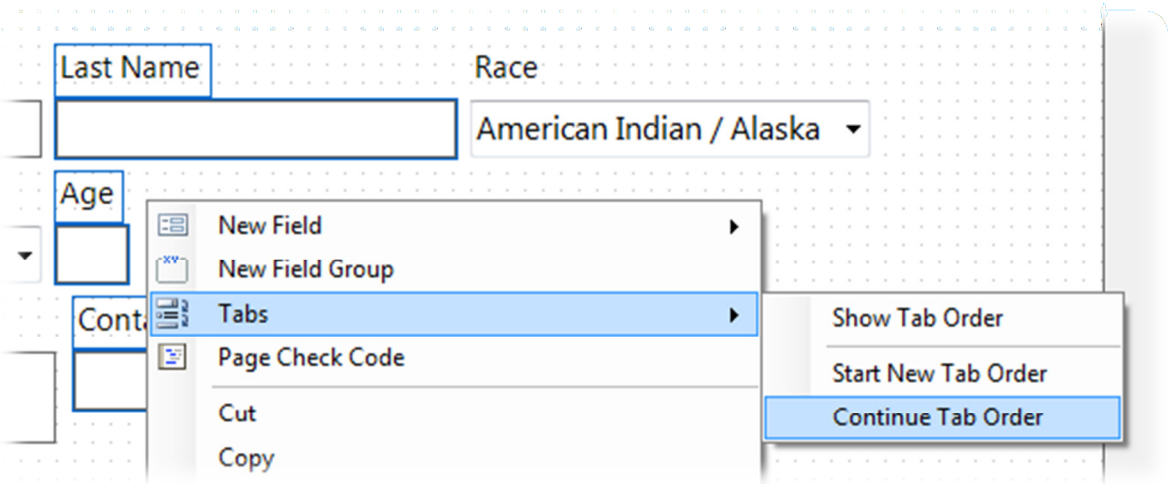

Figure 8

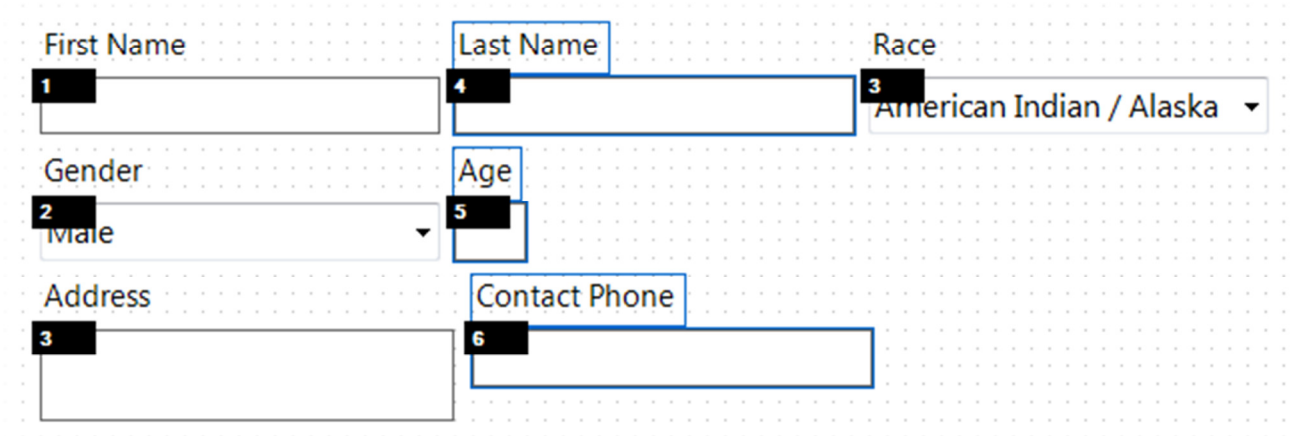

Figure 9

Notice the three selected fields continued their numbering from where you left off in the prior exercise. You can keep using the **Continue Tab Order** feature for subsequent selections of fields.