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Generated on 15/11/2026 00:39

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InnoDB or MyISAM: which storage engine, and what to do with an old table

Servers & Technology

CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
RLX-INT-KB-3516	v2026.10.10	International · English

MozOut International
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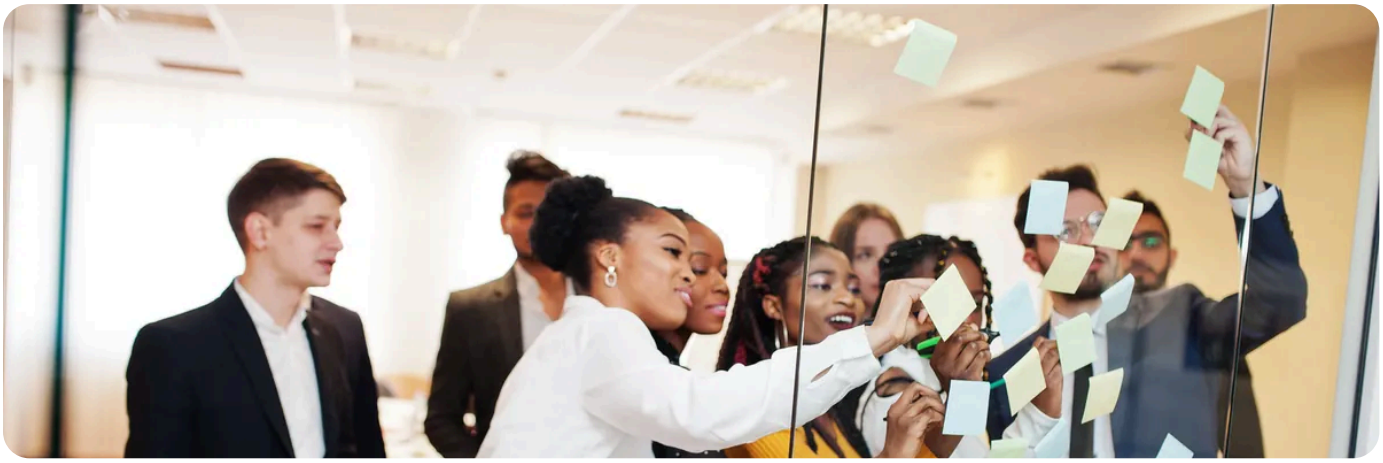
Tax no. (SARS) 943 907 6234 · Registration no. (CIPC) 2025/667953/07

https://www.my.mozout.com/knowledgebase/3516

InnoDB or MyISAM: which storage engine, and what to do with an old table

Servers & Technology Created on **October 10, 2026** 2 min read



Use InnoDB. It is the default engine of the MariaDB that runs on our hosting, it copes better with failures and simultaneous writes, and it is what current applications expect. MyISAM is an older engine that still turns up in databases created many years ago. If you find MyISAM tables in your site, in most cases they are worth moving to InnoDB.

What each engine does differently

Feature	InnoDB	MyISAM
Transactions	Yes: a group of changes is saved all or nothing.	No.
Locking on write	Per row: several writes at the same time.	Whole table: one write makes the others wait.
Foreign keys	Yes.	No.
After a failure	Recovers by itself, from its internal log.	The table may be left marked as damaged and need repair. See **a table marked as crashed**.
Text search (FULLTEXT)	Yes, in current versions.	Yes.
Size on disk	Tends to take more.	Tends to take less.

MyISAM has one small advantage: counting all the rows in a table, with no condition, is instant. It is rare for that to decide anything on a website.

Seeing which engine each table has

1. In cPanel, open **phpMyAdmin** and pick the database in the left-hand list. See **creating databases and using phpMyAdmin**.

2. The table list has a column with each table's **type** (the engine). Or, on the **SQL** tab, run:

```
SELECT TABLE_NAME, ENGINE FROM information_schema.TABLES WHERE TABLE_SCHEMA = DATABASE();
```

3. Note which ones are MyISAM.

Moving a table to InnoDB

1. **Make a copy of the database first.** See **exporting a database with phpMyAdmin**. If something goes wrong, you can go back.

2. Pick a quiet moment. The conversion copies the table, and a large table takes a while and stays locked until it finishes.

3. In phpMyAdmin, open the table, go to **Operations** and, under **Storage Engine**, choose InnoDB. Or, on the SQL tab, one table at a time:

```
ALTER TABLE table_name ENGINE=InnoDB;
```

4. Walk through the site: pages, forms, login. Only then convert the next table.

Convert table by table, not all at once, and never without a copy.
On a very large database the conversion can exhaust the connection time or take too much space in the account. If you see "MySQL server has gone away" halfway, see **the causes, in order of likelihood**.

A recent WordPress database is born as InnoDB.
It is only worth checking if the site is old, came from another provider or was created by a very old program. If you want to take the chance to lighten the database, see **cleaning and optimising the database in phpMyAdmin**.

NEED A HAND?

Have old tables and do not want to risk the conversion? Tell us the database and we will go through it with you.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- A table marked as crashed: what it means and how to repair it →
- Creating databases and using phpMyAdmin →
- MySQL or MariaDB: which one runs here, and does it matter →
- Hosting plans and what each includes →

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