The optimizer is the "brain" of the database, interpreting SQL queries and determining the fastest method of execution. This talk uses the EXPLAIN command to show how the optimizer interprets queries and determines optimal execution.

https://momjian.us/presentations

Creative Commons Attribution License

Last updated: June 2023
Postgres Query Execution

User Terminal

Application Code

Libpq

PostgreSQL Database Server

Queries

Results
Postgres Query Execution

https://momjian.us/main/presentations/internals.html#internal_pics
The Optimizer Is the Brain

https://www.flickr.com/photos/dierkschaefer/
What Decisions Does the Optimizer Have to Make?

- Scan Method
- Join Method
- Join Order
Which Scan Method?

- Sequential Scan
- Bitmap Index Scan
- Index Scan
A Simple Example Using *pg_class.relname*

```sql
SELECT relname
FROM pg_class
ORDER BY 1
LIMIT 8;
```

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>relname</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_pg_foreign_data_wrappers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_pg_foreign_servers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_pg_foreign_table_columns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_pg_foreign_tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_pg_user_mappings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>administrable_role_authorizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>applicable_roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attributes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let’s Use Just the First Letter of `pg_class.relname`

```
SELECT substring(relname, 1, 1)
FROM pg_class
ORDER BY 1
LIMIT 8;
```

---

a
a
a
a
CREATE TEMPORARY TABLE sample (letter, junk) AS
    SELECT substring(relname, 1, 1), repeat('x', 250)
    FROM pg_class
    ORDER BY random();  -- add rows in random order

CREATE INDEX i_sample on sample (letter);

All queries used in this presentation are available at https://momjian.us/main/writings/pgsql/optimizer.sql.
CREATE OR REPLACE FUNCTION lookup_letter(text) RETURNS SETOF text AS $$
BEGIN
RETURN QUERY EXECUTE 'EXPLAIN SELECT letter FROM sample
WHERE letter = ''' || $1 || '''';
END
$$ LANGUAGE plpgsql;
What is the Distribution of the *sample* Table?

```sql
WITH letters (letter, count) AS (  
    SELECT letter, COUNT(*)  
    FROM sample  
    GROUP BY 1
)
SELECT letter, count, (count * 100.0 / (SUM(count) OVER ()))::numeric(4,1) AS "%"  
FROM letters  
ORDER BY 2 DESC;
```
What is the Distribution of the *sample* Table?

| letter | count | %  |
|--------+-------+----|
| p      | 342   | 83.4 |
| c      | 13    | 3.2 |
| r      | 12    | 2.9 |
| f      | 6     | 1.5 |
| s      | 6     | 1.5 |
| t      | 6     | 1.5 |
| u      | 5     | 1.2 |
| _      | 5     | 1.2 |
| d      | 4     | 1.0 |
| v      | 4     | 1.0 |
| a      | 3     | 0.7 |
| e      | 2     | 0.5 |
| k      | 1     | 0.2 |
| i      | 1     | 0.2 |
EXPLAIN SELECT letter
FROM sample
WHERE letter = 'p';

QUERY PLAN

-----------------------------------------------------------------------
Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.16..10.07 rows=2 width=32)
  Recheck Cond: (letter = 'p'::text)
  -> Bitmap Index Scan on i_sample (cost=0.00..4.16 rows=2 width=0)
    Index Cond: (letter = 'p'::text)
EXPLAIN SELECT letter
FROM sample
WHERE letter = 'd';

QUERY PLAN

-----------------------------------------------
Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.16..10.07 rows=2 width=32)
  Recheck Cond: (letter = 'd'::text)
  -> Bitmap Index Scan on i_sample (cost=0.00..4.16 rows=2 width=0)
     Index Cond: (letter = 'd'::text)
EXPLAIN SELECT letter
FROM sample
WHERE letter = 'i';

QUERY PLAN

-----------------------------------------------------------------------
Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.16..10.07 rows=2 width=32)
  Recheck Cond: (letter = 'i'::text)
  -> Bitmap Index Scan on i_sample (cost=0.00..4.16 rows=2 width=0)
    Index Cond: (letter = 'i'::text)
Running ANALYZE Causes a Sequential Scan for a Common Value

ANALYZE sample;

EXPLAIN SELECT letter
FROM sample
WHERE letter = 'p';

QUERY PLAN

---------------------------------------------------------
Seq Scan on sample (cost=0.00..21.12 rows=342 width=2)
  Filter: (letter = 'p'::text)

Autovacuum cannot ANALYZE (or VACUUM) temporary tables because these tables are only visible to the creating session.
Sequential Scan

Heap

8K
EXPLAIN SELECT letter
FROM sample
WHERE letter = 'd';

QUERY PLAN

-----------------------------------------------------------------------
Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.18..14.23 rows=4 width=2)
  Recheck Cond: (letter = 'd'::text)
  -> Bitmap Index Scan on i_sample (cost=0.00..4.18 rows=4 width=0)
    Index Cond: (letter = 'd'::text)
Bitmap Index Scan

Index 1  Index 2  Combined
col1 = 'A' col2 = 'NS'  Index

Table

\[
\begin{array}{c}
0 & 0 & 0 \\
1 & 1 & 1 \\
0 & 1 & 0 \\
1 & 0 & 0 \\
\end{array}
\]

'A' AND 'NS'
An Even Rarer Value Causes an Index Scan

```
EXPLAIN SELECT letter
FROM sample
WHERE letter = 'i';

QUERY PLAN

Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..8.17 rows=1 width=2)
  Index Cond: (letter = 'i '::text)
```
Index Scan

Index

< Key = >

Heap

DATATA DATATA DATATA DATATA DATATA DATATA DATATA DATATA DATATA DATATA DATATA
Let’s Look at All Values and their Effects

```
WITH letter (letter, count) AS (  
    SELECT letter, COUNT(*)  
    FROM sample  
    GROUP BY 1
)

SELECT letter AS l, count, lookup_letter(letter)  
FROM letter  
ORDER BY 2 DESC;
```

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>l</th>
<th>count</th>
<th>lookup_letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>Seq Scan on sample (cost=0.00..21.12 rows=342 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>Filter: (letter = 'p'::text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.25..20.69 rows=13 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Recheck Cond: (letter = 'c'::text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-&gt; Bitmap Index Scan on i_sample (cost=0.00..4.25 rows=13 width=0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Index Cond: (letter = 'c'::text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.24..20.14 rows=12 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Recheck Cond: (letter = 'r'::text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-&gt; Bitmap Index Scan on i_sample (cost=0.00..4.24 rows=12 width=0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Index Cond: (letter = 'r'::text)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WITH letter (letter, count) AS (  
    SELECT letter, COUNT(*)  
    FROM sample  
    GROUP BY 1
)
SELECT letter AS l, count,  
    (SELECT *  
     FROM lookup_letter(letter) AS l2  
     LIMIT 1) AS lookup_letter  
FROM letter  
ORDER BY 2 DESC;
| l | count | lookup_letter |
|---+-------+----------------------------------|
| p | 342   | Seq Scan on sample (cost=0.00..21.12 rows=342 width=2) |
| c | 13    | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.25..20.69 rows=13 width=2) |
| r | 12    | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.24..20.14 rows=12 width=2) |
| f | 6     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.19..17.25 rows=6 width=2) |
| t | 6     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.19..17.25 rows=6 width=2) |
| s | 6     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.19..17.25 rows=6 width=2) |
| u | 5     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.19..15.86 rows=5 width=2) |
| _ | 5     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.19..15.86 rows=5 width=2) |
| d | 4     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.18..14.23 rows=4 width=2) |
| v | 4     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.18..14.23 rows=4 width=2) |
| a | 3     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.17..12.31 rows=3 width=2) |
| e | 2     | Bitmap Heap Scan on sample (cost=4.16..10.07 rows=2 width=2) |
| k | 1     | Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..8.17 rows=1 width=2) |
| i | 1     | Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..8.17 rows=1 width=2) |

Results will vary based on the clustering of values in heap pages.
We Can Force an Index Scan

```
SET enable_seqscan = false;

SET enable_bitmapscan = false;

WITH letter (letter, count) AS (
    SELECT letter, COUNT(*)
    FROM sample
    GROUP BY 1
)
SELECT letter AS l, count,
    (SELECT *
    FROM lookup_letter(letter) AS l2
    LIMIT 1) AS lookup_letter
FROM letter
ORDER BY 2 DESC;
```
Notice the High Cost for Common Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>l</th>
<th>count</th>
<th>lookup_letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..56.35 rows=342 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..27.69 rows=13 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..25.53 rows=12 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..18.98 rows=6 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..18.98 rows=6 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..18.98 rows=6 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..16.82 rows=5 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..16.82 rows=5 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..14.66 rows=4 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..14.66 rows=4 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..12.49 rows=3 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..10.33 rows=2 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..8.17 rows=1 width=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using i_sample on sample (cost=0.15..8.17 rows=1 width=2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESET ALL;
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>lookup_letter</th>
<th>count</th>
<th>scan_type</th>
<th>cost_range</th>
<th>rows</th>
<th>width</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>Seq Scan on sample</td>
<td>0.00..21.12</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.25..20.69</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.24..20.14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.19..17.25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.19..17.25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.19..17.25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.19..15.86</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.19..15.86</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.18..14.23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.18..14.23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.17..12.31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bitmap Heap Scan on sample</td>
<td>4.16..10.07</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using sample</td>
<td>0.15..8.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Index Only Scan using sample</td>
<td>0.15..8.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which Join Method?

- Nested Loop
  - With Inner Sequential Scan
  - With Inner Index Scan
- Hash Join
- Merge Join
What Is in `pg_proc.oid`?

```
SELECT oid
FROM pg_proc
ORDER BY 1
LIMIT 8;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>oid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
CREATE TEMPORARY TABLE sample1 (id, junk) AS
    SELECT oid, repeat('x', 250)
    FROM pg_proc
    ORDER BY random();  -- add rows in random order

CREATE TEMPORARY TABLE sample2 (id, junk) AS
    SELECT oid, repeat('x', 250)
    FROM pg_class
    ORDER BY random();  -- add rows in random order

These tables have no indexes and no optimizer statistics.
Join the Two Tables with a Tight Restriction

EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
WHERE sample1.id = 33;

QUERY PLAN

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------

Nested Loop  (cost=0.00..364.14 rows=770 width=32)
  ->  Seq Scan on sample1 (cost=0.00..313.09 rows=77 width=4)
      Filter: (id = '33 '::oid)
  ->  Materialize  (cost=0.00..41.45 rows=10 width=36)
      ->  Seq Scan on sample2 (cost=0.00..41.40 rows=10 width=36)
          Filter: (id = '33 '::oid)
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------
Nested Loop Join with Inner Sequential Scan

No Setup Required

Used For Small Tables
Pseudocode for Nested Loop Join with Inner Sequential Scan

for (i = 0; i < length(outer); i++)
    for (j = 0; j < length(inner); j++)
        if (outer[i] == inner[j])
            output(outer[i], inner[j]);
Join the Two Tables with a Looser Restriction

EXPLAIN SELECT sample1.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
WHERE sample2.id > 33;

QUERY PLAN

Hash Join  (cost=49.86..2189.32 rows=52017 width=32)
  Hash Cond: (sample1.id = sample2.id)
  ->  Seq Scan on sample1  (cost=0.00..274.67 rows=15367 width=36)
  ->  Hash  (cost=41.40..41.40 rows=677 width=4)
      ->  Seq Scan on sample2  (cost=0.00..41.40 rows=677 width=4)
      Filter: (id > '33'::oid)
Hash Join

Hashed

Must fit in Main Memory
Pseudocode for Hash Join

for (j = 0; j < length(inner); j++)
    hash_key = hash(inner[j]);
    append(hash_store[hash_key], inner[j]);
for (i = 0; i < length(outer); i++)
    hash_key = hash(outer[i]);
    for (j = 0; j < length(hash_store[hash_key]); j++)
        if (outer[i] == hash_store[hash_key][j])
            output(outer[i], inner[j]);
Join the Two Tables with No Restriction

EXPLAIN SELECT sample1.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id);

QUERY PLAN

--------------------------------------------------------------------------
Merge Join  (cost=1491.22..3843.32 rows=156129 width=32)
  Merge Cond: (sample2.id = sample1.id)
  ->  Sort  (cost=147.97..153.05 rows=2032 width=4)
      Sort Key: sample2.id
  ->  Seq Scan on sample2  (cost=0.00..36.32 rows=2032 width=4)
  ->  Sort  (cost=1343.26..1381.67 rows=15367 width=36)
      Sort Key: sample1.id
  ->  Seq Scan on sample1  (cost=0.00..274.67 rows=15367 width=36)
Merge Join

Ideal for Large Tables
An Index Can Be Used to Eliminate the Sort
sort(outer);
sort(inner);
i = 0;
j = 0;
save_j = 0;
while (i < length(outer))
    if (outer[i] == inner[j])
        output(outer[i], inner[j]);
        if (outer[i] >= inner[j] && j < length(inner))
            j++;
        if (outer[i] > inner[j])
            save_j = j;
    else
        i++;
    j = save_j;
Order of Joined Relations Is Insignificant

EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.junk
FROM sample2 JOIN sample1 ON (sample2.id = sample1.id);

QUERY PLAN

-------------------------------------------------------------------------
Merge Join  (cost=1491.22..3843.32 rows=156129 width=32)
  Merge Cond: (sample2.id = sample1.id)
    ->  Sort  (cost=147.97..153.05 rows=2032 width=36)
      Sort Key: sample2.id
      ->  Seq Scan on sample2  (cost=0.00..36.32 rows=2032 width=36)
    ->  Sort  (cost=1343.26..1381.67 rows=15367 width=4)
      Sort Key: sample1.id
      ->  Seq Scan on sample1  (cost=0.00..274.67 rows=15367 width=4)

The most restrictive relation, e.g., \textit{sample2}, is always on the outer side of merge joins. All previous merge joins also had \textit{sample2} in outer position.
ANALYZE sample1;

ANALYZE sample2;
This Was a Merge Join without Optimizer Statistics

EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id);
QUERY PLAN

Hash Join  (cost=25.38..195.17 rows=417 width=254)
  Hash Cond: (sample1.id = sample2.id)
  ->  Seq Scan on sample1  (cost=0.00..153.45 rows=3245 width=4)
  ->  Hash  (cost=20.17..20.17 rows=417 width=258)
      ->  Seq Scan on sample2  (cost=0.00..20.17 rows=417 width=258)
EXPLAIN SELECT sample1.junk
FROM sample1 RIGHT OUTER JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id);

QUERY PLAN

Hash Right Join (cost=25.38..195.17 rows=417 width=254)
  Hash Cond: (sample1.id = sample2.id)
  -> Seq Scan on sample1 (cost=0.00..153.45 rows=3245 width=258)
  -> Hash (cost=20.17..20.17 rows=417 width=4)
    -> Seq Scan on sample2 (cost=0.00..20.17 rows=417 width=4)
EXPLAIN SELECT sample1.junk
FROM sample1 CROSS JOIN sample2;

QUERY PLAN

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------
Nested Loop (cost=0.00..17089.22 rows=1353165 width=254)
  ->  Seq Scan on sample1 (cost=0.00..153.45 rows=3245 width=254)
  ->  Materialize (cost=0.00..22.26 rows=417 width=0)
    ->  Seq Scan on sample2 (cost=0.00..20.17 rows=417 width=0)
CREATE INDEX i_sample1 on sample1 (id);

CREATE INDEX i_sample2 on sample2 (id);
EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
WHERE sample1.id = 33;

QUERY PLAN

---

Nested Loop  (cost=0.55..16.60 rows=1 width=254)
  ->  Index Only Scan using i_sample1 on sample1  (cost=0.28..8.30 rows=1 width=4)
      Index Cond: (id = '33'::oid)
  ->  Index Scan using i_sample2 on sample2  (cost=0.27..8.29 rows=1 width=258)
      Index Cond: (id = '33'::oid)
Nested Loop Join with Inner Index Scan

No Setup Required

Index Must Already Exist
Pseudocode for Nested Loop Join with Inner Index Scan

for (i = 0; i < length(outer); i++)
    index_entry = get_first_match(outer[j])
    while (index_entry)
        output(outer[i], inner[index_entry]);
        index_entry = get_next_match(index_entry);
EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
WHERE sample2.junk ~ '^aaa';

QUERY PLAN

---

Nested Loop (cost=0.28..29.52 rows=1 width=254)
  ->  Seq Scan on sample2 (cost=0.00..21.21 rows=1 width=258)
      Filter: (junk ~ '^aaa'::text)
  ->  Index Only Scan using i_sample1 on sample1 (cost=0.28..8.30 rows=1 width=4)
      Index Cond: (id = sample2.id)

No junk rows begin with 'aaa'.
EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
WHERE sample2.junk ~ '^[^xxx]';

---

Hash Join (cost=26.42..196.21 rows=417 width=254)
  Hash Cond: (sample1.id = sample2.id)
    -> Seq Scan on sample1 (cost=0.00..153.45 rows=3245 width=4)
    -> Hash (cost=21.21..21.21 rows=417 width=258)
      -> Seq Scan on sample2 (cost=0.00..21.21 rows=417 width=258)
      Filter: (junk ~ '^[^xxx]':::text)

Hash join was chosen because many more rows are expected. The smaller table, e.g., sample2, is always hashed.
Without LIMIT, Hash Is Used for this Unrestricted Join

EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
ORDER BY 1;

QUERY PLAN

Sort (cost=213.32..214.36 rows=417 width=254)
  Sort Key: sample2.junk
  -> Hash Join (cost=25.38..195.17 rows=417 width=254)
    Hash Cond: (sample1.id = sample2.id)
    -> Seq Scan on sample1 (cost=0.00..153.45 rows=3245 width=4)
    -> Hash (cost=20.17..20.17 rows=417 width=258)
      -> Seq Scan on sample2 (cost=0.00..20.17 rows=417 width=258)
LIMIT Can Affect Join Usage

```
EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.id, sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
ORDER BY 1
LIMIT 1;
```

**QUERY PLAN**

```
Limit (cost=0.55..2.33 rows=1 width=258)
  -> Nested Loop (cost=0.55..742.75 rows=417 width=258)
    -> Index Scan using i_sample2 on sample2 (cost=0.27..86.52 rows=417 width=258)
    -> Index Only Scan using i_sample1 on sample1 (cost=0.28..1.56 rows=1 width=4)
      Index Cond: (id = sample2.id)
```

Sort is unneeded since an index is being used on the outer side.
EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.id, sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
ORDER BY 1
LIMIT 10;

QUERY PLAN

Limit (cost=0.55..18.35 rows=10 width=258)
   -> Nested Loop (cost=0.55..742.75 rows=417 width=258)
      -> Index Scan using i_sample2 on sample2 (cost=0.27..86.52 rows=417 width=258)
      -> Index Only Scan using i_sample1 on sample1 (cost=0.28..1.56 rows=1 width=4)
         Index Cond: (id = sample2.id)
LIMIT 100 Switches to Merge Join

EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.id, sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
ORDER BY 1
LIMIT 100;

QUERY PLAN

Limit (cost=11.00..170.51 rows=100 width=258)
  -> Merge Join  (cost=11.00..676.13 rows=417 width=258)
      Merge Cond: (sample1.id = sample2.id)
      -> Index Only Scan using i_sample1 on sample1 (cost=0.28..576.91 rows=324)
      -> Index Scan using i_sample2 on sample2 (cost=0.27..86.52 rows=417 width=258)

Merge join is normally used for large joins, but the indexes eliminate the need for sorting both sides band LIMIT reduces the number of index entries that need to be accessed.
LIMIT 1000 Switches Back to Hash Join

EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.id, sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
ORDER BY 1
LIMIT 1000;

QUERY PLAN

Limit (cost=213.32..214.36 rows=417 width=258)
  -> Sort (cost=213.32..214.36 rows=417 width=258)
    Sort Key: sample2.id
    -> Hash Join (cost=25.38..195.17 rows=417 width=258)
      Hash Cond: (sample1.id = sample2.id)
      -> Seq Scan on sample1 (cost=0.00..153.45 rows=3245 width=4)
      -> Hash (cost=20.17..20.17 rows=417 width=258)
        -> Seq Scan on sample2 (cost=0.00..20.17 rows=417 width=258)

For LIMIT 1000, index lookups are considered to be too expensive to partially execute the join, so a hash join is fully executed, which is then sorted and the LIMIT applied.
VACUUM Causes Merge Join Again

-- updates the visibility map
VACUUM sample1, sample2;

EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.id, sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
ORDER BY 1
LIMIT 1000;

QUERY PLAN

Limit (cost=40.67..150.78 rows=420 width=258)
  -> Merge Join (cost=40.67..150.78 rows=420 width=258)
    Merge Cond: (sample1.id = sample2.id)
      -> Index Only Scan using i_sample1 on sample1 (cost=0.28..97.75 rows=3298)
      -> Sort (cost=38.50..39.55 rows=420 width=258)
        Sort Key: sample2.id
        -> Seq Scan on sample2 (cost=0.00..20.20 rows=420 width=258)

VACUUM reduces the cost of the index-only scan by making heap access less likely, so merge join again becomes the cheapest option. The inner index scan has also changed to
EXPLAIN SELECT sample2.id, sample2.junk
FROM sample1 JOIN sample2 ON (sample1.id = sample2.id)
ORDER BY 1;

QUERY PLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan Type</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Rows</th>
<th>Width</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merge Join</td>
<td>40.67</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merge Cond:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sample1.id = sample2.id)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; Index Only Scan using i_sample1 on sample1</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>3298</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; Sort</td>
<td>38.50</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort Key:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sample2.id</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; Seq Scan on sample2</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Same Join, Different Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Query Modifier</th>
<th>Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No LIMIT</td>
<td>Hash join</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMIT 1</td>
<td>Nested loop join with two index scans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMIT 10</td>
<td>“”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMIT 100</td>
<td>Merge join with two index scans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMIT 1000</td>
<td>Hash join</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VACUUM, LIMIT 1000</td>
<td>Merge join with index scan and sort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No LIMIT</td>
<td>“”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last two are different from previous matching lines because of VACUUM.
Conclusion

https://momjian.us/presentations

https://www.flickr.com/photos/trevorklatko/