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Section: Excel Basics Tutorial: Excel Made Easy

Excel Made Easy - A Beginner's Guide



Greetings! In this tutorial, you'll learn about workbooks and the different parts of an Excel worksheet (spreadsheet), such as rows, columns, and cells. We'll discuss how to insert rows and columns, and how to move around in a worksheet.

We'll also learn how to enter data into cells, move and copy data, propagate cell contents, and more. We'll tell you everything you need to know to get started using Microsoft Excel.

If you're a new Excel user, then this tutorial is for you! We encourage you to open the Excel program and take the steps we outline below in your own worksheet and workbook.

OK. Let's begin learning Microsoft Excel!

What is Microsoft Excel?

Microsoft Excel is a program that provide worksheets comprised of rows and columns. Textual data can be stored in the workbook similarly to a Microsoft Word table, but the power of Excel is its ability to perform simple to complicated mathematical calculations. When you are ready to create some math formulas, see our tutorial [Excel Math Basics: Writing Formulas and Expressions](#).

The Excel Worksheet (Spreadsheet) and Workbook

An Excel worksheet, or spreadsheet, is a two-dimensional grid with columns and rows. Look at the spreadsheet below. The column names are letters of the alphabet starting with A, and the rows are numbered chronologically starting with the number one. The cells in the first *row* are A1, B1, C1, and so on. And the cells in the first *column* are A1, A2, A3, and so on. These are called cell names or cell references.

We use **cell references** when creating math formulas or functions. For example, the formula to add the contents of cells B2 and B3 together is: =B2+B3.

Structure of a Microsoft Excel Worksheet (Spreadsheet)



[Author: Keynote Support](#)

The **Name Box** is located in the area above Column A, and displays the cell reference of the selected cell - the cell where the cursor is resting. In our spreadsheet above, the selected cell is C2. Notice that the column letter (C) and the row number (2) change color.

The beginning of the **Formula Bar** can be seen in the area above Column D on our worksheet. The Formula Bar displays the contents of the selected cell.

A workbook is a collection of worksheets or spreadsheets. When the Excel program is opened, a workbook opens with three blank worksheets. The names of the worksheets are displayed on tabs at the bottom of the Excel window. We discuss [working with worksheets](#) later in this tutorial.

Moving From Cell to Cell

The arrow keys can be used to move left, right, up, and down from the current cell. Press the Enter key to move to the cell immediately below the current cell, and press the Tab key to move one cell to the right.

Selecting Cells

There are a variety of ways to select cells in an Excel spreadsheet:

- To select one cell, click in the cell. 
- To select one or more rows of cells, click on the row number(s).
- To select one or more columns of cells, click on the column letter(s).
- To select a group of contiguous cells, click in a corner cell and, with the left mouse button depressed, drag the cursor horizontally and/or vertically until all of the cells you want selected are outlined in black.
- To select multiple cells that are not contiguous, press and hold the Ctrl key while clicking in the desired cells.
- To select every cell in the worksheet, click in the upper right corner of the worksheet to the left of "A."

Entering Data into Cells

To enter data into a cell, just click in the cell and begin typing. What you type also displays in the Formula Bar. When entering dates, Excel defaults to the current year if the year portion of the date is not entered.

You may edit cell contents from the Formula bar, or from directly inside the cell. To edit from the Formula Bar, select the cell and click inside the Formula Bar. When done typing, either press the Enter key or click inside another cell. To edit directly inside a cell, either double click inside the cell, or select the cell and press the F2 key.

Each cell has a specific format. This format tells Excel how the data inside the cell should be displayed. See our separate tutorial on [Formatting Cells in Microsoft Excel](#).

Propagating Cell Contents

There are multiple ways to propagate or fill data from one cell to adjacent cells. Let's begin with two popular [keyboard shortcuts](#) that allow us to *fill down*, or *fill to the right*:

- To fill adjacent cells with the *contents of the cell above*, select the cell with the data and the cells to be filled and press Ctrl + D (the Ctrl key and the D key) to *fill down*.
- To fill adjacent cells with the *contents of the cell to the left*, select the cell with the data and cells to be filled and press Ctrl + R (the Ctrl key and the R key) to *fill to the right*.

To propagate in any direction, use the **Fill Handle**. Click in a cell with data to be copied, hover the cursor over the cell's lower right corner until the cursor changes to a thin plus sign (+) or a dark square, and drag up, down, left, or right to fill the cells. Excel's Fill Handle is powerful; see our [Fill Handle tutorial](#).

If the data to be copied is a *date, number, time period, or a custom-made series*, the data will be **incremented by one** instead of just copied when the Fill Handle is used. For example, to display the months of the year in column A, type January in cell A1, drag the Fill Handle down to cell A12, and the months will display, in order, in column A!

Moving and Copying Cells

To move cell contents, right-click in the selected cell and click Cut. To copy cell contents, click Copy. Then right-click in the new location and click Paste. To paste a group of cells, right-click in the cell where the *top left cell* of the group should be located, and click Paste. **Remove the animated border around the original cell by pressing the ESC key, or start typing in a new cell.**

Adding and Deleting Rows and Columns



To insert a new row in a spreadsheet, right-click on a row number, and click Insert. Excel always inserts the row ABOVE the row that was clicked on. If you want to continue inserting rows, press the F4 key to insert each additional row.

To delete a row, right-click on the row number, and click Delete. Contiguous rows can be deleted by highlighting them before clicking Delete. And non-contiguous rows can be selected by pressing and holding the CTRL key before clicking Delete.

To insert a new column, right-click on a column letter and click Insert. Excel always inserts the column to the LEFT of the column that was clicked on. As with rows, if you want to add additional columns after inserting the first column, press the F4 key.

To delete a column, right-click on the column letter, and click Delete. Contiguous columns can be deleted by highlighting them before clicking Delete. And non-contiguous columns can be selected by pressing and holding the CTRL key.

Locking Cells and Protecting a Worksheet

There are two steps to preventing important cell content from being accidentally overwritten or deleted. First, the cell must be **locked**. Second, the worksheet must be **protected**. If you have any valuable data or complex formulas that you do not want to lose, and data DOES get accidentally erased(!), then you owe it to yourself to learn which cells to lock and which worksheet protection options to take. We provide detailed instructions in our separate tutorial, [Protecting Worksheet Data in Microsoft Excel](#).

Working with Worksheets (Spreadsheets)

Viewing, Renaming, Inserting, and Deleting Worksheets

Worksheet tabs are found in the bottom left area of the workbook. **To view a worksheet**, click on its tab. If the workbook window is not wide enough to display all of the tabs, use the arrows to the left of the tabs to navigate left or right, or right-click on any of the arrows and select the tab from the list that displays.

To rename a spreadsheet, right-click on the spreadsheet tab, select Rename from the context menu, and type a new name. Or, double-click on the worksheet tab and type a new name.

To insert a worksheet, right-click on a worksheet tab and select Insert from the menu. Excel always inserts the spreadsheet *to the left of the current worksheet*.

To delete a worksheet, right-click on the worksheet tab and select Delete from the context menu.

[Author: Keynote Support](#)

Moving Worksheets (Spreadsheets)

Sometimes we want our spreadsheets to be arranged in a different order. **To move a worksheet in the same workbook**, right-click on the tab of the source worksheet and click "Move or Copy." In the Move or Copy window, click the name of the worksheet that you want the sheet to be *inserted before*, and click OK.

To move a spreadsheet to a new workbook, right-click on the tab of the source spreadsheet and click "Move or Copy." In the Move or Copy window, click the drop-down arrow under "To Book:" and click (new book). Excel removes the worksheet from the existing workbook and opens a new workbook containing the moved worksheet.

To move a worksheet to another existing workbook, we recommend copying the worksheet as instructed below, and then deleting the original sheet when the worksheet has been successfully pasted. Using cut and paste is an option, but if something happens to the PC before pasting occurs, a valuable worksheet could be lost.

Copying Worksheets (Spreadsheets)



Rather than start from scratch, it is often easier to copy, and then modify, an existing worksheet. **To copy a worksheet in the same workbook**, right-click on the tab of the source worksheet and click "Move or Copy."

In the Move or Copy window, check the "create a copy" box, click the name of the spreadsheet that you want the sheet to be *inserted before*, and click OK.

To copy a worksheet into a new workbook, right-click on the tab of the source worksheet and click "Move or Copy." In the Move or Copy window, click the drop-down arrow under "To Book:" and click (new book). Excel opens a new workbook containing the copied spreadsheet.

To copy a worksheet from one workbook to another existing workbook, right-click the top left corner cell to select all cells and click Copy. Open the other Excel workbook, find an empty worksheet, right-click the top left corner cell to select all cells, and click Paste. Return to the first worksheet and press ESC to remove the animated border.

In Closing...

Excel error messages begin with a pound sign (#). The most common error, #####, indicates that the cell is too narrow to display all of the data. Make the column wider by placing the cursor on the right side of the column heading and dragging the column edge to the right.

We hope you've enjoyed our Beginners Guide to Microsoft Excel tutorial. Cheers!

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