

Microsoft Excel is a spreadsheet application. This means Excel is designed for holding, manipulating, and displaying data. Common uses include budgeting and other financial tasks, analyzing scientific data, and keeping track of information such as names, addresses, and so on. You need only learn a few basic features of the program to unleash its potential for making many of the things you do easier and more efficient.

This document is the first of a series on how to use Microsoft Excel and is only a brief introduction to the program's basic features.



Terms and concepts

Cell. Data is entered in a cell, a square space on the spreadsheet. An Excel document is made up entirely of rows and columns of these cells, as shown here. Cells can hold almost any kind of data from numbers to text to special formulas.

	A	B	C
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Cell addresses. A cell is addressed by its column and row. The darkened cell in this example is A1, while the bottom-right cell would be C5.

Selecting. You will need to select a cell or cells before you can enter data or apply most menu functions. Select a *single cell* by clicking on it with your mouse. Select *multiple cells* by click-and-holding on one cell, then dragging the cursor horizontally and/or vertically to highlight the range of cells desired. Select *unconnected cells* by clicking on one (or a range of cells), then holding down the Control button on the keyboard and selecting another cell or cells (or another range of cells). Select an entire *row* or *column* by clicking on the label (i.e. "A" or "1" for that row or column).



Entering and editing data

Manual entry. To begin entering data into a cell, select the cell and begin typing the data. There are several things to note about this process, however:

Tab: Use the tab key to move right one cell. This saves you from having to move from keyboard to mouse to keyboard as you enter data. **Shift-tab** (hold down shift while pressing tab) will move left one cell.

Return or Enter: Pressing this key will go down one row AND back to "home." Excel will call "home" whatever column you started typing in. For work in a single column this means return or enter simply drops down one row. When working in multiple columns, return or enter will go down one row and back to the leftmost cell of the group (not necessarily column A). In the example at right, if you clicked on cell B4 and started entering the first row of data, hitting return or enter after "Burgerville" would go to cell B5 for the next entry.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1						
2						
3		Date	Check nu.	Amount	Name	
4		12/29/99	2416	\$12.45	Burgerville	
5		01/01/00	2417	\$50.00	St. Joseph's	
6		01/04/00	2418	\$43.45	Fred Meyer	
7						

Arrow keys: In Excel the arrow keys are used to move between cells.

Fill. The fill feature is used to quickly enter repeating data into a range of cells. The range of cells can be to the right, left, up, or down from the original cell, but the range of cells must be continuous. A **standard fill** will copy the contents of the original cell into the range of cells. A **series fill** will enter a series of

numbers or dates (i.e. 1,2,3,4... or Jan. 4th, 5th, 6th...) into the range of cells. Note that while a standard fill can repeat any type of cell (text, number, date, etc.) a series fill will only work with numbers or dates.

To do a standard fill, start by highlighting the cell you want to copy. Then either A) drag the mouse in a line (left, right, up, or down) starting with the original cell until the desired area is highlighted, then go to the Edit menu and select Fill then the appropriate direction, or B) click on the square in the bottom-right corner of the selected cell, and drag it in any direction until the desired line of cells is highlighted.

To do a series fill follow the directions above, except you will need to include two or three cells from the series (i.e. 1,2,3 or Jan. 4th, 11th, 18th) instead of a single cell. You can also go to the Edit menu, select Fill and then Series to control how the data will be filled in.

Editing data. To edit the contents of a cell, click on the cell and start typing a new entry. Alternately, you can click on the cell, then click on the white box above your spreadsheet that shows the contents of the cell. This latter method allows you to edit the data like you would edit text in a word processor.

Cut and paste. A cell or group of cells can be copied or cut from one location and pasted to another. Select the desired cell(s) then use the Edit menu to select either Cut or Copy. You have two options for pasting: A) Select a destination area *of the same size*, or B) select a single cell at the *top and/or left* of your destination. To finish go to the Edit menu and select Paste.

Delete. To delete the contents of a cell or cells, highlight and then hit the Delete key. Note that the “Backspace” key (Delete on Macs) will only delete the first cell in a selection – use the actual Delete key (Del on most Macs) to delete the contents of multiple cells at once.

To delete an actual cell, or group of cells, highlight and then go to the Edit menu and select Delete. You will be asked whether to shift cells up or left to fill in the space left behind by the deleted cell(s).

Insert. To insert a blank cell, or group of cells, onto a spreadsheet select a cell or group of cells *below or to the right* of where you want the inserted cells to appear. Then go to the Edit menu and select Insert. You will be asked whether to shift cells down or to the right to make room for the inserted cell(s).



Formatting cells

Despite being “limited” to using only cells for storing data, there are many easy and powerful ways to format cells to create charts, tables, data sheets, graphs, and so on.

Resizing rows and columns. The gray cell at the beginning of each row or column (i.e. the “A” or “1” cell) can be used to resize the row or column. Simply hold your cursor at the right or bottom side until the cursor changes to a double arrow. Click and drag the border to expand or shrink the column or row size. As you resize a note will appear with a numerical value – use this to pick exact sizes.

Alternately, you can select the row or column then go to the Format menu and select Row or Column and then Height or Width. In the window that appears type the new size desired.

** The next five features are accessed by selecting a cell or group of cells, then going to the Format menu and selecting Cells. It is critical that the selection of a cell or cells takes place before trying to apply a format. Each heading below is a tab in the Format Cells window.*

* **Number.** For a cell or group of cells that contain numbers, text, dates, or other data you can define a format for displaying the information. Options exist for currency, number of decimal places, and so on.

* **Alignment.** Text or data in a cell can be displayed horizontally, vertically, or at an angle – the latter two being useful for chart or graph headings. Also tucked away in this window are two powerful features. The *Wrap text* option can be enabled, forcing Excel to add height to a cell as needed to handle long text. The *Merge cells* option can be used create one large cell out of multiple connected cells.

* **Font formats.** For a cell or group of cells you can format the font, font size or type, and so on. Note that the Formatting toolbar contains buttons for many of these font functions. Select the cell(s) then use these buttons as desired. (If your formatting toolbar is not visible, go to the View menu, select Toolbars, then select Formatting.)

* **Borders.** Use this window to create a border around a cell or cells. Borders can apply to any combination of the four sides of a cell. When multiple connected cells are selected the border can be applied to the outside of the group only, to the inside of the group only, or to both outside and inside.

* **Patterns.** Use this window to apply a shading effect and/or color to a cell or group of cells.



Printing

Page setup. Before printing go to the File menu and select Page Setup. This is where you set the orientation of your printout (landscape or portrait) and the margins you want. Two other options exist here that are unique to spreadsheets, and both are found under the Sheet tab of the window. Page order specifies whether you want larger spreadsheets to print down and then to the right, or right and then down (see illustration). Print Gridlines specifies whether you want your “gridlines” (the outlines of the cells themselves) to print. Printing with gridlines is especially useful for sign-up sheets or other printouts onto which you will be writing further data. Examples of each are included below.



Intermediate Microsoft Excel		
20-Dec	Margaret Fuller	x2218
20-Dec	Kathi Becker	x2166
28-Dec	Kathleen Weiss	x2340
28-Dec	Patty Findley	x2910
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Print preview. Before printing go to the File menu and select Print Preview. This is the only way to find out where your page breaks will be *before* you send a file to the printer.



Parting wisdom

Save often. Spreadsheets are more complicated, and often more important, than word processing documents. As such, it is even more important to save your document as you are working, every five to ten minutes. When you are done working on a document, consider saving a copy of the document under a different name as a backup file.

Save before making changes. Some operations in Excel cannot be “undone” through the Edit menu item Undo. With this in mind, save your work before making changes to format, formulas, graphs, and so on. To revert to a previously saved version of the document you are working on follow these steps:

- Go to the File menu and Close the document.
- When asked if you want to save changes, click on No.
Go to the File menu and Open the document again. The previously saved version will appear.