



Learning the basics of Microsoft Excel

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In this article we teach you the basics of Microsoft Excel in the hope that this usually scary program can become that little bit friendlier.

It looks scary but it's not

When you first open Microsoft Excel you are confronted with a daunting scene. Row upon row of endless cells that keep going as far as you can scroll (we know, we tried).

Relax...

Take a deep breath...

You can do this!

Excel is actually not as scary as you may think. Given a bit of basic knowledge and a desire to learn, Excel can help you do an almost endless variety of tasks that would otherwise take ages.

Primarily, Excel is a great way of storing and analysing numerical data. Whether this data is your home finances, a weight loss chart or a financial plan, the basic skills you require are the same.

The Basics

The faded little rectangles filling your screen when you start Excel are called 'cells'. Each cell is designed to store an individual pieces of information. For example, you may want to store information about your weight in cells.

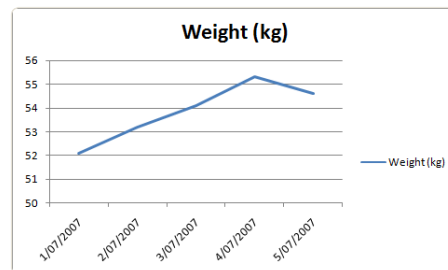
To enter information into a cell, simply click it (a black border will surround the cell you have clicked) and enter a information such as a date or a weight. You can also type text into heading cells to keep everything organised.

| | A | B | C | D |
|---|-----------|-------------|---|---|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | Date | Weight (kg) | | |
| 3 | 1/07/2007 | 52.1 | | |
| 4 | 2/07/2007 | 53.2 | | |
| 5 | 3/07/2007 | 54.1 | | |
| 6 | 4/07/2007 | 55.3 | | |

Once your information is in cells, it is easy to manipulate it. For example, one thing you might like to do with the information about

your weight is to create a line graph of it.

To create a graph, simply click and hold your mouse on the top left cell and then drag the cursor to the bottom right cell. This will highlight that 'range' of cells. Next click on the "Charts" button which can be found in the "Insert" tab and choose the type of chart you want to use. Your chart will be displayed on the screen. More detailed instructions for your specific version of Excel can be found on the Microsoft Office website.



Formulas

Once you get your head around the basics, its time to move onto formulas. Formulas let you perform calculations on individual or multiple cells within an excel workbook.

All formulas in Excel begin with the Equals (=) sign. As formulas need to be created in their own cells a good way to think about it is that "This cell will EQUAL the formula I put in it".

So if you type:

$$=15+2$$

into a cell, when you press enter, it will display the result of 17.

As well as performing calculations using formulas like the one above, Excel can also reference cells. Referencing cells means that you can type a formula like the following into a cell and still get the same result:

$$=A3+B3$$

| | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|----|---|--------|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | 15 | 2 | =A3+B3 | | |

| | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|----|---|--------|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | 15 | 2 | =A3+B3 | | |
| 4 | | | | | |

The formula =A3+B3 will still display the result of 17 as cell A3 has a value of 15 and cell B3 has a value of 2. The advantage of referencing cells as opposed to using numbers is that if you change the values of the referenced cells, your result will be updated automatically. For example, below the formula =A3+B3 gives the result of 27 as cell A3 has changed.

| | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|----|---|--------|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | 25 | 2 | =A3+B3 | | |
| 4 | | | | | |

Learn more about Excel

We've only explained a few really basic elements of Excel in this tutorial but there is a lot more to learn.

The best place to go to find easy to follow tutorials is the Microsoft Office website.

Depending on the version of Microsoft Office you have the tutorials you need will be slightly different.

To learn more about Microsoft Excel 2003 or 2007 visit the Microsoft Office website at <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/help/FX100485361033.aspx?pid=CL100605171033>.

This article applies to:

