

Excel Quick Tips

One thing almost every Excel user has in common: not knowing enough. There are so many ways to work with the application, many methods to manage the numbers, give that data a new look, and more, that it's close to impossible to recount them all. Entire books are written on the topic. But it's easy to master some of the most useful and intricate tips that will make your time using the program more efficient and easier, and will make you look like a professional.

1. Add the current date to a cell

There are many situations where you may need to enter the current date in a cell. Although you can type it manually, this can become tedious if you have to enter the date frequently. Luckily, there is a keyboard shortcut that makes it even faster: **Ctrl+;**. To use this shortcut, simply hold down the Ctrl key and then press the semicolon key, and it will instantly add the current date.

Similarly, if you need to add the current time, you can use the **Ctrl+Shift+;** shortcut. Just hold down the Ctrl and Shift keys, then press the semicolon key.

2. A faster way to use the fill handle

If you're copying cell content to adjacent cells, you can click and drag the fill handle (the small square in the lower-right corner of the selected cell). However, with larger spreadsheets this can be awkward because you'll have to hold down your mouse button and wait for Excel to scroll to the bottom of your sheet. Luckily, there's a shortcut: **Simply double-click the fill handle**, and it will instantly copy the cell content down.

3. Two ways to use the Format Painter

The Format Painter offers a quick way to copy all of the formatting from one cell to another. This can help keep things consistent without spending a lot of time replicating the formatting in each cell.

There are two ways to use the Format Painter:

- Single-click the Format Painter to copy the formatting from the selected cell, then click a different cell to paste the formatting. Alternatively, you can click and drag over a range of cells to paste the formatting to multiple cells.
- Double-click the Format Painter if you want to copy the formatting to several non-adjacent cells. When you use this method, you can paste the formatting to as many



cells as you want, and the Format Painter will stay on. When you're done, you'll need to click the Format Painter again to turn it off.

4. A shortcut to AutoSum

AutoSum is a fast, easy way to add up multiple values in Excel. You can access the AutoSum command from either the Home tab or the Formulas tab, but there is a keyboard shortcut that makes it even faster: **Alt+=**. To use this shortcut, simply hold down the Alt key, then press the equals sign on your keyboard.

5. Quick Access Toolbar shortcuts

The Quick Access Toolbar is a convenient place to add your favorite commands because they will always stay visible no matter where you are on the Ribbon. But there's another reason to use it that not everyone knows about: Every command on the Quick Access Toolbar gets its own keyboard shortcut—putting them literally at your fingertips.

You'll first need to add your favorite commands. You can right-click any command on the Ribbon and select Add to Quick Access Toolbar.

The shortcut is the **Alt key, followed by a number**. You can see which number is associated with each command by pressing the Alt key, as show below.

As example, the Sort A-Z command is number 6, so the shortcut would be Alt+6. Keep in mind that your Quick Access Toolbar may have different shortcuts depending on the commands you've added.

6. How to quickly duplicate a sheet

When creating a new worksheet, you may not always want to start from a blank sheet. It's often better to duplicate an existing sheet instead, and there's a quick shortcut that can help with this. Simply hold down the Ctrl key, then click and drag the sheet's tab. When you release the mouse, Excel will create an exact copy of the sheet.

A dialog box will appear with a list of all of the sheets in your workbook. You can then double-click the sheet you want to jump to.

7. Select an entire row or column

You may sometimes need to select an entire row or column at once. Luckily, there are a few shortcuts that can help with this.

To select an entire row, click the row number or press **Shift+spacebar** on your keyboard.



To select an entire column, click the column letter or press **Ctrl+spacebar**.

To select multiple rows or columns, click and drag over several row numbers or column letters.

These shortcuts can save you a lot of time if you need to add formatting to your spreadsheet, add or delete rows, or complete other tasks in Excel.

8. Find a sum without using a formula

Even if you've never created a formula, you can still find the sum, average, or count of a cell range. That's because Excel calculates these values automatically whenever you select a cell range. It displays them in the lower-right corner of the window.

9. Center across cells without using merge

Excel allows you to merge several cells into a single large cell, which can be used to center text across several rows or columns. However, merged cells are notorious for creating problems in spreadsheets, especially if you're trying to sort, copy, paste, or move data. Because of this, it's generally best to avoid merging cells unless you absolutely have to.

Luckily, the Center Across Selection feature can give the same basic look as merged cells without creating problems in your spreadsheet. On the Home tab, first click the small arrow in the bottom-right corner of the Alignment group.

In the dialog box that appears, open the Horizontal menu and select Center Across Selection.

When you click OK, your cells will look like they've been merged, but they're actually separate cells. This means you'll still be able to work with the cells without encountering any of the problems associated with merged cells.

Note that Center Across Selection only works horizontally, so for vertical groups of cells you may still need to merge cells.

10. Using the Quick Analysis tool

There are a lot of ways to visualize data in Excel, but sometimes it's hard to know where to start. Luckily, the Quick Analysis tool lets you browse through many different options even if you don't know exactly what you want.

Whenever you select a cell range, the Quick Analysis button will appear in the lower-right corner of the selection. When you click it, you'll be able to choose from a variety of charts, sparklines, conditional formatting options, and more. Best of all, the options will be tailored to your specific data, helping you find relevant visualizations quickly.



11. How to make charts auto update

When you create a chart in Excel, it's important to make sure it stays up to date, even if you add more data later on. Although you can manually adjust the chart's data range to include the new data, this can be tedious if you frequently update your spreadsheet.

Luckily, there is an easier way. Simply format your source data as a table, then create a chart based on that table. When you add more data below the table, it will automatically be included in both the table and the chart, keeping everything consistent and up to date.

12. Use Transpose to flip data on its side

Suppose you have a spreadsheet that is arranged into two horizontal rows.

This arrangement would quickly become unwieldy if more columns were added. It would be better to rearrange this data into two columns instead. Luckily, you don't have to rearrange each cell by hand. Excel can do it automatically using a feature called Transpose, which is available when copying and pasting data.

13. Absolute references with the F4 key

If you're typing a formula, you may sometimes want a cell reference to stay locked on a specific cell or cell range even if the formula is copied. To do this, you'll need to change the cell reference to an absolute reference by adding dollar signs before the row and column (for example, \$D\$2).

Although you can type the dollar signs manually, the F4 key on your keyboard allows you to add both dollar signs with a single keystroke. If you create formulas frequently, this shortcut can save you a lot of time.

On some keyboards, the F4 key controls the computer's volume or screen brightness by default. In that case, you may have to hold down the Fn (Function) key before pressing F4.

14. Add a new row with a shortcut

Sometimes you may want to add a blank row to your spreadsheet. Luckily, there is an easy keyboard shortcut for this: **Ctrl+Shift+Plus**. Simply click a row number to select a row, hold down the Ctrl and Shift keys, and press plus (+). Excel will then add a row above the selected row.

15. Use an entire column as a cell range



In some situations, you may want to find the sum or average of a column of data. Although you can do this with a normal cell range, for example `=SUM(C1:C20)`, you may have to update the cell range later if you add more data to your spreadsheet.

However, Excel also has a different kind of cell range that omits the row number and pulls in all of the cells in the entire column. For example, if you want to find the sum of all of the values in column C, you would type `=SUM(C:C)`. This kind of cell range allows you to add as much data as you want to your spreadsheet without having to update your cell ranges.

16. Using Named Ranges

A typical spreadsheet can have many different formulas, and it can be difficult to keep track of all of the cell ranges used by those formulas. To make things easier, you can add a more intuitive, descriptive name to any cell range, and then use those named ranges in your formulas.

To create a named range, simply select a cell or cell range, then type the desired name into the Name box (to the left of the formula bar). You can then use the new name whenever you want to refer to that cell range.

17. A trick for finding inconsistent data

In Excel, details matter. If you have minor inconsistencies in your data, it can cause major problems later on. But with larger spreadsheets, it can be difficult to find all of the inconsistencies. In this lesson, we'll show you a shortcut that makes it much easier.

18. How to add line breaks in Excel

Most of us use line breaks without even thinking about it. They can be used to start a new paragraph in Microsoft Word. They can even be used in everyday situations, like when you're writing an email, posting to Facebook, or commenting on something you saw or read online.

Line breaks are pretty easy to add in most programs—all you have to do is press Enter on your keyboard, and voilà! One of the few places this doesn't work is Excel. If you've ever tried hitting Enter there, you know it just takes you to the next cell in your worksheet.

Not to worry. There's a simple keyboard shortcut that will let you add as many line breaks as you want—inside any cell. Go ahead and try it! This works in Google Sheets too.

Windows: Alt+Enter

Mac: Ctrl+Option+Enter



Just use the shortcut whenever you want to insert a line break (and save the Enter key for navigating to the next cell). This might take some getting used to, but can come in handy depending on what you're working on. Take the example below. We've used line breaks to make sure each address appears on two lines.

One word of caution: You probably don't want to rely on line breaks too much. After all, Excel already has a great system for organizing and separating data: all of those thousands and thousands of tiny cells in your worksheet!

The more you rely on cells for organization, the better Excel will work for you. But when you desperately want to add a line break—and Enter simply isn't working—it's good to know that you can.