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How to Apply an Excel Date Format

How Dates Are Stored in Excel

Dates in Excel are stored as positive integers.

For example, on most computer systems:

1 = January 1st, 1900

2 = January 2nd, 1900

⋮

42369 = December 31st, 2015

Therefore, when entered into a spreadsheet, the integer values, 1, 2 and 42369 are displayed as follows (depending on the cell formatting):

With 'General' Formatting:		With Date Format "mm/dd/yyyy":	
	A		A
1	1	1	01/01/1900
2	2	2	01/02/1900
3	42369	3	12/31/2015



This page describes different ways to apply an Excel date format to the cells of a spreadsheet.

Excel provides several standard date formats that you can apply to cells containing date values. These can be accessed in different ways (see below).

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However, if none of the standard date formats are satisfactory, Excel also allows you to [define your own custom date format](#).

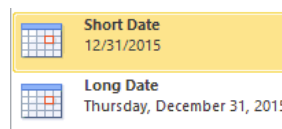
### How to Apply a Standard Excel Date Format

In recent versions of Excel (Excel 2007 and later) a selection of standard formats, including some date formats, are available via the drop-down box in the 'Number' grouping on the **Home** tab of the ribbon (see below).



To apply a standard date format to the cell(s) of your spreadsheet, simply select the cell(s) to be formatted and click on the format cells drop-down box. You will then be presented with several formats which, if selected, will be applied to the current selected cell(s).

The image on the right shows two Excel date format options that are available in the drop-down menu when a PC is set up for US times.



The standard date formats in your version of Excel may be different, depending on the settings on your computer.

### How to Access More Excel Date Formats

Excel has several other standard date formats that can be accessed via the **Format Cells** dialog box (shown below).

To display the **Format Cells** dialog box, ensure the cell(s) to be formatted are selected, and then either:

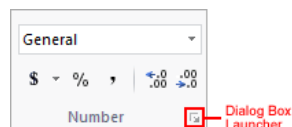
- Click on the dialog box launcher on the 'Number' Grouping within the **Home** tab of the Excel ribbon (see right)

or

- Use the mouse to right click on the selected cells, and from the right-click menu, select **Format Cells...**

or

- Use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl + 1** (i.e. Select the **Ctrl** key and while holding this down, select the **1** key).

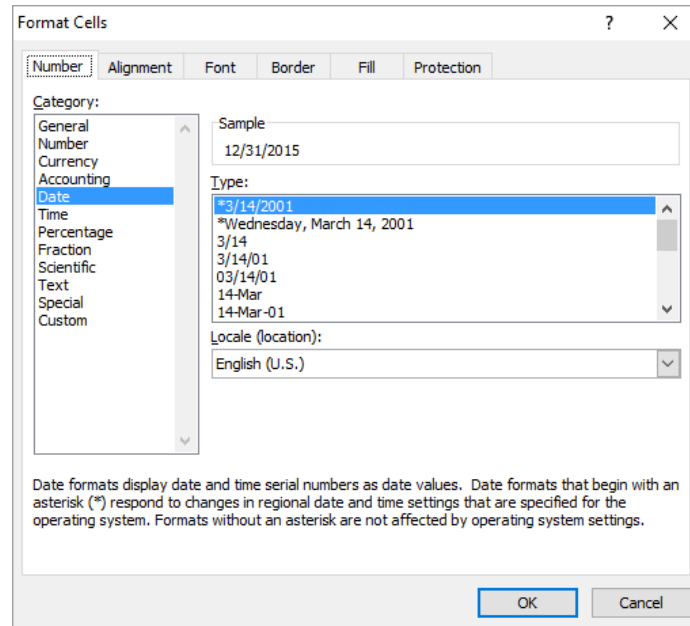


Dialog Box  
Launcher

Within the **Format Cells** dialog box:

- Ensure the **Number** tab is selected.
- Select the Category **Date** from the **Category:** list.

A list of date formats will be displayed on the right of the dialog box, as shown below:



- Select one of the listed date formats and click **OK**.

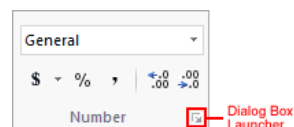
### How to Define Your Own Custom Excel Date Format

If you do not wish to use any of the pre-defined date formats, Excel also allows you to define your own custom formats.

To apply your own custom date format to a cell, first ensure that the cells you want to format are selected and then open up the **Format Cells** dialog box using one of the following methods:

- Click on the dialog box launcher on the 'Number' Grouping within the **Home** tab of the Excel ribbon (see right)

or



- Use the mouse to right click on the selected cells, and from the right-click menu, select **Format Cells...**

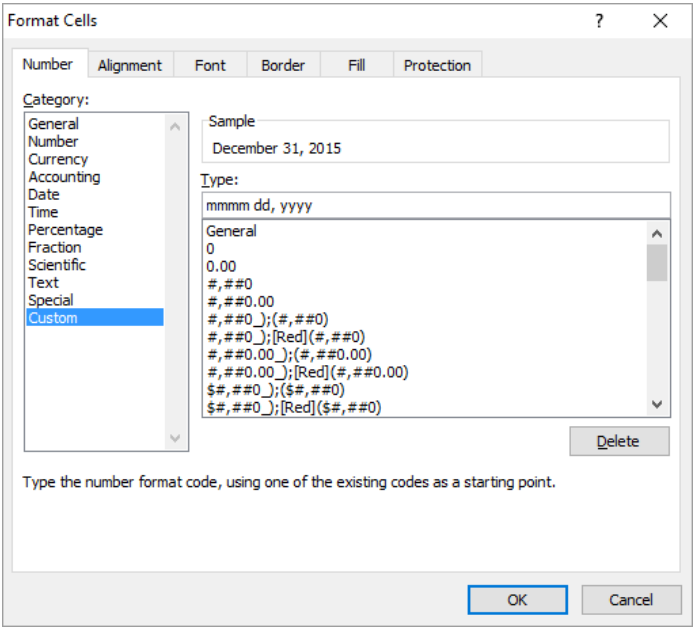
or

- Use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl** + **1** (i.e. Select the **Ctrl** key and while holding this down, select the **1** key).

Within the **Format Cells** dialog box:

- Ensure the **Number** tab is selected.
- Select the Category **Custom** from the **Category:** list.

The **Type:** text field will be displayed on the right, as shown below:



- Type your required date format (e.g. "m d, yyyy") into the **Type:** text box.  
(Note that the characters that can be used in date formats are described in Table 1 below).
- Click **OK** to close the dialog box and apply the format.

The following characters are used for defining a custom date format in Excel:

Table 1: Characters used in Custom Date Formats

d	- Represents the Day of the month or a Day of the week: <div>d = one or two digit representation (e.g. 1, 12) dd = two digit representation (e.g. 01, 12) ddd = abbreviated day of week (e.g. Mon, Tue) dddd = full name of day of week (e.g. Monday, Tuesday)</div>
m	- Represents the Month: <div>m = one or two digit representation (e.g. 1, 12) mm = two digit representation (e.g. 01, 12) mmm = abbreviated month name (e.g. Jan, Dec) mmmm = full name of month (e.g. January, December)</div>

y - Represents the Year:

yy = 2-digit representation of year(e.g. 99, 01, 15)

yyyy = 4-digit representation of year(e.g. 1999, 2001, 2015)

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### Excel Date Format Examples

The example below shows different Excel formatting definitions for the date 'January 31st 2015':

Formatting Definition	Formatted Date
mm/dd/yy	01/31/15
m/d/yyyy	1/31/2015
ddd mmm-dd-yy	Sat Jan-31-15
dddd mmmm dd yyyy	Saturday January 31 2015

Excel Custom formatting is described in more detail on the [Custom Number Formatting](#) page.

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