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The Excel Autofilter

The basic Excel filter (also known as the Excel Autofilter) allows you to view specific rows in an Excel spreadsheet, while hiding the other rows.

When the Excel autofilter is added to the header row of a spreadsheet, a drop-down menu appears in each cell of the header row. This provides you with a number of filter options that can be used to

specify which rows of the spreadsheet are to be displayed.

This page describes how to use the autofilter in current versions of Excel (2007 and later). If you have Excel 2003, see the [Excel 2003 Autofilter page](#).

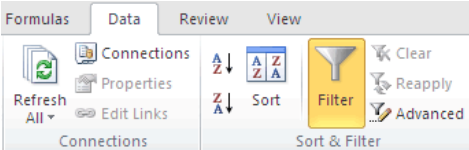
Activating the Excel Autofilter

To apply the Excel autofilter:

1. First click on the range of cells that you want to filter.

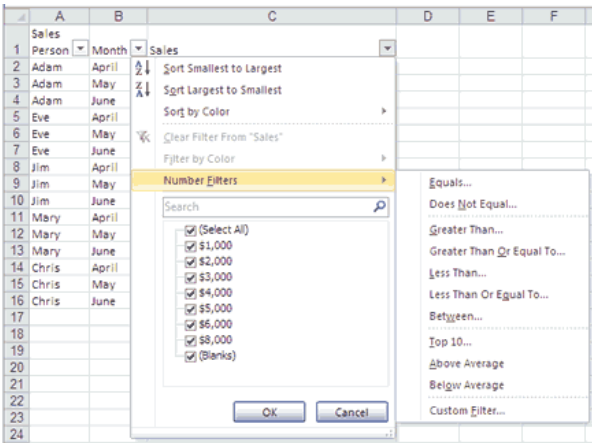
Excel should automatically detect the entire data range when applying the autofilter. However, if the range of cells that you want to filter has missing rows or columns of data, Excel will not select all the data, so you may need to manually select the range of cells that you want to apply the filter to.

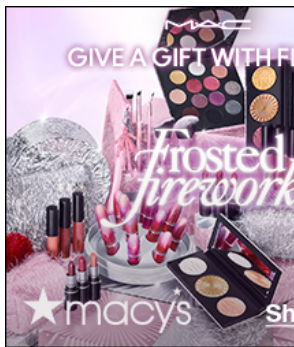
2. Select the **Filter** option from **Data** tab on the Excel ribbon (see right).



You should now have the drop-down menus on each of your header cells, which can be used to select the rows to be displayed (see below).

The example spreadsheet on the right shows sales figures for different sales people over 3 months. The basic Excel filter has been applied to all three columns and the drop-down menu for the 'Sales'





column is displayed.

This drop-down menu offers a check list for the contents of the cells in the filtered column. The user can opt to display all rows or to display cells containing one or more selected values (specified by checking / unchecking values from the list).



Current versions of Excel also allow you to filter by color. This may be text color or the color of a cell background. The spreadsheet in this example has no color applied to the cells to be filtered, so the 'Filter by Color' option has been greyed out.

Also, the above image shows the option to apply number filters. Excel has displayed this option because the data in the filtered column is numeric. However this option will vary depending on the data within the filtered column. Columns containing dates will have date-specific filters and columns containing text will have text-specific filters.

The Excel filters in the **Number Filters...** category are:

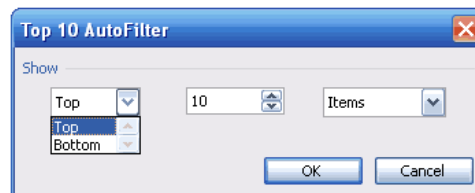
- Simple Numeric Conditions (Equals, Does Not Equal, Greater Than, etc.). If you select one of these options, Excel will open up a dialog box in which you can specify up to two simple numeric conditions;
- (**Top 10...**) - Display rows containing the top N values;
- (**Above Average**) - Display numeric values that are above the average value;
- (**Below Average**) - Display numeric values that are below the average value;
- (**Custom Filter...**) - This opens up the same dialog box as you get when selecting the individual Numeric Conditions (Equals, Does Not Equal, etc), to allow you to specify up to two numeric conditions.

Further explanation of the (**Top 10**) and the (**Custom**) options are given below.

(**Top 10...**)

The (**Top 10...**) option is only available for columns that Excel identifies as containing numeric values.

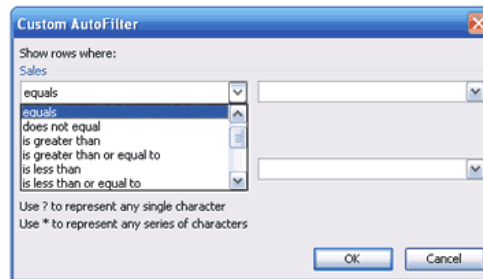
This Excel filter option allows you to display only the N highest or the N lowest values from the current column. If you click on this option, Excel brings up a dialog box which contains 3 options:



1. Select the **Top** (highest) values or the **Bottom** (lowest) values;
2. Option to select the number, N;
3. Select N **Items** or N **Percent** of entries to be displayed.

(**Custom...**)

Selecting the **(Custom...)** filter option causes the 'Custom Autofilter' dialog box to open. This dialog box allows you to define the conditions that specify which rows you want to display.



The conditions that are presented to you in the 'Custom Autofilter' dialog box depend on the type of data that is present in the column to be filtered:

- If your column contains numeric values, you will be presented with number-related criteria, such as 'equals', 'does not equal', 'is greater than', etc.
- If your column contains dates, you will be presented with 'before', 'after' and 'between' criteria types.
- If your column contains text values, you will be presented with text-related criteria, such as 'equals', 'does not equal', 'begins with', 'contains', etc.

Up to 2 criteria can be combined, separated by an 'and' or an 'or'.

Removing the Excel Filter

To remove the filter from your spreadsheet, simply select the **Data** tab on the ribbon at the top of your spreadsheet, and from within this, click on the **Filter** option.

Common Problems with the Excel Autofilter

Two commonly encountered problems with the Excel Autofilter are:

[The Filter Stops Working Part of the Way Down the Spreadsheet](#)

[The 'Custom' Filter Fails to Show Rows that Satisfy the Specified Condition](#)

These are dealt with separately below:

Common Problem No. 1: Filter Stops Working Part Way Down the Spreadsheet

If your Excel Autofilter works for the top part of the data in your spreadsheet, but stops working part way down, this is probably because you have added more data since initially activating the autofilter or because you had a blank row in your data when you activated the filter.

Solution

In this case:

- Remove the autofilter;
- If your data has blank rows, use the mouse to manually select the entire data range;
- Activate the autofilter again.

This causes the new data to be added to the range of filtered cells.

Common Problem No. 2: The 'Custom' Filter Fails to Display Rows That Satisfy the Specified Condition

If you use the **(Custom...)** option and the condition that you specify fails to work, this may be because you are using a text condition (i.e. 'begins with', 'does not begin with', 'ends with', 'does not end with', 'contains' or 'does not contain') on numeric values, OR because you are using a numeric condition (i.e. 'is greater than', 'is greater than or equal to', 'is less than' or 'is less than or equal to') on text values.

Solution

In this case, you can get the filter to work as expected by changing the column data to the type that relates to the condition you wish to apply.

For example, to get the 'begins with' condition to work on a column of numbers, you will need to [convert the numbers to text](#) before applying the Custom filter.

See the [Microsoft Office website](#) for further details on Excel filtering.

[See also the Excel Advanced Filter page >>](#)

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