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Excel Copy And Paste

It is worth taking a few minutes to familiarise yourself with the different ways you can copy and paste data in Excel.

Until you know about all the different shortcuts and methods of copying and pasting in Excel, you will not be able to appreciate how much time and effort can be saved by introducing these into your daily working practises.

This page provides a brief overview of a Simple Excel Copy & Paste, as well as the Excel Paste Special command. We also provide a description of the Excel Copy-Paste shortcuts CTRL-D and CTRL-R.

Simple Excel Copy and Paste

The most simple Excel copy and paste uses the following steps:

1. Select an Excel cell, or range of cells.

2. Copy the cell(s) by either:

   - Right clicking with the mouse and selecting 'Copy' from this menu;

   - Selecting the **Copy** option from the home tab of the Excel ribbon;

   - Using the keyboard shortcut, ⌷ Ctrl ⌷ + ⌷ C ⌷ (i.e. select the **Ctrl** key and while holding this down, press **C**).

3. Click on the location where you want to paste the copied cell(s).

4. Paste the copied cell(s) by either:

   - Right clicking with the mouse and selecting 'Paste' from this menu;

   - Selecting the **Paste** from the home tab of the Excel ribbon;

   - Using the keyboard shortcut, ⌷ Ctrl ⌷ + ⌷ V ⌷ (i.e. select the **Ctrl** key and while holding this down, press **V**).

Note that there are a few Excel copy and paste rules that you should be aware of:

- When you copy cells containing formulas, the cell references within the formulas will be altered, unless they are made absolute by placing the $ symbol before the column or row reference - see the pages on Absolute and Relative Cell References for a detailed explanation of this.

- If you copy more than one cell, and then select a paste location that would result in the copied cells 'falling off' the edge or end of the spreadsheet, Excel will flag up an error and will not paste the copied data. This will occur if you copy a whole row or column and then attempt to paste this into a internal cell (i.e. not the first column or row) within the spreadsheet.

Paste Special

Normally when you perform an Excel copy and paste, all information from the copied cell(s) is pasted into the new cell(s). This includes any formulas or other cell contents, *and* the cell formatting.

However, sometimes you might want to only paste one part of the original copied cells, (e.g. just the cell values or just the cell formatting) into the new range. You can do this using the Excel 'Paste Special' command, which is found in the menu that appears when you right click the mouse.

The 'Paste Special' command can also be accessed from the 'Clipboard' group on the home tab of the Excel ribbon.
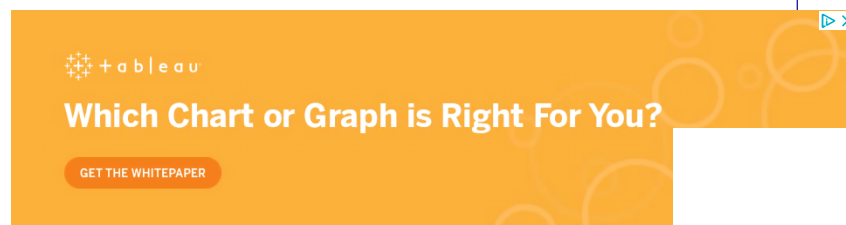
In recent versions of Excel (Excel 2010 or later), the right click menu and the 'Paste' menu contain 'Paste Special' shortcuts. Examples of these are shown below:

Examples of Paste Special Shortcuts:

Paste Special Values Example

A simple paste special example is shown in the two images below.

The first image shows the set of cells A1-A15, which have coloured formatting and also contain data values. If you want to copy the <u>values</u>, but <u>not the formatting</u> of cells A1-A15, into cells B1-B15, you could do this as follows:

1. Select and copy cells A1-A15;

2. Select cell B1 (or cells B1-B15) and then select **Paste Special** (from the Excel ribbon or the mouse right-click menu);

3. You will be presented with the 'Paste Special' dialog box (also shown in the left image below). Select the option **<u>V</u>alues** from this dialog box and click **OK**.

The image on the right below shows the result of the Paste Special. Note that the <u>values</u> from cells A1-A15 have been copied into cells B1-B15, but the <u>formatting</u> has not been copied across.
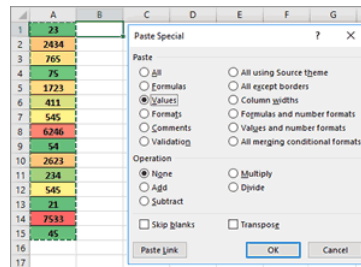
Original Spreadsheet with Paste Special Dialog Box   *Paste Special Values Result*

Of course, if you have one of the more recent version of Excel (Excel 2010 or later), you wouldn't need to open up the 'Paste Special' dialog box, as you can paste values only by using the Paste Special Values shortcut, .

Paste Special Transpose

You can see, from the above example, that the Values option is just one of several options linked to the Excel Paste Special feature.

As well as pasting selected attributes of the copied cells, the Paste Special command can be used to perform simple transformations. One example is the Transpose option which, in the example below, has been used to copy cells A1-A6, and paste these into the cell range C1-H1.

	A	B	C
1	andy		
2	dave		
3	carl		
4	beth		
5	ian		
6	pete		

Before Paste Special Transpose

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	andy		andy	dave	carl	beth	ian	pete
2	dave							
3	carl							
4	beth							
5	ian							
6	pete							

Paste Special Transpose Result

Use Paste Special to Perform Arithmetic Operations

The Paste Special command can also be used to perform a simple arithmetic operation on the contents of the target cells. The values in the copied cells are added to, subtracted from, multiplied by or used to divide the target cells.

An example of this is shown below. Columns A and B of the example spreadsheet both contain numeric values and the Paste Special command is used to subtract the values in column A from the values in column B. This is done by copying column A, selecting column B, and then selecting 'Paste Special', with the **S**ubtract option.

	A	B	C
1	54	66	
2	58	86	
3	95	100	
4	34	56	
5	23	32	
6	87	101	

Before Paste Special Subtract

	A	B	C
1	54	12	
2	58	28	
3	95	5	
4	34	22	
5	23	9	
6	87	14	

Paste Special Subtract Result

Note that, in the above example, instead of subtracting every cell of column A from column B, we could have subtracted a single cell of column A from every cell of column B. To do this, simply copy a single cell to start with, instead of a range of cells. Then, as in the example above, select column B and then select the **Paste Special→Subtract** option.

Copy Using Ctrl-D or Ctrl-R

Another convenient way to copy the values from one (or more) cells into adjacent cells is to use the **Ctrl-D** or **Ctrl-R** shortcuts.

Ctrl-D

The keyboard shortcut [Ctrl] + [D] (i.e. press the **Ctrl** key and, while keeping this pressed down, press the **D** key), copies the contents of a cell or row into the cell(s) below.

There are two ways in which this shortcut works:

1. If you select one or more cells <u>in a single row</u>, the shortcut **Ctrl-D** copies the row <u>above</u> the selected row, into the selected row.

pressing Ctrl-D copies the contents of cells A1-C1 into cells A2-C2

2. If you select cells in <u>more than one row</u>, the shortcut **Ctrl-D** copies the <u>top row</u> of the selected range into all the other rows in the selected range.

pressing Ctrl-D copies the contents of cells A1-C1 into cells A2-C4

Ctrl-R

The keyboard shortcut Ctrl + R (i.e. press the **Ctrl** key and, while keeping this pressed down, press the **R** key), copies the contents of a cell or row into the cell(s) to the right.

Again, there are two ways in which this shortcut works:

1. If you select one or more cells <u>in a single column</u>, the shortcut **Ctrl-R** copies the cells <u>to the left of</u> the selected column, into the selected column.

pressing Ctrl-R copies the contents of cells A1-A3 into cells B1-B3.

2. If you select cells in <u>more than one column</u>, the shortcut **Ctrl-R** copies the <u>left column</u> of the selected range, into all the other columns in the selected range.


pressing Ctrl-R copies the contents of cells A1-A3 into cells B1-D3

Copy a Worksheet

Finally, it is worth mentioning how to duplicate a worksheet in Excel. To do this:

- Use the mouse to right-click on the tab at the bottom of the worksheet and select the option **Move or Copy ...**.
  This will open up the 'Move or Copy' dialog box.

- Within the 'Move or Copy' dialog box, check the **Create a copy** box and click **OK**.
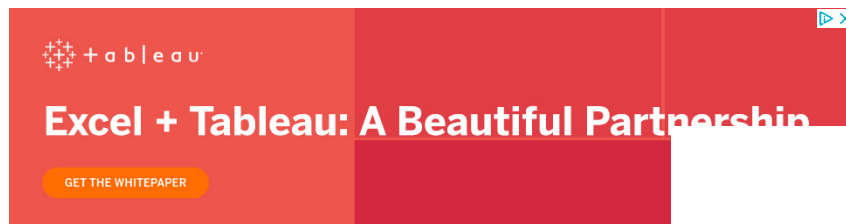
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