

Separate Strings in Excel

To separate strings in Excel, use RIGHT, LEN, FIND and LEFT. If you're not a formula hero, use Flash Fill to split text strings in Excel.

◆ Formulas

The problem we are dealing with is that we need to tell Excel where we want to separate the string (see picture below).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	First Name	Last Name					
2	Smith, Mike							
3	Johnson, Matthew							
4	Williams, Janet							
5	Brown, Sandra							
6	Jones, Lisa							
7	Millar, Peter							
8								

In case of Smith, Mike the comma is at position 6 while in case of Williams, Janet the comma is at position 9.

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1. To get the first name, use the formula below.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	First Name	Last Name					

2	Smith, Mike	Mike						
3	Johnson, Matthew							
4	Williams, Janet							
5	Brown, Sandra							
6	Jones, Lisa							
7	Millar, Peter							
8								

Explanation: to find the position of the comma, use the FIND function (position 6). To get the length of a string, use the LEN function (11 characters). =RIGHT(A2,LEN(A2)-FIND(", ",A2)-1) reduces to =RIGHT(A2,11-6-1). =RIGHT(A2,4) extracts the 4 rightmost characters and gives the desired result (Mike).

2. To get the last name, use the following formula.

C2								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	First Name	Last Name					
2	Smith, Mike	Mike	Smith					
3	Johnson, Matthew							
4	Williams, Janet							
5	Brown, Sandra							
6	Jones, Lisa							
7	Millar, Peter							
8								

Explanation: to find the position of the comma, use the FIND function (position 6). =LEFT(A2,FIND(", ", A2)-1) reduces to =LEFT(A2,6-1). =LEFT(A2,5) extracts the 5 leftmost characters and gives the desired result (Smith).

3. Select the range B2:C2 and drag it down.

B2								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	First Name	Last Name					
2	Smith, Mike	Mike	Smith					
3	Johnson, Matthew	Matthew	Johnson					
4	Williams, Janet	Janet	Williams					
5	Brown, Sandra	Sandra	Brown					
6	Jones, Lisa	Lisa	Jones					
7	Millar, Peter	Peter	Millar					
8								
9								

There's an even quicker way to achieve this result. Read on.

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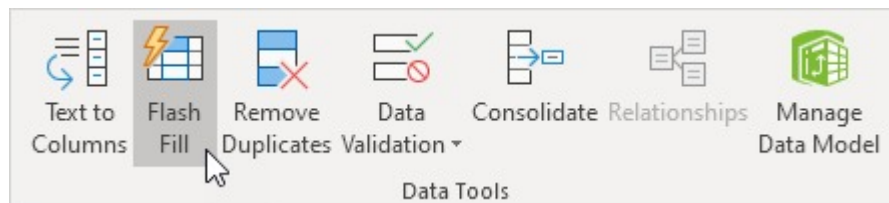
◆ Flash Fill

If you're not a formula hero, use Flash Fill to split text strings in Excel.

1. First, tell Excel what you want to do by entering the first name Mike into cell B2.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	First Name	Last Name					
2	Smith, Mike	Mike						
3	Johnson, Matthew							
4	Williams, Janet							
5	Brown, Sandra							
6	Jones, Lisa							
7	Millar, Peter							
8								

2. On the Data tab, in the Data Tools group, click Flash Fill (or press CTRL + E).



Result:

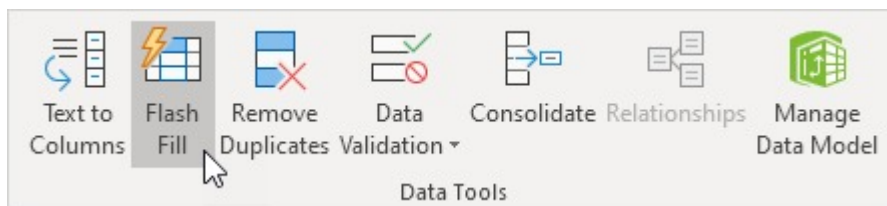
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	First Name	Last Name					
2	Smith, Mike	Mike						
3	Johnson, Matthew	Matthew						
4	Williams, Janet	Janet						
5	Brown, Sandra	Sandra						
6	Jones, Lisa	Lisa						
7	Millar, Peter	Peter						
8								

That's pretty cool!

3. Next, enter the last name Smith into cell C2.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	First Name	Last Name					
2	Smith, Mike	Mike	Smith					
3	Johnson, Matthew	Matthew						
4	Williams, Janet	Janet						
5	Brown, Sandra	Sandra						
6	Jones, Lisa	Lisa						
7	Millar, Peter	Peter						
8								

4. On the Data tab, in the Data Tools group, click Flash Fill (or press CTRL + E).



Result:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	First Name	Last Name					
2	Smith, Mike	Mike	Smith					
3	Johnson, Matthew	Matthew	Johnson					
4	Williams, Janet	Janet	Williams					
5	Brown, Sandra	Sandra	Brown					
6	Jones, Lisa	Lisa	Jones					
7	Millar, Peter	Peter	Millar					
8								

Note: one drawback when using Flash Fill is that the output will not automatically update when the source data changes. Create formulas (see first paragraph) to overcome this limitation.

◆ TEXTSPLIT

If you have Excel 365, use the new [TEXTSPLIT function](#) to split text into rows or columns using delimiters.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Full Name	Last Name	First Name					
2	Smith, Mike	Smith	Mike					
3	Johnson, Matthew	Johnson	Matthew					
4	Williams, Janet	Williams	Janet					
5	Brown, Sandra	Brown	Sandra					

6	Jones, Lisa	Jones	Lisa					
7	Millar, Peter	Millar	Peter					
8								

Note: the TEXTSPLIT function, entered into cell B2, fills multiple cells (B2 and C2). Wow! This behavior is called [spilling](#).

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