**Importing data into Microsoft Excel**

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Excel can accommodate several different data formats. If you receive data in a tab-delimited or fixed-width text file, all hope is not lost. Excel has an Import Wizard that allows users to pull in data and convert it into a format that is readable in Excel.

**File Types**

These are some common file extensions you may encounter:

.xls, .xlsx, .xlsm Excel files

.txt Text file

.csv Comma-separated value

.dbf Database format

.html Hyper-text mark-up language

.mdb Microsoft database (Access file)

.pdf Portable document format

Got a weird extension? Check out [lifewire.com](https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-an-xlsx-file-2622540). They have good articles on how to open, convert, and work with different file types.

In this session, we’ll go over how to use the Text Import Wizard on fixed-width and delimited .txt files.

**Using the Text Import Wizard**

Step 1: Open the data

Just because we can’t work with our data in Excel yet doesn’t mean we can’t take a look at it. Most computers come with a built-in text editor such as Notepad. If you’re familiar with fancier text editors like Atom or Sublime, those work as well.

Take note of how the data is formatted. Are there headers? Dates? Numbers? Commas? Unique ID fields? Are there quotation marks around each value?

Keep the file open to reference as we move into Excel.

Step 2: Open Excel

Open a blank Excel file. This is where we’ll put our data. In the toolbar, click on the “Data” tab. Under “External Data Sources,” select “Text.” The import wizard should pop up.

Step 1: Got headers?

Does your data have a header row? Multiple header rows? You can tell Excel to read those as header lines.

Step 2: Is your data delimited or fixed width?

Text files come in two flavors: fixed width and delimited. Fixed width data is separated via a set distance between each value. For fixed width files, Excel guesses the column breaks, but will also let you select the exact place where the new column begins.

Delimited data uses some character to signify the end of a field. Common delimiters include commas, tabs, spaces, carats (^), pipes (|), and semicolons. Any character can be used as a delimiter. You just have to tell the import wizard what to look for.

Step 3: Does your data have text qualifiers?

Text qualifiers are quotation marks (either single or double) that signal to the computer that the data is text instead of a number. Not all data has these, but you’ll need to tell Excel if they are there, otherwise all of your text will come in “like this.”

‘this is a string’

“this is also a string”

this could also be a string

Step 4: Choose data formats for each column

Excel recognizes multiple data formats, including integers, text and dates. I don’t recommend selecting the “General” option. Excel can make a lot of bad assumptions, like counting zip codes, phone numbers and unique ID keys as integers. Excel removes the leading zeroes on integers, which could cause problems.

As a general rule, if it is not something you want to do math with, it’s text.

Dates can be in any combination of MDY, DMY, YMD, etc. Look carefully at the dates to figure out which combination you’re working with.

You can always change the data format after you import it by selecting the column and clicking the “Number” dropdown while in the Home toolbar.

Step 5. Finish!

Select where you want your imported data to go (usually A1) and hit “OK.” Make sure everything imported correctly. If not, just make adjustments and try it again!