

# Excel Basics—Tips & Tricks

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This handout & sample files are posted at:  
<http://ljhs.sandi.net/faculty/SGrant/SharedProf.html>

## *Labels, values, formulas, functions*

### Labels, values, formulas...

To **enter a formula**, start by typing **equals sign (=)**; enter into cell with <Enter> key.

Examples: =2+2 =C10-B8 =C10\*.0775 =(B5-B3)/8 =F12

To **enter a value**, start by (and continue) typing **digit** (or decimal or minus sign).

Examples: 107 268.12 .46 -524.12

To **enter a label**, start by typing **just about anything else**. If you start with a digit but type non-numeric characters after that, Excel will make it a label.

Examples: **Date Item Cost 2005 Average**

☞ To **force a number (or anything else) to be a label**, start by typing an **apostrophe**.

Example: To enter 012345 as a label (so the zero displays), enter **'012345**

Syntax for a **range** of cells: **(C10:C25)**

☞ <Enter>/<Return> enters what you've typed and moves **down**; <Tab> enters and moves **right**.

### "Point-to-cell" shortcut...

When typing a formula, can **point to cell with mouse instead of typing** its coordinates.

Example: You want to enter the formula "=C10+D10". After typing the equals sign, instead of typing "C10", **click on** cell C10, then type "+", then **click on** cell D10, then hit <Enter> key.

☞ **Point to cell in another worksheet** same way; formula will show name of that worksheet followed by exclamation point and cell coordinates. Example: =**Wilma!E7**

☞ **Point to a contiguous range** by dragging from first to last cell in the range... or by holding down <Shift> while using arrow key.

### Functions...

**SUM(range)** Example: =SUM(C10:C25)

**AVERAGE(range)** Example: =AVERAGE(C10:C25)

**IF (Logical\_test,Value\_if\_true,Value\_if\_false)** Example: =IF(C10<>0,C10,C9)

To **enter a function**, start with **equals sign**, then **name of function**, then **parentheses** around what the function operates on.

Example: =SUM(C10:C25)

## *Copy-Pasting, Selecting*

### Copy-Paste...

Copy and Cut commands same as in Word (under Edit menu, or keyboard:

**Copy...** <Control>/<Command>-C

**Cut...** <Control>/<Command>-X—think of scissors)

...but **Paste** is *not* the same. After Copy or Cut, **hit <Enter> key**.

Can **copy formula in one cell** and **paste to multiple other cells**: Select source cell, Copy, select target cell/cells, hit <Enter>.

Cell references in formula adjust automatically to reflect new position when Pasted.

Usually you want this, but you can **prevent by making source cell references “absolute” w/ dollar signs** before Copying. Example: **\$C\$10**

### **Selecting...**

**Select multiple cells (contiguous, i.e. a range)**—3 ways:

☞ Favorite... **Select first cell**, scroll if necessary to see last, **<Shift>-click on last cell**.

☞ 2<sup>nd</sup> favorite... **Select first cell**, hold down **<Shift> while use <Arrowkey>**.

Good for short ranges... **Drag** from first cell to last cell.

**Select entire row(s) or column(s) by clicking gray “button”** with row/column name.

**Select multiple non-contiguous cells**: **Hold down <Control>** while clicking each cell.

## ***Formatting***

**Format | Cells...** or **right-click** and select **“Format Cells...”**

### **Number formats...**

**General**: If contains number, may display as scientific notation (“1.23E +08”) or pound-signs (“#####”) if column too narrow.

*Solution*: Change to Number format (prevents scientific notation display); widen column.

**Currency**: Displays “\$”. If you select 0 decimal places, will round display to nearest dollar.

### **Alignment...**

**Left/center/right**: Use toolbar buttons as in Word.

**Wrap text**: Stacks multiple-word label vertically in a column heading (or any other cell)

**Shrink to fit**: “Fudges” font size for you if label almost (but not quite) fits in cell

**Merge cells**: Makes single larger cell out of two/more existing ones. Must select all cells you want merged before giving this command. Uncheck to “unmerge” back again.

### **Fonts & colors...**

**Typeface, font settings (including color)**: Use toolbar buttons.

**Cell background color** (highlighting): Use toolbar button that looks like a highlighter.

### **Cell borders...**

**Basic borders**: Use toolbar button. More option with “Borders” tab in Format Cells dialog box.

☞ To make **all cell borders print**: **File | Page Setup...** “Sheet” tab, “Print” area—check “Gridlines”.

### **Comments...**

**Add**: **Insert | Comment**

**Edit: Insert | Edit Comment**

**Delete: Edit | Clear | Comments**

Way **easier to right-click** a cell to add/edit/delete a Comment.

When typing in a Comment box, **click outside box when finished**.

### **Text box...**

Use **toolbar button**. If not there...

**Tools | Customize...** “**Commands**” tab, select “**Autoshapes**”. **Drag “Text Box” icon** into toolbar where you want it, then click “**Close**” button.

### **Adjust column width...**

**Drag gray column button’s border** at top.

**Automatically size column** to largest cell: **Select entire column** (click gray column button at top). Then **Format | Column | Autofit Selection**.

☞ Shortcut: **Double-click right border** of gray column button.

## ***Inserting / Deleting Rows or Columns***

**Insert: Select entire row/s** (click row’s gray button at far left). Then **Insert | Rows**. Row is inserted *above* selected row.

**Delete: Select entire row/s**. Then **Edit | Delete**. ☞ *No confirmation dialog...* It just does it!

☞ If you delete a row with a “running total” formula, all other running-total formulas below it will display error “#REF!” To fix, Copy running-total formula from last cell in which it’s still working to all cells below it displaying “#REF!”

Inserting & deleting columns works same way.

## ***Split Window***

**To split: Click into upper-left corner** of entire worksheet (cell A1) (shortcut: <Control>-<Home>). Then **Window | Split**. **Drag splitbars** as desired.

**To remove vertical or horizontal split only, drag that splitbar off the worksheet** entirely.

**To remove all splits: Window | Remove Split**.

☞ Usually you want to **do all scrolling in lower-right quadrant** (4-way split) or **lower half** (2-way).

## ***Multiple Worksheets***

New file (Excel: “workbook”) has 3 by default. Move among by clicking tabs in lower left. Use **navigation buttons to left of tabs to scroll tabs** in case they’re not all visible.

**Add a worksheet: Insert | Worksheet**.

**Delete a worksheet:** Be sure it’s selected and visible. Then **Edit | Delete Worksheet**.

**Rename a worksheet: Format | Sheet | Rename** or **right-click on worksheet’s tab**.

**Formula can refer to cell in another worksheet:** As you write formula, **click on other worksheet’s tab** to bring it up, then **point to and click on cell**.

☞ Renaming a worksheet will rename any cell references to it in other worksheets (Good!)

## ***Importing Delimited Text Files with Barcode Numbers***

Must open from within Excel: **File | Open...** be sure “**Files of type**” is set to “**All Files**”.

**Wizard Step 2:** Be sure “**Delimiter**” checked results in **vertical lines between columns** in preview display (scroll sideways to inspect).

**Wizard Step 3:** All columns default to “Column data format” of “General”... OK *except* for **columns with large numbers (e.g. barcode or ID numbers)**. Click-to-select such a column, then click data format “**Text**”.

### ***Sorting***

**Select entire block of data**—including any cells with column headings. Then **Data | Sort**. “My list has” section: select “**Header row**”.