

Sean McManus

100 TOP TIPS

Microsoft Excel

- Supercharge your Excel skills
- Learn more from your data
- Boost your productivity





In easy steps is an imprint of In Easy Steps Limited
16 Hamilton Terrace · Holly Walk · Leamington Spa
Warwickshire · United Kingdom · CV32 4LY
www.ineasysteps.com

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FSC® C020837

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom

ISBN 978-1-84078-879-2

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Entering data with Auto Fill

1

If you're typing in data that has a pattern to it, Excel can complete the pattern for you. You can use this for number sequences, times, and dates.

1 Enter the start of the sequence into two cells. If it's a number sequence, you'll need to enter at least two numbers. For times and dates, Excel can use just one. For alternate months (January, March, etc.), you'd enter the first two to show the pattern.

2 Highlight the cells containing your data.

3 Click the Fill handle. It's a tiny dot in the bottom right of the selected area. Your cursor becomes a small black cross when you hover over it.



4 Drag the mouse to cover the area you want to fill. In the example shown here, you'd drag down. As you drag, you'll see the value that's being added shown next to your cursor.

5 Click the Auto Fill Options menu that appears beside your cursor to find options for the fill, including Copy, which fills each cell with the data you've selected. You can also fill weekdays, days, months, or years from dates. Try putting 31-Jan in the first box, then autofilling months to get the last day of each month.

6 Even quicker: If you just want a sequence of numbers going up by 1, enter the first number, select the cell and hold down Ctrl while you drag the Fill handle.

Filling to match the neighboring column

There's an even quicker way to autofill a range so it matches the size of the neighboring columns.

1 Enter the first two data items in the sequence you want to use. For example, if you want to add years starting at 2025 and want to increase by 1 each time, enter 2025 and 2026 into two cells.

2 Highlight both cells containing the data items you just entered.

Period	US sales	UK sales
2025	65	11
2026	72	22
	46	232
	98	12
	23	54
		45
		54

3 Double-click the Fill handle in the bottom right of the selected area.

4 Your data column is automatically filled to match the size of the neighboring columns. In my example, the autofill extends to where the data ends in the third column, even though the nearest column is shorter.

Period	US sales	UK sales
2025	65	11
2026	72	22
2027	46	232
2028	98	12
2029	23	54
2030		45
2031		54

Using Flash Fill

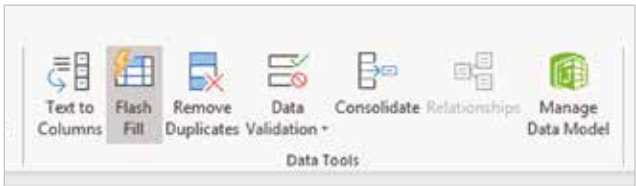


Introduced in Excel 2013, Flash Fill recognizes patterns in data based on neighboring cells. It's much more sophisticated than Auto Fill. You can use it, for example, to reformat text and split or combine data. Here's an example.

- 1 You might have a list of names, with the first name and last name combined. For the first row, type the first and second names into the next cells. This is how you teach Excel the pattern to copy.

	Name	First Name	Surname		
	Murphy Slaw	Murphy	Slaw		
	Bob Sled				
	Phil Space				
	Dave Triffids				
	Gladys Working				

- 2 Position your cursor in the empty first name cell for the second name.
- 3 Press Ctrl + E or click the Flash Fill button on the ribbon. Find it by clicking the Data tab, then looking in the Data Tools.



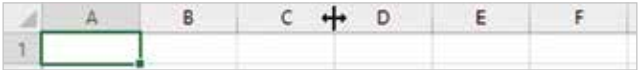
- 4 The first name column is then automatically filled out for you. Check the results look okay, and then do the same for the last name column.

4

Adjusting column widths and row heights

Here are some tips for adjusting the width of columns. Similar ideas apply to rows.

- 1 To adjust the width of a column, click and drag the line to the right of its letter above the column. Here, I'm adjusting the width of column C.



- 2 To make the column width snap to the width of the content in the column, double-click this same dividing line above the column, on its right.
- 3 You can select several columns and adjust them at the same time, making them equal width, or making them all snap to their content width. To select a column, click its letter. Click and drag on the letters to select multiple columns, or use Ctrl + click to select columns that aren't adjacent.
- 4 You might want to set the column width to a particular cell in the column, rather than the widest cell. Perhaps one cell contains a title that you're happy to run into other cells. Select the cell you want to adjust the width to, go to Format in the Cells group of the Home tab, and select AutoFit Column Width.

This is a long title, which we don't want to fit the column to				
Books				
Stationery				
Frozen produce				
Recorded media				