

(Approx. 1,052 words)

The Tip Corner – December 2014

By Bill Sheff, Lehigh Valley Computer Group, Pennsylvania

December 2014 issue, The LVCG Journal

www.lvcg.org

nsheff (at) aol.com

Since this is the last Tip Corner for 2014, and as most of you know Spreadsheets are my passion, I am devoting this issue to a bevy of tips strictly for the Excel user (but don't tell anyone but almost all of them can be used in Open or Libre Office. But first, a eagle-eyed reader in Colorado noticed a line missing from one of my tips in the November issue, so I am repeating it here. Sorry about that.

XP and Banking

I usually don't profess to follow some of the paranoid warnings of some people, however, I have to suggest that the very last thing you should be doing with a Windows XP computer is banking on line. Security support for Windows XP ended last April, and it's even worse if you happen to be using Internet Explorer. The highest version of IE supported in XP is 8 and that browser is also without any security support. You're slightly safer using Firefox or Chrome, but with XP receiving no security support from Microsoft, your system could be a prime target. You should definitely stop banking online until you have another operating system.

Text to Columns

If you ever prepared a list of names, and put both first and last in name in the same column, tsk, tsk. Now you know better. But what do you do with that list of over 200 friends all in one column? Select the data (highlight the column) then on the Data tab click **Text to Columns**, then choose to separate them based on what delimiter is used (usually either spaces or commas). It works like magic. This tip is also handy if you downloaded some data in CSV format .where the data is all in the first column, but separated by a fixed number of spaces or period.

Paste Special to Transpose

Over the last few years changing from rows to columns got easier. What you do is COPY the data, and then select PASTE SPECIAL and pick the Transpose box. Another great helpful command.

Paste Special with Formulas

While we are looking at the Paste Special command here is another helpful hint. Suppose you wanted to change a list of numbers from decimal to percentages. You don't want the numeral 1 to be 100% but rather 1%. So rather than you having to divide all the numbers by 100 using the Paste Special comes to the rescue. That's where Paste Special comes in. First, type 100 in a cell and copy it. Then, select all the numbers you want reformatted, select Paste Special, click the "Divide" radio button, and *olla* as they say in France. Use this procedure to also add, subtract, or multiply numbers.

Conditional Formatting

If you have a need to change the way a cell looks based on the data, Conditional Formatting is the way to go. Using Conditional Formatting allows you to make cells stand out based on

the criteria you select. Not only can you change colors, but you can draw borders around cells. Even little graphs can be built into the cells making it easier to visualize positions in a range. Use the Highlighted Cells Rules sub-menu to create more rules to look for things, such as text that contains a certain string of words, recurring dates, duplicate values, etc. There's even a greater than/less than option so you can compare number changes.

Validate Data to Make Drop Downs

This is one I use, and also demo'd at some of the Novice Sig meetings. You can create a drop-down menu of selections just like the form fillers put out by companies that restricts the choices that can be made. Highlight a cell, go to the Data tab, and click Data Validation. Under "Allow:" select "List." Then in the "Source:" field, type a list, with commas between the options. Or, you could click the button next to the Source field and go back into the same sheet to select a data series. You can hide that data and it will still work. Data Validation is also a good way to restrict data entered—for example, give a date range, and people cannot enter any dates before or after what you specify. You can even create an error message they tell them what they did wrong.

Insert Excel Data into a Word Document

Way back when, this was another of the extremely difficult tasks. Today it is a snap. Whether you're copying data cells or a full-blown graphical chart, just copy and paste 1, 2, 3. There is one caveat to be aware of., This is a link-and-embed process—if you change the data in the spreadsheet, it'll change in the Word doc or PowerPoint PPT, as well. To avoid this, use the Word Paste Special tool for or, when taking it from Excel, use the Copy Special option to paste the graphic into any program at all.

AutoFill

When I was a mere lad in terms of spreadsheet abilities, the only way we could make a list of say one to a hundred was to type a 1 in the first cell (say A1), go down to the next cell (A2) and type in the formula =A1+1. Then copy cell A2 down the other 98 rows. Weren't we the clever ones. Today making a list has come a long way. You start typing usually just the first two cells of your list. Highlight the cells and note that the cursor has turned into a type of cross called a fill handle. Drag the fill handle down as far as you want the list to go. The list fills up. This works with more than just numbers. Dates, days of the week, etc. can usually benefit from the fill handle. You can fill in up a column or in either direction in a row. And there is more! You can Auto Fill without much of a pattern. Again, pick a cell or cells, move to the fill handle, click, and drag. You'll get a menu of options. The more data you input at first, the better the Fill Series option will do creating your AutoFill options.