

Back to the Basics

Easy Spreadsheets for Home Finances

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Tax time has come and gone and this is always a good time to review your financial status. Over the years I have found that two easy spreadsheets have helped me a great deal in keeping track of my finances and I would like to share them with you. It is important that you know that it is NOT difficult to keep a spreadsheet, especially if you are only doing basic calculations. My first spreadsheet tracks all my expenses, month by month, and the other spreadsheet tracks my investments, also monthly. (See the two samples with this article – I am showing only three months instead of twelve, but you will get the idea).

By using these two spreadsheets I can easily see what bills I have paid (or not), the past amounts paid for each, and I can see those quarterly or annual payments as well. For my investments status, I can see the amount and percent gain/loss each month and the overall gain/loss for the year. Color shading of the rows of cells in each spreadsheet is very helpful, easy to do, and makes the data easy to view. All “formulas” that I use are only totals, differences from the previous month column, and percentages. Really easy stuff for a spreadsheet!

The only spreadsheet “skills” that you need to know for all of this are listed here, and you can find instructions by looking them up on Google:

- a) Merge cells to create titles on your spreadsheet that span multiple columns. This makes the spreadsheet look nice.
- b) Enter a number (dollar amount) in a cell.
- c) Enter text into a cell.
- d) Color a background to a cell, row, or column.
- e) Enter a summation formula in the bottom cell to add all the cells in that column above.
The formula: `SUM(b2:b15)` will add all the values in the cells in column B from B2 through B15.
This formula should be entered in the last cell in the column which would be B16 in this example.
- f) Just change the numbers to add the cells you want.
- g) Add and/or delete a row or column of cells.

And that's about it. Of course, there is always more to learn if you want, but just these skills will work just fine for the basics.

Let's begin with my “Monthly Expenses” spreadsheet and how you can modify it to suit your situation. I have each billing company or organization in the first column “a,”

followed by a column for each month across the sheet “b” through “m,” twelve months. The last column on the right “n” is a total column.

Basically, I have grouped my bills that come due each and every month at the top of the sheet, followed by those bills I consistently pay by credit card (a different color). These are then followed by those odd bills, the ones I pay quarterly or annually, and one-time bills such as for home improvements, etc. Don't forget to keep your medical bills clearly indicated in another color too. Usually it is a good idea to use your charge card for many bills because you can separate out the medical, food, and other charges as you need to for tax purposes. I usually do not track my cash payments out of my pocket (lunches, misc. expenses, etc.) but I DO track how much I take out from the bank in cash for those expenses. By looking across each row I can see how that bill went up or down and how much I have been using in gas or electric, etc. If my water bill jumps up, for example, maybe I have a leak or maybe I just filled up my pool too much. At the end of the year I can see how much I paid, total and monthly average, for all my expenses.

For my “Financial Status” or “Investments” spreadsheet I do pretty much the same thing, one row across for each investment or account, and a column for each month. I enter the numbers into the spreadsheet based upon my monthly account statements. On my example, I have one row that is all negative as it is a loan or debt. The rows at the bottom contain the totals and the percent difference (up or down) from the previous month. Whenever you enter a new number in a cell, the totals, averages, and percentages are all automatically calculated for you. The column at the far right tells me the percentage gain/loss for the year so far for each investment.

Remember you can just add more rows as you need. It fits nicely on my computer screen and, if I print it out in “landscape” mode, it looks great. Learning how to use the basics of a spreadsheet is a great way to find out if spreadsheets can help you in other areas as well. There is free spreadsheet software on Google Drive and Open Office, and free help on using them on Google and YouTube. Why not give it a try? – it's a lot easier than keeping written records by hand!

My Monthly Expenses						
COMPANY	JAN	FEB	MAR	TOTAL	Average	
Electric	68.22	75.93	63.86	208.01	69.34	
Gas	34.25	39.76	37.72	111.73	37.24	
Phone	48.32	48.32	48.32	144.96	48.32	
Water & sewer	55.93	60.72	58.44	175.09	58.36	
VISA bill	387.93	487.73	433.87	1309.53	436.51	
Pest control			35.88	35.88	11.96	
Dentist		478.5		478.5	159.50	
Medications		35.86		35.86	11.95	
				0	0.00	
TOTAL	594.65	1226.82	678.09	2499.56	833.19	

Figure 1: Monthly Expense Spreadsheet example

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	A	B	C	D	E
1	MY ASSETS				
2	Investment	JAN	FEB	MAR	% + or -
3	Edward Jones	50,678	53,124	58,402	15.2%
4	Stock A	35,673	30,483	31,383	-12.0%
5	Stock B	15,478	17,123	18,058	16.7%
6	IRA	100,673	102,841	109,984	9.2%
7	House equity	50,738	50,738	50,738	0.0%
8	Checking acct	1,027	1,507	1,183	varies
9	Savings acct	20,675	19,839	20,108	-2.7%
10	Debt on loan	(4,893)	(4,772)	(4,633)	-5.3%
11	TOTAL	270,049	270,883	285,223	5.6%
12	% from prev month		0.3%	5.3%	

Figure 1: Investment Spreadsheet example