

Word, Excel & Microsoft 365 | Medium | 2 min read

Excel: conditional formatting basics

Conditional formatting changes how a cell looks based on what is in it. You can make overdue dates turn red, highlight sales over a target, or add small bars to show how big numbers are. It updates itself as the numbers change.

Highlight cells above a number

1. Select the cells you want to check, for example a column of sales.
2. Click the **Home** tab, then **Conditional Formatting**.
3. Choose **Highlight Cells Rules**, then **Greater Than**.
4. Type the number, such as 1000, and choose a colour from the drop-down list.
5. Click **OK**.

Any cell above 1000 now changes colour. Other choices in the same menu include **Less Than**, **Between**, **Equal To**, **Text that Contains** and **A Date Occurring**.

Find the biggest or smallest

Choose **Top/Bottom Rules** and pick something like **Top 10 Items** or **Below Average**. You can change the 10 to any number.

Data bars and colour scales

- **Data Bars** put a coloured bar in each cell, longer for bigger numbers.
- **Color Scales** shade cells from one colour to another, like a heat map.
- **Icon Sets** add traffic lights or arrows.

Pick one from the menu and see how it looks. If you do not like it, you can undo it with Ctrl+Z.

Colour a whole row

This needs a formula, so it is a little harder. Select the rows, choose **Conditional Formatting**, then **New Rule**, then **Use a formula to determine which cells to format**. For example `=D2="Overdue"` colours every row where column D says Overdue. The dollar sign locks the column.

Edit or remove rules

Click **Conditional Formatting**, then **Manage Rules**. Choose to show rules for **This Worksheet** and you can edit or delete any of them. To remove all rules, choose **Clear Rules**, then **Clear Rules from Entire Sheet**.

Common problems

- **Colours stay when the cell no longer qualifies:** the colour may have been added by hand rather than by a rule.

Mac users find the same options on the **Home** tab.

When to get more help

If a spreadsheet has become slow or full of conflicting rules, get in touch and we can tidy it up for you.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.