

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

Excel: fix numbers stored as text

If Excel will not add up a column, or your numbers sit on the left of the cell instead of the right, they are probably stored as text. Excel sees them as words that merely look like numbers. This often happens with data copied from a website, email or another system.

How to spot it

- The numbers are left-aligned.
- A small green triangle sits in the corner of the cell.
- The total at the bottom of the screen (the status bar) shows a count but no sum.
- Formulas such as SUM ignore the cells, and lookups fail to match.

Fix 1: the quick warning icon

1. Select the affected cells.
2. Click the yellow warning icon that appears beside them.
3. Choose **Convert to Number**.

Fix 2: Text to Columns

This works well for a whole column at once.

1. Select the column.
2. Click the **Data** tab, then **Text to Columns**.
3. Click **Finish** straight away, without changing any options.

Fix 3: multiply by one

1. Type 1 in any empty cell and copy it with Ctrl+C.
2. Select the numbers.
3. Right-click, choose **Paste Special**, then pick **Multiply** and click **OK**.
4. Delete the cell holding the 1.

If the cells are formatted as Text

On the **Home** tab, change the format drop-down from **Text** to **General**. Changing the format does not alter existing entries. After that, click in each cell and press Enter, or use Fix 2.

Hidden spaces

If the fixes above do not work, there may be spaces or odd characters. In a spare column, type =TRIM(A2) and copy it down. This removes extra spaces. Then copy the results and paste them back as values using **Paste Special**, then **Values**.

Things to watch

- Telephone numbers, account numbers and postcodes should stay as text, so leave them alone.
- Make a copy of the file before you try anything new.

On a Mac the same options appear on the **Data** and **Home** tabs.

When to get more help

If a whole file of imported figures will not behave, send it to us. We can usually clean it up quickly and show you how.

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.