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Excel: how to protect a sheet so cells cannot be changed

Protecting a sheet stops people accidentally overwriting formulas or headings. It is great for forms and shared workbooks. It is not strong security, so do not use it to hide private information.

How protection works

Every cell in Excel is 'locked' by default, but the lock does nothing until you protect the sheet. So the usual approach is to unlock the cells people are allowed to edit, then switch protection on.

Step 1: unlock the cells people may edit

1. Select the cells that should stay editable, such as input boxes.
2. Press Ctrl+1 to open **Format Cells**.
3. Click the **Protection** tab.
4. Untick **Locked** and click **OK**.

Step 2: protect the sheet

1. Click the **Review** tab.
2. Click **Protect Sheet**.
3. Type a password if you want one. It is optional.
4. Choose what people can still do, such as selecting cells or formatting columns.
5. Click **OK**, and retype the password if asked.

Anyone who tries to change a locked cell now sees a message saying the cell is protected.

Remove protection

Click **Review**, then **Unprotect Sheet**, and enter the password if there is one.

Protect the whole workbook

- **Protect Workbook** on the **Review** tab stops people adding, deleting or renaming sheets.
- To make people enter a password before even opening a file, choose **File, Info, Protect Workbook, Encrypt with Password**.

Important warnings

- **Write the password down somewhere safe.** If you lose a file's open password it is very hard to recover, and Microsoft cannot help.
- Sheet protection can be got around by a determined person. Treat it as a safeguard against mistakes, not a lock on a safe.
- Do not use your email or banking password.

Common problems

- **I cannot edit anything:** you have probably forgotten to unlock the cells in step 1.

- **Some buttons are greyed out:** the sheet is protected. Unprotect it first.
- **Macs:** the **Review** tab has the same buttons.

When to get more help

If you are locked out of an important spreadsheet, contact us as soon as possible, and avoid downloading password-cracking tools from the internet.

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.