

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

Excel: why you see ##### in a cell

Seeing a row of hash signs (#####) in a cell looks alarming, but your data is almost certainly fine. Excel is simply telling you it cannot fit the contents into the space.

Most common cause: the column is too narrow

The fix takes two seconds.

1. Move your pointer to the line between two column letters at the top, for example between **B** and **C**.
2. When the pointer becomes a double-headed arrow, double-click.

The column widens to fit. You can also click the cell, then choose **Home**, **Format**, **AutoFit Column Width**. If you want to widen several columns, select them first.

Another cause: a negative date or time

Excel cannot show a date or a time that is below zero, and it fills the cell with hash signs instead. Check the calculation that produced it. A common cause is subtracting a later time from an earlier one, such as an end time that is before the start time.

Other things to try

- **Shrink the text:** select the cells, press Ctrl+1, open the **Alignment** tab and tick **Shrink to fit**. Use this carefully, as tiny numbers are hard to read.
- **Use a smaller font** or fewer decimal places. The **Decrease Decimal** button is on the **Home** tab.
- **Wrap long text:** if a cell holds words rather than numbers, click **Wrap Text** on the **Home** tab.
- **Change the number format:** if the value is huge, a different format may help. Right-click, choose **Format Cells** and pick **Number**.

Does it print as hashes?

Yes, if it appears on screen it will print that way, so fix it before printing or emailing.

Is anything lost?

No. Click the cell and look at the formula bar above the sheet. The real number or date is shown there.

Tip

Select the whole sheet by clicking the small triangle at the top left corner, then double-click any column border. Every column tidies itself in one go.

This works the same on a Mac.

When to get more help

If you still see hashes after widening the column, or negative dates keep appearing in an important workbook, ask us to look at it.

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.