

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

# Excel: XLOOKUP and VLOOKUP explained simply

A lookup formula finds a value in a list and brings back something from the same row. For example, you type a product code and Excel fetches the price. It is just like looking up a name in a phone book and reading across to the number.

## Which one should I use?

**XLOOKUP** is the newer, easier choice. It is available in Microsoft 365 and Excel 2021 and later.

**VLOOKUP** is older but works in every version, so you will see it in many workbooks. If a colleague on an older Excel needs to open your file, use VLOOKUP.

## XLOOKUP

The pattern is: what to find, where to find it, what to return.

Suppose codes are in A2:A50 and prices are in C2:C50, and you typed a code in E2. In F2 type:

`=XLOOKUP(E2, A2:A50, C2:C50, "Not found")`

Excel looks for E2 in the code column and returns the matching price. The last part is the message shown if there is no match.

## VLOOKUP

The pattern is: what to find, the table, which column to bring back, and exact match.

`=VLOOKUP(E2, A2:C50, 3, FALSE)`

The table must start with the column holding the codes. The **3** means 'bring back the third column of that table'. **FALSE** means 'exact matches only', and you almost always want this.

## Tips

- Press the **F4** key while the cursor is on a range to lock it with dollar signs. This stops it shifting when you copy the formula down.
- Both formulas ignore capital letters.
- Excel starts suggesting the formula after you type `=XLOOKUP(` and shows what each part means.

## Common problems

- **#N/A**: nothing matched. Check for spelling differences or extra spaces. Numbers stored as text will not match real numbers (see our guide on numbers stored as text).
- **Wrong answer from VLOOKUP**: you may have left off **FALSE**.
- **#NAME?**: you may be using XLOOKUP in an older version of Excel that does not have it.

The formulas are identical on a Mac.

## When to get more help

If a lookup returns wrong values in something important, such as pricing or payroll, ask us to check it before it is used.

**Still stuck?** Email [admin@visiontech336.com](mailto: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.