Excel: Things you should never do #1

- **(Almost) never have blank rows or columns within the body of your spreadsheet.**

Why not?

Because Excel will consider the body of data below the blank row (or to the right of the blank column) to be a separate entity…another (*separate*) spreadsheet – which will cause that data to be left out of bulk actions like sorting and subtotals.

Here's proof:

One "clean" spreadsheet – without any blank rows or columns.
With the cellpointer located anywhere within the body of data, if you press [CTRL]A (to select all)…the entire spreadsheet is selected.

Now, with a blank row inserted within the body of the data – looks what happens when we try to select all ([CTRL]A). Because my cellpointer was located above the blank row when I pressed [CTRL]A…only the top portion of the spreadsheet was selected. Excel considers the data below the blank row to be a different spreadsheet.

The same happens when you have blank columns.

This can cause you more work (when you go to select "all" the data) – but more importantly it can cause you more work when you try to perform calcualtions *and* can give you incorrect calculations.

People often insert blanks row because they are trying to subtotal sections of data – like totalling each departments' expenditures.

What should you do?

Use the SUBTOTAL function. It will make your data section totals standout – without the extra spacing.

How do you perform the SUBTOTAL function? Here's an exercise to try. (This is the example from Tip #198).
1. Open the FREEZING.XLSX file located at www.ctccomputertraining.com/students. (At the students site, click the EXCEL button – then click the FREEZING.XLSX link under the EXCEL – LEVEL 2 heading).
2. Select any cell in the DEPT column.
3. SORT the list by department, by clicking the SORT & FILTER button at the end of the HOME tab – then choosing SORT SMALLEST TO LARGEST.
4. Still sitting within the body of data – click the DATA tab – then click SUBTOTAL (end of the ribbon).
5. When the SUBTOTAL window appears:
   a. Make sure the AT EACH CHANGE IN drop-down displays DEPT (the column you sorted by).
   b. Leave the rest of the options as is – and click OK.
6. See the Outline Pane that appears down the LHS of the spreadsheet? Click button 2 (at the top of the outline pane) to see the Dept subtotals. See how it adding an extra row for the department totals? Not a blank row that will interfere with your data either.
7. BTW: Click button 1 (at the top of the outline pane) to see the overall total/sum; and click button 3 to see all the data (with one final total at the bottom).

There is much more to the SUBTOTAL function – but you (should) get the idea.

The SUBTOTAL function is one of the many topics that we cover in our Excel Level 2 course.