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Excel: Things you should never do #2

- **NEVER USE NUMBERS FOR COLUMN HEADINGS.**

Why not?
For a few reasons, but the most common being that Excel doesn't know the difference between the numeric column heading and the numbers contained in that column. Let's say you had a heading entitled 2018 and that column was filled with expense amounts. If you sat at the bottom of the column and used the AutoSum function to add up all your expenses, the amount would be out by $2018 because Excel would mistake the year as an expense figure. Excel doesn't know that one of the numbers shouldn't be included in the total.

What should I do?
Always include text in the heading. Entitle the column heading "Year: 2018" instead of just "2018", for example.

- **STOP USING SO MANY CROSS TAB LAYOUTS**

Why not?
First of all, let's make sure you understand what I mean:
Cross tab layouts are where you have one set of headings going down a column (maybe like months of the year, or employee names listed in column A) and another set of headings (expense categories? Years? Whatever) going *across* the spreadsheet.

This is a crosstab layout

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
2	Joe	686.5429	875.1019	985.0738	720.0875	825.3715	412.800
3	Laura	205.4749	898.9763	970.4096	557.6889	464.7065	999.632
4	Ralph	810.0092	154.5871	8.6133	477.6566	711.025	621.9549
5	Heidi	970.4847	470.9286	321.5174	403.9173	135.8305	969.1426
6	Doug	187.1691	468.2903	979.0538	423.6746	176.5866	429.145
	Robert	48	282	712		620	2.86365	777.05

Back to why not…although this layout looks good for reporting purposes it is almost useless when it comes to using the data any other way. Excel is a heck of a good data analyzer – but in order for Excel to be able to do what it does best, you need to help out…but organizing the data efficiently. And that means in row/list format – just like a database.

But I need that cross tab layout to present to my boss/committee/etc! Well…that's what PIVOT TABLES are for. In only seconds, you can have whatever layout – and filter/grouping/analysis you need.

What should I do?
Start small. Start with one (important) spreadsheet and start looking a how you can convert it into a big list. Don't forget – you can build in drop-down lists to help you cut down on repetitive typing (and ensure accuracy!).

And learn Pivot Tables. They rock. And they are w-a-y easier than they look. I can't tell you how many of our students have told me how scary pivot tables look and how that has kept them from going near them. Five minutes into our Pivot Table lesson (in our Excel Level 3 course) they're like "You are kidding me!".

- **STOP USING SO MANY WORKSHEETS**

Why not?
Again, let's make sure you understand what I mean:
I'm talking about having tabs along the bottom of your Excel file: one for January, one for February, etc. Or maybe one for this location, one for that location, etc.

Back to why not: it makes it too difficult to get a look at the "big picture" – too difficult to filter or get totals for all the data.

What should I do?
Same solution as the cross tabs – put everything into ONE sheet/list. As long as the data *belongs* together, of course – don't mix school bus scheduling with garage parts inventory, or crime statistics with vehicle maintenance. I'm not saying you shouldn't ever have more than one worksheet – charts and pivot tables are great items to delegate to other worksheets. As is unrelated data (as mentioned a moment ago).