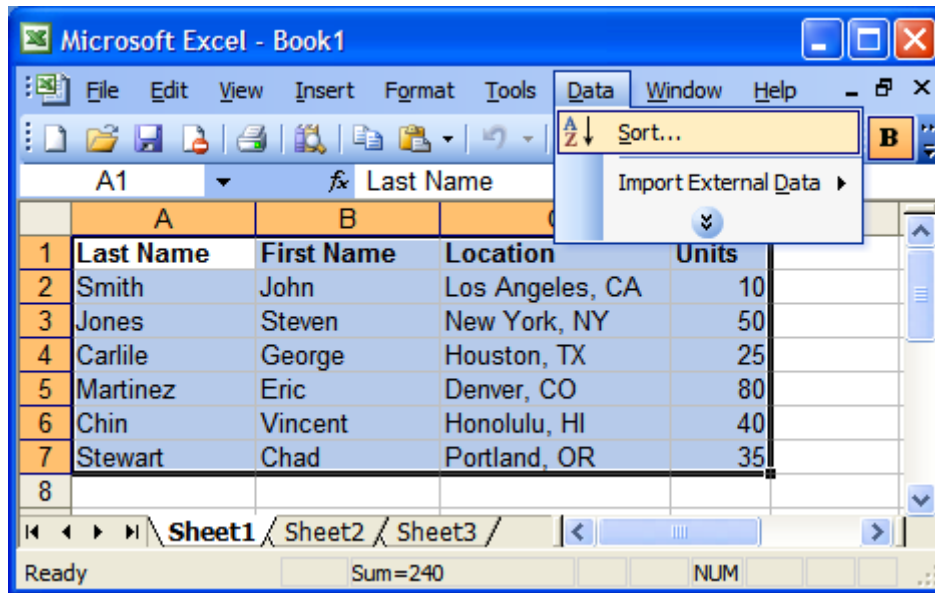


How do I sort data in excel?

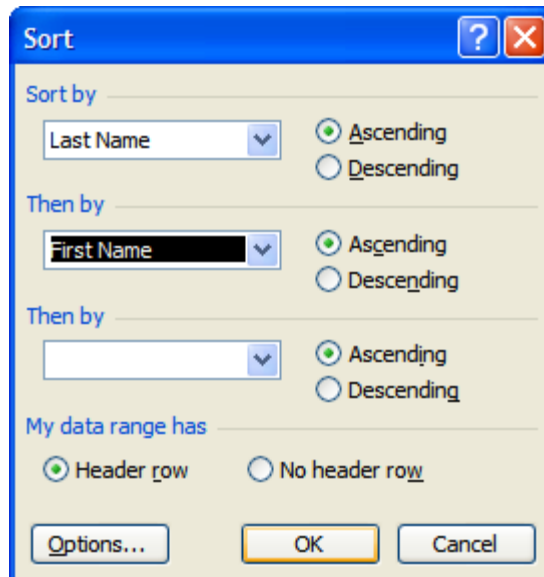
Sorting data is one of the quintessential basics of spreadsheet usage. This simple procedure of re-ordering any arbitrary amount of data with minimal effort really emphasizes the idea that once you have data in a structured format, it becomes amazingly simple to work with. Sorting data in Excel is very simple, and is done with just a few short steps.

Step 1: Select all of the data that you want to sort. You may select a set of rows, a set of columns, or your entire spreadsheet. Only the data that you select will be sorted. Once you've made your selection, click "Data", then click "Sort".

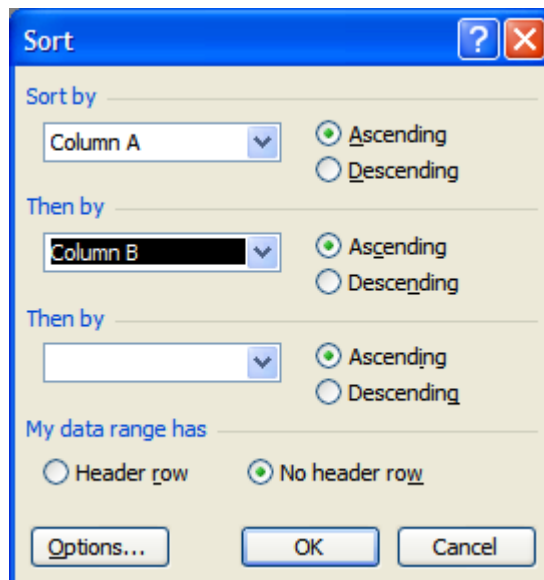


Step 2: What do you want to sort by? The new window that has opened should be asking you to select up to three columns to sort by, and which order to sort each of them in (ascending or descending order). Excel will sort by the first column you select, then sort by the second column, then sort by the third.

If your worksheet has column headers in the first row, check off the box labeled "Header row", and you'll be able to select columns by name.



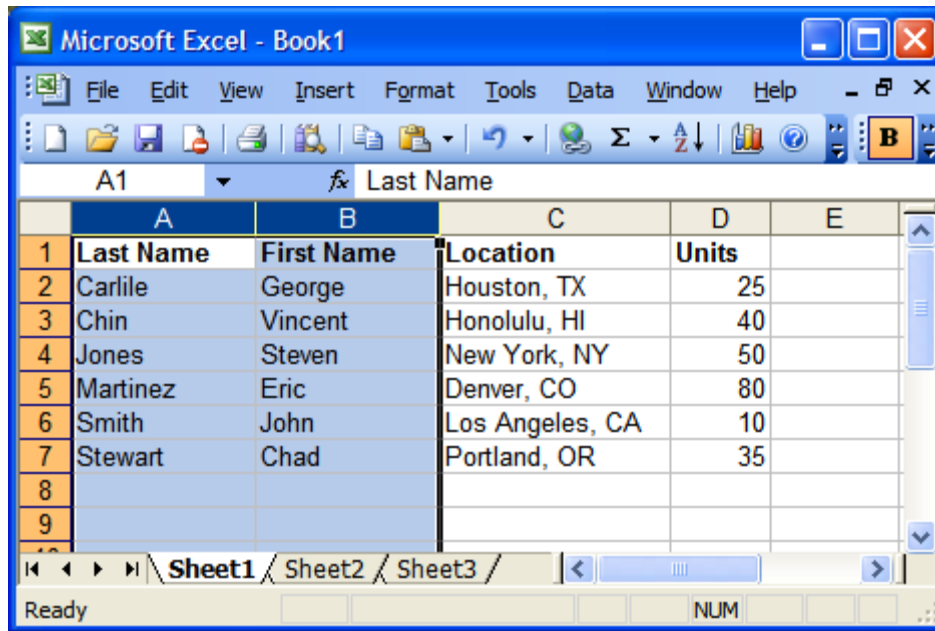
If you do not have column headers in the first row of your worksheet, you will have to select your sort columns by their letter.



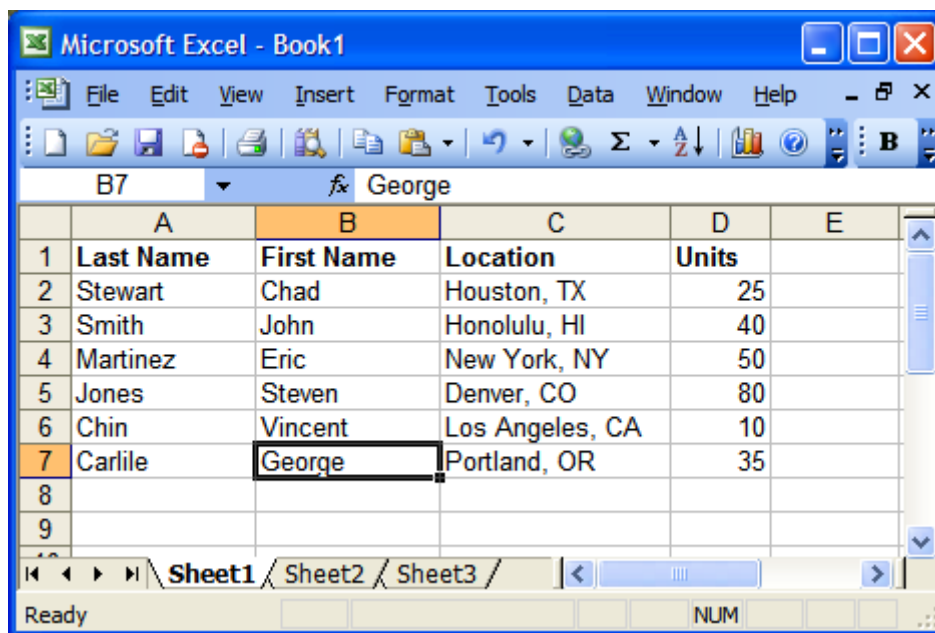
Step 3: Click OK. After you have selected your sort columns, click the "OK" button and the data in your worksheet will be sorted according to the guidelines that you have just defined.

Beware of accidental data corruption

A few paragraphs ago, we made a very important point: "only the data you select will be sorted". Before you click the "OK" button and let Excel sort your data, you need to be sure that you haven't accidentally selected only a portion of your data. If you have, and you allow Excel to sort, you may mis-match data. For example, let's say you make the following selection and then sort your data:



Because you have only selected the "First Name" and "Last Name" columns, sorting this data will separate each name from the "Location" and "Units" columns. The outcome of sorting this selection would look like this:



As you can see, the data in this worksheet has been split right down the middle as a result of sorting the partial selection.

The moral of the story

Excel, and the spreadsheet format in general, is very powerful software when it comes to working with data. Effortlessly sorting and re-sorting a set of data is a little taste of what's possible with spreadsheets. Just make sure you sort the right data, and remember where the undo button is!