

# EXCEL TIPS

## Naming Ranges in Excel

Glen Finau, The University of the South Pacific  
Acklesh Prasad, Queensland University of Technology

When working with functions in Excel you can reference a range of cells by simply selecting the cells. For instance if you wanted to sum all your first month sales located in the range B3:B16, the function would be =SUM(B3:B16).

This is the most common method for referring to ranges in Excel and is fine when there are few formulas referencing small ranges. However, if you are using many formulas which are pulling from large ranges then Excel's NAME function is extremely useful.

Excel's NAME function allows you to name a cell or a range of cells. This makes it easier for you to refer to these cells when writing a formula and also makes your formula much easier to understand. Instead of reading a formula that has a range of obscure cell ranges, naming the ranges can help you better understand the formula.

This will make it easier for you to manage, update and audit your formulas. So instead of SUM(B3:B16), you could name the range B3:B16 as "FirstMonthSales" and thus it would be =SUM(FirstMonthSales). The name would also be an absolute reference and you can easily use the name to derive other formulas such as the Average Sales: =AVERAGE(FirstMonthSales), Maximum Sales: =MAX(FirstMonthSales) or Minimum Sales: =MIN(Sales).

Naming a range is accomplished quite easily in Excel. You simply select the range of cells you wish to name, then click on the Formulas tab and then select Define Name. You then simply enter the name, enter the scope

and any comments. A name's scope is the location in which that name is recognized without qualification. That is, the scope is where that name is unique and there is no other range of cells with the same name. This is important as you may use the same name in several sheets. For instance if you name a range of cells TotalSales in Sheet 1 and the scope is the Workbook, then no other range of cells can be named TotalSales in the same workbook. However, if you set the Scope to Sheet 1, then you can name another ranges of cells as Total Sales on another sheet in the same workbook.

There are also other rules that must be followed when naming cells. These include:

- The name must begin with a letter or underscore
- The name must not contain a space or invalid character e.g. Names such as "Total Sales" will not be accepted. It can be named "TotalSales" or "Total\_Sales"
- The name must not conflict with an Excel built-in name

Once you have created a name that satisfies Excel's criteria, you simply enter in your formula, and then call the name where it is a required parameter in your formula, simply typing the first few letters of the name will make the name appear in a drop down box in the formula window.

Using Excel's name function will take a bit of time to get used to but once you get the hang of it, it will become second nature and significantly save you time and help you better manage Excel formulas.

