Excel Shortcuts to Cut, Copy, and Paste Data

THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO MOVE DATA IN EXCEL

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Cutting, copying, and pasting data are some of the most common Excel tasks. This article will discuss four shortcuts to do each of these functions in Excel – helping you uncover the fastest ways to enter data.

Cutting vs. Copying

In Excel, *cutting* data is defined as moving the data from one location to another, either to a different spot in the same worksheet, a separate worksheet in the same workbook, a different Excel workbook, or even a different application. *Copying* data means taking a copy of the data to another location. In other words, if you *cut* data in cell F4, the data will move from F4 to the new location. If you *copy* data in cell F4, a copy of the data will remain in cell F4 even as you copy it to the new location.

If you cut data, you can only paste it once. If you copy data, you can paste it multiple times in different places. You can cut or copy either one cell at a time or a group of cells at once, as long as the range of cells is next to each other. For example, you can cut or copy cells A5 *through* D10 at once, but you cannot cut or copy cells E6 *and* I9 at the same time. You will save a lot of time by cutting or copying multiple cells at once.

Cutting Data

To cut data, select the cell or cells you want to cut and use the keyboard shortcut "Ctrl+X" (hold down the "Ctrl" key and the "X" key at the same time). If you prefer to use the mouse, or if you need to select a range of cells to cut, click the "Cut" icon (in the shape of scissors) from the "Home" tab on the ribbon, as shown in Figure 1. A third way to cut data is to select the cell or cells to cut and right-click with the mouse. Choose "Cut" from the right-click menu. Finally, you can cut data by selecting the cell or cells to cut and hovering your mouse over any of the edges of the cells to cut. As soon as your cursor changes to a four-way arrow, drag the cells to the area of the workbook you want to move the cells to.

Copying Data

There are similar shortcuts to copy data. The keyboard shortcut is "Ctrl+C." The "Copy" icon is below the "Cut" icon and looks like two pieces of paper, as shown in Figure 2. The same right-click menu to cut data also has a copy option. If you like dragging cells to cut data, hold down the "Ctrl" key while you drag the cells. This will copy instead of cutting the data you drag.
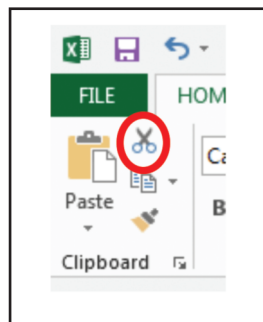
FIGURE 1	FIGURE 2	FIGURE 3

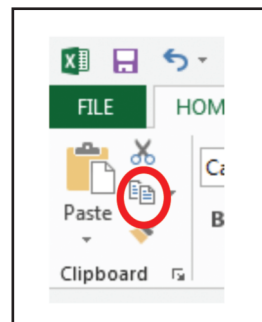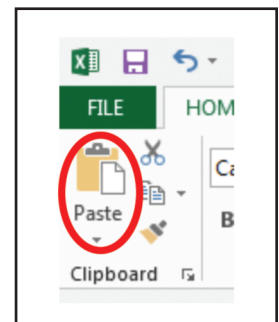### Pasting Data

The final step is to paste the data where you want it to go. Excel places cut or copied data in an area known as the clipboard. The keyboard shortcut to paste data from the clipboard is "Ctrl+V." The "Paste" icon looks like a clipboard with a piece of paper. The icon is larger and to the left of the "Cut" and "Copy" icons, as shown in Figure 3. Again, the right-click menu will paste, but the right-click menu has a variety of optional ways to paste, depending on what you have cut or copied. The paste options relate to a feature called "Paste Special," which is a powerful way to control what and how Excel pastes data. We will discuss the "Paste Special" feature in a future *Billing* article.

The fastest way to paste data is to press "Enter." Excel knows

FIGURE 4
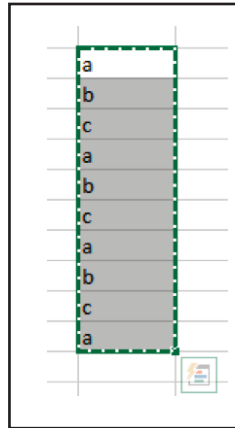
that you have cut or copied data and assumes that when you press "Enter," you want to paste the data. There is a difference between pressing "Enter" and the first three ways to paste data. If you *copied* (not cut) data, Excel assumes you may want to paste the data more than once. If you paste copied data using one of the first three methods ("Ctrl+V," the "Paste" icon, or from the right-click menu), you can use any of those three methods to paste the data again.

Notice that when you cut or copy data, Excel will highlight the copied cells, as shown in Figure 4. If you have copied the data, Excel will leave those cells highlighted after pasting the data with one of the first three methods to show you that the data is available to paste again. When you press "Enter" to paste, Excel empties the clipboard and removes the highlight showing that the data

is no longer available to paste. If you pasted data using "Ctrl+V," the "Paste" icon, or the right-click menu and are finished pasting, press the "Esc" key to remove the highlight and empty the clipboard. You can also tell that the clipboard is empty because the "Paste" icon on the ribbon will be grayed out. If I have a lot of pasting to do, I will copy the data, paste (I usually use "Ctrl+V") until I know I am done pasting, and then press "Enter" for the final paste to empty the clipboard.

The next time you work in a spreadsheet, try some of these shortcuts. Time saved entering and organizing data in Excel can always be better spent analyzing that data instead. ◼

Nate Moore writes custom SQL server code to mine practice management data for analysis in Excel, web pages, and via email. Nate's first book, Better Data, Better Decisions: Using Business Intelligence in the Medical Practice*, was written with Mona Reimers. His free Excel videos are available at mooresolutionsinc.com.*