Freezing Columns

HOW TO ALWAYS KNOW WHICH COLUMN YOU ARE EDITING

By Nate Moore, CPA, MBA, CMPE

Large spreadsheets with lots of data can make managing that data difficult. As you scroll down a page with multiple columns, it can be tricky to remember what column contains what data. The January/February issue of *Billing* is a good time to talk about "freezing." To Excel users, freezing is a way to lock columns and/or row headings so that even when you scroll, the headings stay on the screen to make navigating the spreadsheet easier. This article will discuss two ways to freeze data on a spreadsheet so that you always know which column you are editing.

Freeze Panes

Figure 1 shows the main tool to freeze columns and rows in Excel. From the View tab, choose Freeze Panes. There are three options in the menu that appear: Freeze Panes, Freeze Top Row, and Freeze First Column. Freeze Panes locks all rows to the left of the selected cell and all columns above the selected cell. Test it on one of your spreadsheets; the trick is to select the right cell before choosing Freeze Panes. If you want to freeze the first three rows as well as columns A and B, you want to select cell C4 before choosing Freeze Panes. Notice that after freezing panes, the first option in the Freeze Panes menu on the View tab changes to Unfreeze Panes. Unfreeze Panes unlocks the frozen rows and columns, and lets you navigate around your spreadsheet again normally.

Freeze Top Row simply freezes the first row of the spreadsheet no matter which cell is selected when the Freeze Top Row command is invoked. Similarly, Freeze First Column locks the first column of the spreadsheet regardless of the selected cell, Unfreeze Panes turns off these two options.

Accessing Frozen Cells

Even though rows or columns may be frozen, you can still navigate to, and change cells in, the frozen area of the spreadsheet. Simply scroll up—or left, as applicable—and Excel will let you edit those cells. You can also enter the cell address in the box shown in Figure 2 at the top of your spreadsheet; this trick is a quick way to go to any cell in a spreadsheet, not just frozen cells. Another shortcut that works with or without frozen cells is to press Ctrl+Home, which takes you to cell A1 from anywhere in a spreadsheet.
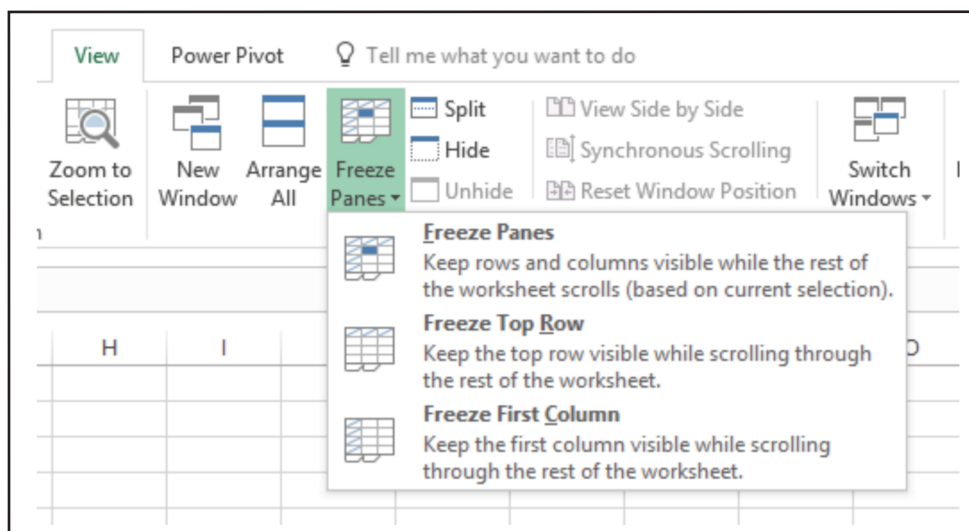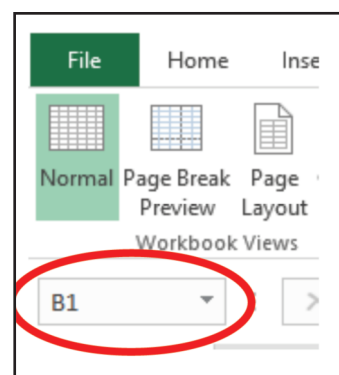
FIGURE 1

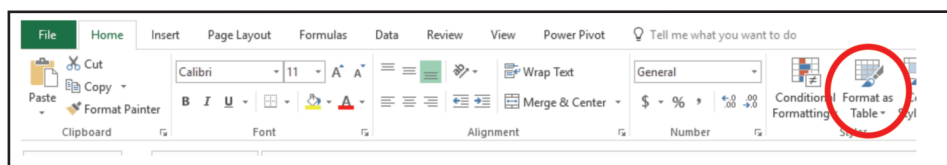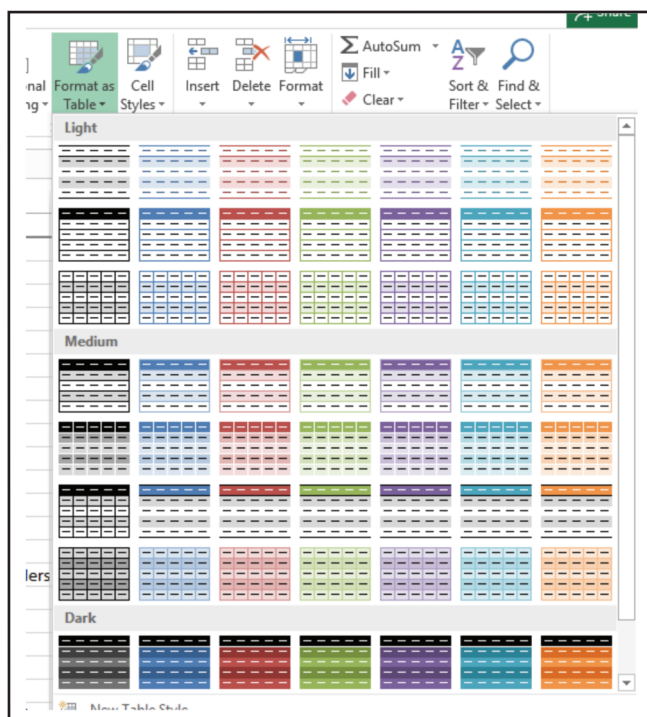

FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

FIGURE 5

Tables

Another way to freeze the top row of data is to format the data as a Table. Figure 3 is a screenshot of data before being formatted as a Table. Figu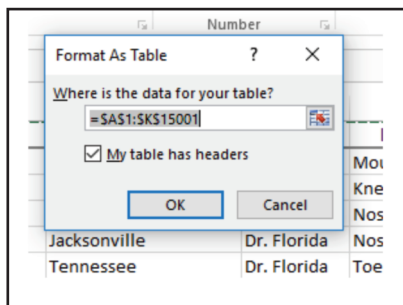re 4 shows the Format as Table button on the Home tab of the Ribbon. Select one of the cells inside the range of data you want to format as a table and click the Format as Table button. Figure 5 shows the first screen that appears after clicking the Format as a Table button. Choose a format for the Table from the options shown. I typically choose one of the styles on the first row of the Medium section.

Figure 6 shows the next screen that appears. The key to getting this screen correctly is to select a cell inside your data before clicking the Format as Table button. If your data is clean without empty rows and columns, Excel generally does a good job of automatically selecting your data range for you. In Figure 6, my data range is A1 to K15001. The dollar signs are Excel's way of indicating that the reference to those cells is absolute. If Excel does not correctly identify your data range, click the red arrow next to the data range to help Excel capture all of your data. Figure 7 shows the data formatted as a Table.

Now that the data is formatted as a Table, notice that not only does the top row of the Table freeze, but look at what happens as I scroll down in my data—compare Figure 7 to Figure 8. Can you see that at the top of the Table, Figure 7

FIGURE 6

shows columns A, B, C, and so on? When I scroll down in a Table, Excel replaces the column letters with the actual names of the columns taken from the first, frozen row. For versions of Excel after Excel 2007, the drop down arrow next to each column when you scroll down is also displayed; this feature can be very helpful. More information about Tables, including a variety of powerful options under those drop down menus, are covered in my *Billing* articles from May/June 2012 through September/October 2012. Tables are an incredibly useful way to deal with detailed data, and Tables are also another way to freeze the top row of data.

Freezing panes, whether from the traditional menu or through Tables, is a great way to stay organized and increase accuracy when working in big spreadsheets. ■

FIGURE 7

Nate Moore, CPA, MBA, FACMPE 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, *written with Mona Reimers, is an MGMA bestseller. His free Excel videos have been viewed over 2 million times and are available at mooresolutionsinc.com. Like PivotTableGuy on Facebook or follow @PivotTableGuy on Twitter to be notified each time an Excel video is released.*

FIGURE 8