



Moore Filling, Works Great!

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If you haven't used the **fill handle** in Excel, you'll be filled with thanks for the tons of time this little trick will save you with some common Excel tasks. If you're still using Excel versions prior to Excel 2007, you're in luck! The fill handle is available in earlier versions of Excel.

What's the Fill Handle?

The fill handle looks like a plus sign (+) and appears at the bottom right hand corner of a cell when you hover over that corner with your mouse. You can hover over a single cell to get a fill handle for that cell. To get a fill handle for a range of

FIGURE 1

| | A | B | C | D |
|---|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | COLLECTIONS | | | |
| 2 | Jan | Feb | Mar | Total |
| 3 | \$ 164,034 | \$ 93,810 | \$175,849 | \$433,693 |
| 4 | \$ 121,063 | \$139,309 | \$216,550 | |
| 5 | \$ 129,220 | \$100,432 | \$133,076 | |
| 6 | \$ 127,686 | \$140,365 | \$172,602 | |
| 7 | \$ 61,552 | \$162,385 | \$238,513 | |
| 8 | \$ 177,315 | \$ 70,971 | \$142,539 | |
| 9 | \$ 219,039 | \$224,134 | \$205,798 | |

cells, first highlight those cells that you want to work with. You'll need to hover over the bottom right hand corner of either the bottom cell in your range of rows or

the far right cell in your range of columns to get a fill handle.

Using the Fill Handle to Copy and Paste

Copying and pasting formulas and numbers is a very common task in Excel. When the cell to be copied from and the cell(s) to be pasted to are adjacent, for me, the fill handle is the fastest way to do it. Simply click on the cell with the formula you want

FIGURE 2

| | A | B | C | D |
|---|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | COLLECTIONS | | | |
| 2 | Jan | Feb | Mar | Total |
| 3 | \$ 164,034 | \$ 93,810 | \$175,849 | \$433,693 |
| 4 | \$ 121,063 | \$139,309 | \$216,550 | \$476,922 |
| 5 | \$ 129,220 | \$100,432 | \$133,076 | \$362,728 |
| 6 | \$ 127,686 | \$140,365 | \$172,602 | \$440,653 |
| 7 | \$ 61,552 | \$162,385 | \$238,513 | \$462,450 |
| 8 | \$ 177,315 | \$ 70,971 | \$142,539 | \$390,825 |
| 9 | \$ 219,039 | \$224,134 | \$205,798 | \$648,971 |

to copy, hover over the bottom right corner, and drag the fill handle over as many cells as you want to paste. Figures 1 and 2 are an example of using a fill handle to

FIGURE 3

| | A | B | C | D |
|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | 1 |
| 5 | | | | 2 |
| 6 | | | | 3 |
| 7 | | | | 4 |
| 8 | | | | 5 |
| 9 | | | | 6 |
| 10 | | | | 7 |
| 11 | | | | 8 |
| 12 | | | | 9 |
| 13 | | | | 10 |

copy formulas. I clicked on cell D3 (Figure 1) and dragged the fill handle down to cell D9 to copy the formula from cell D3 to cells D4 through D9 (Figure 2). You can copy and paste data the same way.

Fill Handle Examples

You can also use the fill handle to quickly fill cells with a sequence based on the pattern of data in adjacent cells. Open an Excel spreadsheet and follow along with this example.

1. Enter 1 in cell D4, 2 in cell D5, and 3 in cell D6
2. Highlight cells D4:D6
3. Hover over the bottom right corner of cell D6 until the fill handle (+) appears
4. Drag the fill handle down to cell D10

Your screen should look like Figure 3.

You can take this example further. Try the same experiment with *Doctor 1*, *Doctor 2*, and *Doctor 3* in cells D4 through D6. If you drag the fill handle down to cell D10, your screen should look like Figure 4.

FIGURE 4

| | A | B | C | D |
|----|---|---|---|-----------|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | Doctor 1 |
| 5 | | | | Doctor 2 |
| 6 | | | | Doctor 3 |
| 7 | | | | Doctor 4 |
| 8 | | | | Doctor 5 |
| 9 | | | | Doctor 6 |
| 10 | | | | Doctor 7 |
| 11 | | | | Doctor 8 |
| 12 | | | | Doctor 9 |
| 13 | | | | Doctor 10 |

In the last two examples, we've given Excel a pattern in cells D4 through D6 to follow when we drag the fill handle. When Excel recognizes a pattern, it follows that sequence in the cells that it fills

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(Moore Filling, Works Great! continued)

FIGURE 5

| | A | B | C | D |
|----|---|---|---|-----|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | Jan |
| 5 | | | | Feb |
| 6 | | | | Mar |
| 7 | | | | Apr |
| 8 | | | | May |
| 9 | | | | Jun |
| 10 | | | | Jul |
| 11 | | | | Aug |
| 12 | | | | Sep |
| 13 | | | | Oct |

with the fill handle. The patterns and sequence aren't just limited to numbers. Try filling cells D4 through D6 with *Jan*, *Feb*, and *Mar*. If you drag the fill handle down to cell D10, your screen should look like Figure 5.

Up, Down, Left, and Right

So far, all of examples have taken formulas, data, or patterns that we wanted to copy and filled the cells below the original data. Filling down is probably the most common direction that I use the fill handle for, but you aren't limited to just filling down. You can drag the fill handle up, down, left, or right and Excel will take the example cell(s) you hovered over to start with and fill any direction that you need to.

Right-Clicking the Fill Handle

The fill handle recognizes days, months, years, linear trends (1, 2, 3, 4), growth trends (1, 2, 4, 8), and other patterns (5, 10, 15, 20). If you'd like more control over what the fill handle does when you drag, right-click when you drag instead of the usual left-click drag. Excel will bring up a menu that allows you to choose whether or not the formatting will be filled along with the data, what pattern Excel will use to fill the data, and more. You'll see similar options from the *Home* tab on the Ribbon. Click *Fill* in the Editing area and then *Series*.

The Fill Handle Double-Click Trick

As long as you only have a few cells to fill, dragging the fill handle to copy or fill data is a very useful trick in Excel. If you have 10,000 cells to fill, you need to know one more shortcut. When you double-click the fill handle, Excel looks at the surrounding data, estimates how far you want to fill the data, and fills the data for you! For example, if you have data in column B from rows 2 through 10,002 and you double-click the fill handle when hovering over a formula in cell C2, Excel will automatically fill cells C3 to C10,002 with the formula in cell C2. Excel sees that the data in the adjacent column (Column B) goes to row 10,002, so double-clicking the fill

handle fills the same distance in column C. Double-clicking instead of dragging the fill handle can save you a ton of time in a big spreadsheet.

Conclusion

By adding the fill handle to your set of Excel tricks, you can save a ton of time copying formulas. You can also save time by using the fill handle to automatically fill in cells to create a sequence of days, months, numbers, and more. For more tips and tricks on using Excel in a medical setting, watch some of the more than 200 free Excel Videos at kelapro.com. ■

Nate Moore, CPA, MBA, CMPE speaks, consults, records, and writes about Microsoft Excel and data mining in medical practices throughout the country. His Excel Videos have been viewed over 25,000 times. Nate's latest project is KelaPro, a software program that automatically downloads critical practice data into Excel. Practice managers use KelaPro to analyze their receivables, collections, billed charges, new patients, reimbursement, and more to better manage their practices' revenue cycles.

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