

Spreadsheet Design Guidelines

By following these guidelines, spreadsheet authors increase readability, maintainability and ease of use, and reduce the potential for error.

1. Models do not span multiple spreadsheets
2. Large data sets that ought to be managed by a database are in fact managed by a database. If the data set must be stored in a spreadsheet, this spreadsheet is separate to the spreadsheet containing the models that use the data set
3. For an English speaking audience, calculations proceed from left to right, top to bottom
4. Spreadsheet-level inputs which affect an entire model are placed in the top left of a sheet, and referred to throughout the model with Named Ranges
5. Placing the “Total” row at the top of large data sheets will save the user a lot of scrolling
6. Columns in a table group similar things. In the case of data, different rows contain different amounts of the same thing. In the case of formulae, different rows contain the same formula performed with different data inputs
7. Rows in a table group attributes shared by a particular entity, indicated by the left-most column
8. References to values in other tables are written logically using VLOOKUP etc rather than as hard references – e.g. “Give me the ‘price’ of ‘IBM’ on date ‘01/02/2003’ rather than “Give me cell AQ123”
9. Data inputs are separate from the formulae that operate on these inputs
10. Formulae are close to the data inputs they operate on
11. References to data areas are written logically using Named Ranges rather than as hard references – e.g. “Sum column 4 of MyData” rather than “Sum BA3:BA748.”