

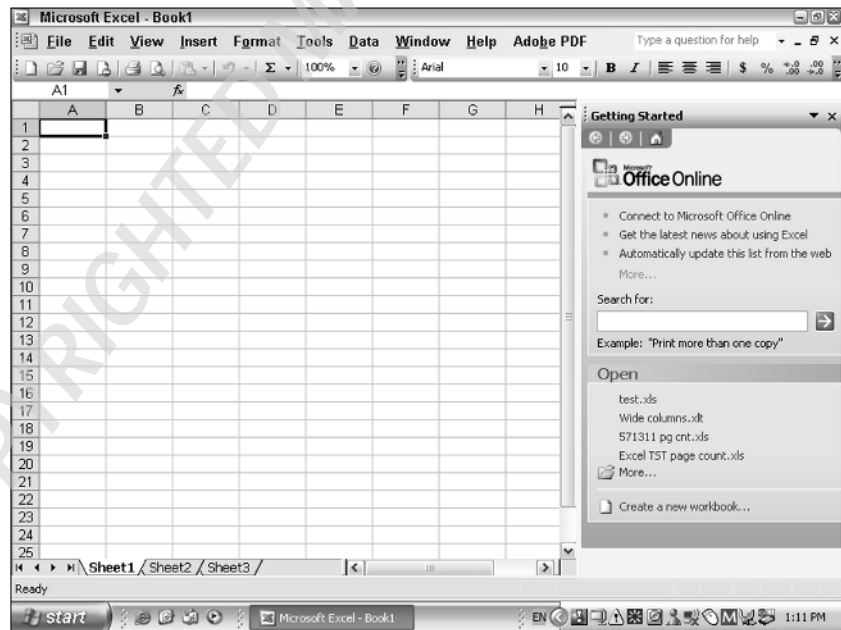
1 Technique

Customizing the Excel Screen Display

Save Time By

- ✓ Switching in and out of Full Screen view
- ✓ Customizing sheet and workbook settings
- ✓ Saving your custom settings in a workbook template

What can I say? The Excel program window (shown in Figure 1-1) is a busy place. Filled with all kinds of buttons and bars, it's a wonder that there's any place left for entering your precious spreadsheet data. Therefore, the first technique that any dedicated Excel user needs to know is how to control the look and feel of the Excel display screen.



• **Figure 1-1:** Is it Grand Central Station? No, just the Excel program screen.

Here you find out how to max out the worksheet display so that you access as many cells and as much of your spreadsheet data as possible, thus saving you from having to waste a lot of your precious time just scrolling up and down and back and forth to view the cells you need to work with. You also find out how to customize the display so that it represents more the type of spreadsheets you create and then how to save these custom display settings in worksheet templates that enable you to immediately utilize all these settings in new workbooks you generate from them.

Standard Display Settings

Controlling the Excel display screen includes not only hiding unwanted toolbars that surround the worksheet but also modifying the sheet's look and feel. Each time you launch Excel, the program opens a new workbook whose sheets use a whole bunch of standard display settings.

These standard settings consist of the following:

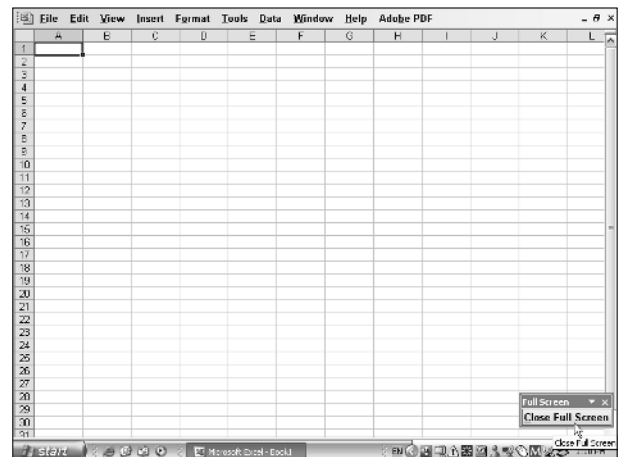
- ✓ Three blank worksheets each identified by their own sheet tabs.
- ✓ 256 columns in each sheet with a standard width of 8.43 characters (64 pixels) and labeled with a column header using letters (A through IV).
- ✓ 65,536 rows in each sheet with a standard row height of 12.75 points (17 pixels) and labeled with a row header (1 through 65536).
- ✓ Gridlines demarcating the edge of each sheet's columns and rows and thereby displaying the outline of each worksheet cell.

Switching to Full Screen

The fastest and simplest way to remove the screen clutter caused by the Excel toolbars and thereby

maximize the number of cells displayed on your screen is by switching to Full Screen view (View⇨Full Screen). As soon as you choose this command, Excel temporarily hides any open toolbars. The program also gets rid of the Formula bar at the top and the sheet tabs, the horizontal scroll bar, and the program's Status bar at the bottom, leaving only the Worksheet menu bar, column and row headers, vertical scroll bar, and Windows taskbar surrounding the blank worksheet cells (see Figure 1-2).

In Full Screen view, Excel displays a floating Full Screen toolbar in the lower-right corner of the screen. To switch back into normal screen view, simply click the toolbar's Close Full Screen button. Excel closes the Full Screen toolbar and restores all the missing toolbars.



• **Figure 1-2: Maximizing the worksheet real estate in Full Screen view.**

Working without the benefit of the Formula bar is fine as long as all you're doing is entering scads of spreadsheet data or checking up on your data entries. If, however, you're doing more than this kind of simple data entry and editing, you'll probably need to have the Formula bar displayed on the screen. To display the Formula bar while Excel is in Full Screen view, follow these steps:

1. Choose **Tool⇒Options**.
2. Select the **View** tab in the **Options** dialog box.
3. Select the **Formula Bar** check box and then click **OK** to close the **Options** dialog box.

After displaying the Formula bar when the program is in Full Screen view, it continues to appear on the screen as you switch in and out of Full Screen view. If you decide that you don't need the Formula bar on the screen in Full Screen view, deselect the Formula Bar check box in Step 3 of the preceding steps.



Auto-hiding the Windows taskbar gives you a little more worksheet real estate. Just right-click the Start button and choose **Properties** to open the **Taskbar and Start Menu Properties** dialog box. Click the **Taskbar** button in this dialog box and then select the **Auto-Hide** the Taskbar check box and click **OK**. After that, Windows keeps the taskbar hidden until you position the mouse pointer somewhere along the bottom of the screen. As soon as you move the mouse pointer out of this area, Windows hides the taskbar again.

Customizing the Worksheet Display

Excel offers all sorts of ways to customize the appearance of the worksheet display. Here's a sampling of what you can do:

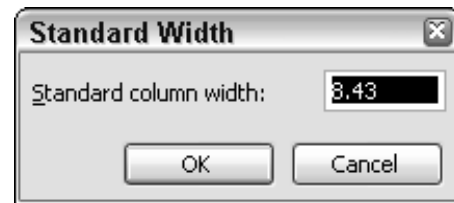
- ✓ Modify the width of some or all the columns and rows in any of the three worksheets.
- ✓ Change the number of sheets in the workbook.
- ✓ Control whether the worksheet gridlines that define the boundaries of each cell are hidden or displayed and determine the color used when they are shown on-screen.

Setting a new standard column width

If you're working on a spreadsheet that almost universally requires a different standard column width (usually one wider than the 8.43 characters or 64 pixels standard), you can easily set a default width for every column in the worksheet:

1. Choose **Format⇒Column⇒Standard Width**.

Excel opens the **Standard Width** dialog box, shown in Figure 1-3.



• **Figure 1-3: Designating a new standard width for the columns in a worksheet.**

2. Enter the new width in characters (between 0 and 255) in the **Standard Column Width** text box.



Setting a column width to 0 is the equivalent of hiding the column in the worksheet by choosing **Format⇒Column⇒Hide**. You can use this technique to hide columns you use in calculating certain worksheet formulas but don't necessarily want printed as part of the final spreadsheet. However, if you enter 0 here as the new standard width, you hide all the columns in the worksheet, making it impossible to add, edit, or print data in any of its cells!

3. Click **OK** to close the **Standard Width** dialog box.

Changing the value in the **Standard Width** dialog box changes the default column width for all the columns

in only the active worksheet. Using this command has no effect on the width of columns that you manually resized or resized with the AutoFit feature.



If you want to change the default column width for all the worksheets in your workbook, select all the sheets (by Ctrl+clicking their sheet tabs or right-clicking the tab of the active sheet and then clicking Select All Sheets on the shortcut menu) before you open the Standard Width dialog box and set a new default value.

Setting a new standard row height

Note that Excel doesn't provide an equivalent command for setting a new default height for all the rows in a worksheet. This is probably because the program automatically adjusts the height of the row to accommodate the data that you enter in its columns. If you're creating a spreadsheet where you would benefit by having a new standard row height (presumably, a taller one), you can set all the rows in the worksheet to a new height by using this work-around:

1. Click a letter in the Column header.

Clicking a column letter in the Column header selects all the rows in that column in the worksheet.

2. Choose Format→Row→Height.

Excel opens the Row Height dialog box, shown in Figure 1-4.



• **Figure 1-4:** Designating a new row height for all the selected rows in a worksheet.

3. Enter the new row height in characters (between 0 and 255) in the Row Height text box.



Setting the row height to 0 is the equivalent of hiding the row in the worksheet by choosing Format→Row→Hide. You can use this technique to hide rows you use in calculating worksheet formulas but don't necessarily want to appear in the printout. However, if you enter 0 here when all the rows of the worksheet are selected, standard width, you hide all the rows in the entire worksheet, making it impossible to add, edit, or print data in any of its cells!

4. Click the OK button to close the Row Height dialog box.

Excel changes the height of all the rows in the worksheet.

To remove the cell selection from all the rows in the column whose heading you clicked, click any single cell with the mouse pointer.

Modifying the number of sheets in a workbook

In the olden days of Excel, when the program first started supporting the use of more than one worksheet in a single spreadsheet file, the program automatically provided each new workbook that you opened in the program with 17 blank worksheets. In the more recent versions of Excel (all those in the 2000 series), the program default has been lowered to a much more modest three sheets in every new workbook. For some users, 17 was far too many sheets for their modest spreadsheet needs, and for others, three sheets are far too few for the types of complex spreadsheets they routinely create.

Although Excel makes it easy to insert new worksheets in a workbook (you simply choose Insert→Worksheet to pop a new one in), if you find yourself having to manually add new sheets to many of the new workbooks you start, you should probably modify the default number of sheets that Excel adds to all new workbooks:

- 1. Choose Tools⇨Options to open the Options dialog box.**
- 2. Select the General tab in the Options dialog box.**
- 3. Enter a new value between 1 and 255 in the Sheets in a New Workbook text box or select this value with the box's spinner buttons; then click OK.**

After changing the value in the Sheets in a New Workbook text box, Excel adds that number of sheets to any new workbook you create.

Customizing the worksheet gridlines

When creating a standard spreadsheet application such as the standard profit and loss statement and balance sheet, the worksheet gridlines that are automatically displayed in all new worksheets provide a much needed background with which to visually align the data. In other, more nonstandard applications such as online forms and presentations with embedded charts, gridlines not only are often confusing to the eye but actually interfere with the presentation of the information the sheet contains.

To give the heave-ho to a worksheet's gridlines in the current worksheet, follow these steps:

- 1. Choose Tools⇨Options to open the Options dialog box.**
- 2. Select the View tab in the Options dialog box.**
- 3. Deselect the Gridlines check box and then click OK.**



Turning off gridlines in a worksheet display has no effect on whether or not the gridlines appear on paper when the sheet is printed. To prevent Excel from adding gridlines to a printed report, the Gridlines check box on the Sheet tab in the Page Setup dialog box (File⇨Page Setup) must not be selected before you send the sheet to the printer. You check this in print preview.

When you display the column and row gridlines on the screen, Excel uses your Windows desktop settings to determine what color to assign the gridlines (usually, they appear in light blue). If you want to assign a new, perhaps bolder, color to the gridlines, follow these steps:

- 1. Choose Tools⇨Options to open the Options dialog box.**
- 2. Select the View tab in the Options dialog box.**
- 3. Select the Gridlines Color drop-down list box, select the new color in the pop-up color palette, and click OK.**



When you select a new color for the gridlines, it doesn't just affect how the gridlines appear on your screen. Excel also uses this color in printing the gridlines in a worksheet when the Gridlines check box is selected on the Sheet tab in the Page Setup dialog box.

Saving Custom Display Settings

While it's all well and good that Excel gives you plenty of choices for customizing its screen display, it sure would be a waste of time if you had to manually modify all the various screen settings each time you started working on a new workbook. Fortunately, you can save your custom display settings as an Excel template, and then any time you need to generate a new spreadsheet that uses those settings, you can do so simply by opening the template.

Creating a template

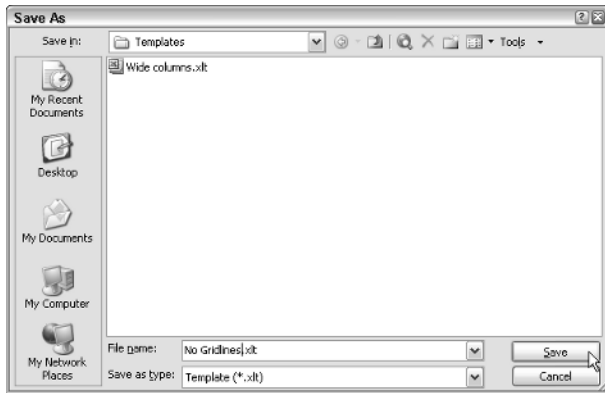
To create an Excel template with your custom display settings, follow these steps:

- 1. Launch Excel and then manually make all the changes to the display settings that you want saved in the new template.**



When making changes to display settings for a template, select the settings that you find yourself manually changing over and over again (such as inserting an additional worksheet, removing the gridlines, and selecting a new standard column width). When entering display values (such as a new default column width or row height), select the value.

2. Choose **File**→**Save** or click the **Save** button on the **Standard** toolbar to open the **Save As** dialog box.
3. From the **Save as Type** drop-down list, choose **Template (*.xlt)**, as shown in Figure 1-5.



• **Figure 1-5:** Selecting **Template (*.xlt)** as the file type for saving a new worksheet template.

4. Highlight the temporary filename (**Book1**, **Book2**, and so on) in the **File Name** combo box (be sure you don't select the **.xlt** filename extension) and then type in a descriptive name for the new template.



When replacing the temporary filename with one of your own, pick a brief name that describes the new settings, such as **15 Wide Col**, **No Gridlines**, or **4-Sht Book**. Be aware that when you generate a workbook from the template you're creating, Excel uses the main

filename in the workbook's temporary filename as in **15 Wide Col1**, **No Gridlines2**, and **4-Sht Book3**.

5. Click **Save** to close the **Save As** dialog box and save your settings in the new template file.

Using a template

To use your template to generate a new workbook with your custom display settings, follow these steps:

1. If the template is currently open, close it by choosing **File**→**Close** on the menu bar or by pressing **Ctrl+W**.

You must close a new template file before you can generate files from it.

2. Choose **File**→**New** to open the **New Workbook** task pane.



To use your new template, don't click the **New** button on the **Standard** toolbar or press the keystroke shortcut **Ctrl+N**. Doing so automatically opens a new workbook using the Excel out-of-the-box settings, giving you no opportunity to generate the new book from any other template. Choose **File**→**New** on the menu bar instead.

3. Select the **On My Computer** link under the **Templates** section of the **New Workbook** task pane.

The **Templates** dialog box opens.

4. Double-click the name of the template you want to use, or click its name and then click **OK**.

Excel opens up a new blank workbook from the template file, using all the custom display settings that you saved as part of it.