

Chapter 1

Harnessing the Power of Excel Charts

In This Chapter

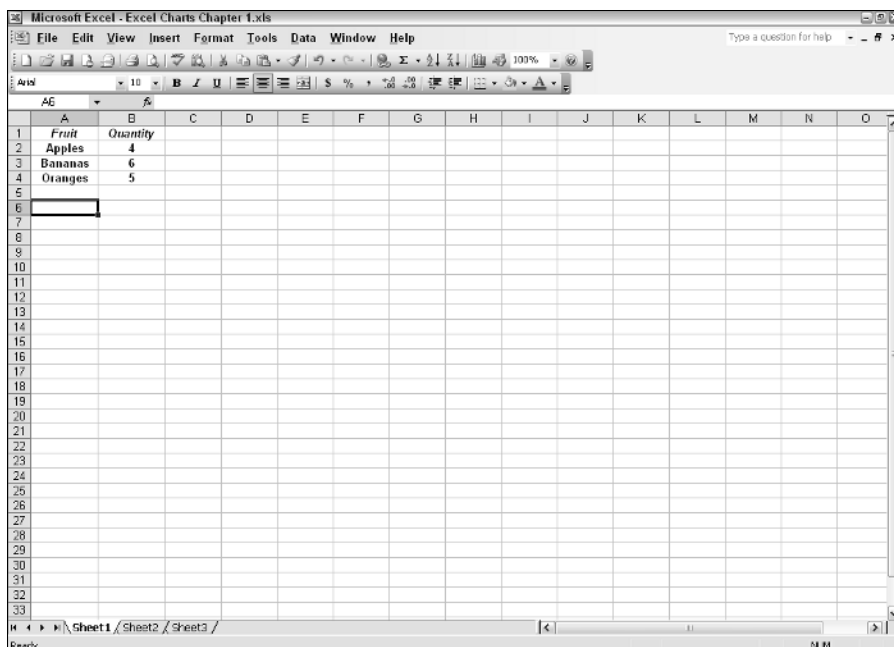
- ▶ Making your first chart
 - ▶ Using the Chart Wizard
 - ▶ Reviewing different chart types
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-

You live in a sea of information. Lucky for you, you can boil down information into bits and pieces that you can make use of. Using charts to convey information is one way to do that.

Excel, as you already know, is fantastic at handling data, crunching numbers, and making snazzy reports. Throw charts into the mix and you really have all bases covered.

Excel can handle all your charting needs, from the simple line to 3-D surface maps and everything in between. This book guides you through all you need to know — from deciding which type of chart to use, to making the chart, to formatting the chart to look as good as you need it to be.

First things first, though! Diving right in is a good way to get started, so here you get your first chart out. Don't worry — I go easy on you for your first chart. You'll just use some basic data, shown in Figure 1-1.



The screenshot shows a Microsoft Excel window titled "Microsoft Excel - Excel Charts Chapter 1.xls". The worksheet contains the following data:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	Fruit	Quantity													
2	Apples	4													
3	Bananas	6													
4	Oranges	5													
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Figure 1-1:
Preparing
basic data
to plot.

Creating Charts with Excel

A chart is a visual representation of data. Before you can make a chart, you need some data on which to base it. The data shown in Figure 1-1 is ideal for a simple chart. It has all the necessary elements of the data:

- ✓ **Categories:** The names of the fruits (Apples, Bananas, Oranges) are the categories, and for each category there is an associated value, which is plotted on the chart.
- ✓ **Values:** The actual numbers associated with each category (each fruit).
- ✓ **Series name:** In this example, the series name is Quantity.



Charts can have more than one series.

Here's how to create the chart:

1. On a worksheet, enter the information, as shown in Figure 1-1.
2. Select the data by clicking the mouse in the first cell and dragging the mouse over the data while keeping the mouse button down.

Figure 1-2 shows how the data should look when it's selected.

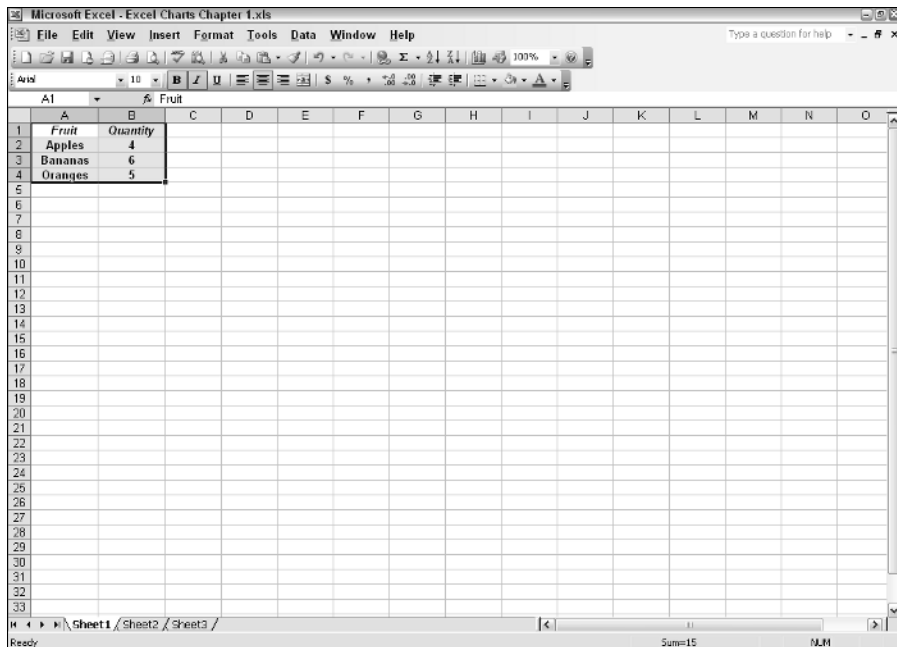


Figure 1-2:
Selected
data.

3. Choose Insert ⇨ Chart.

The Chart Wizard, shown in Figure 1-3, appears.

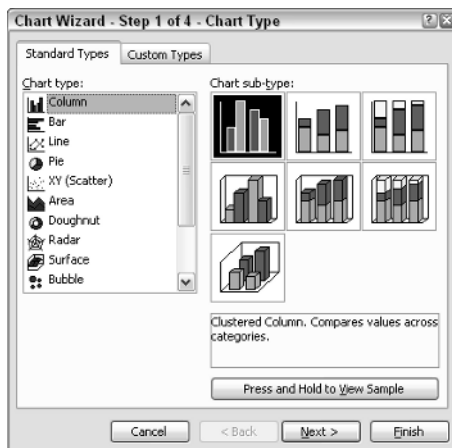


Figure 1-3:
Using
the Chart
Wizard to
make a
chart.

4. Click Finish.

You'll end up with a chart on your worksheet. Figure 1-4 shows how mine came out.

Figure 1-4:
Viewing the
completed
chart.



Congratulations! You made a chart! Here's a review of a couple points about all the excitement that just transpired:

- ✓ Data existed on which to create the chart.
- ✓ The Chart Wizard made the chart for you.
- ✓ The chart is a column chart, one of many types.
- ✓ The chart has categories and values.



After selecting the data, you can bypass the Chart Wizard and just press F11 to create the *default chart* (a certain chart type and formatting that Excel uses when no other selections are made).

In this book, I show you much more about the elements of a chart, how to use the Chart Wizard, and the different chart types (and much more of course!). Chapter 2 explains the parts of a chart. You find out about data series, axes, the legend, chart subtypes, and so forth. Chapter 3 explains the full nuts and bolts of using the Chart Wizard. In the example chart you just finished, I had you just accept all the defaults, thereby skipping most of what the Chart Wizard has to offer. Chapter 3 is where you discover more about using all of the Chart Wizard's magic powers.

Excel offers several chart types, and each type is used for a specific purpose. In Chapters 4 through 7, I show you these in detail with plenty of examples for you to try out.

Looking At the Different Types of Charts

Excel provides a good number of chart types: Column, Bar, Line, Pie, XY (Scatter), Area, Doughnut, Radar, Surface, Bubble, and Stock. Excel has even more chart types, but the others are just variations of these main types. Many of these chart types can be two-dimensional (with a flat appearance); others are three-dimensional. Not all chart types can be formatted as 3-D.

Figure 1-5 shows a few of the chart types. These four charts are of the same data, used in the earlier example.

Changing a chart from one type to another is easy! Here's how to change the chart from the earlier example:

1. **Click once on the chart to select it.**

You'll notice that Chart is now an option on the worksheet menu bar (it replaces the Data menu item as long as a chart is selected).

2. **Choose Chart ⇨ Chart Type.**

The Chart Type dialog box, shown in Figure 1-6, appears.

The Standard Types tab should be on top; if it isn't, click on it to bring it to the top.

3. **In the Chart Type list, select another chart type.**

I suggest selecting Bar, Line, or Pie.

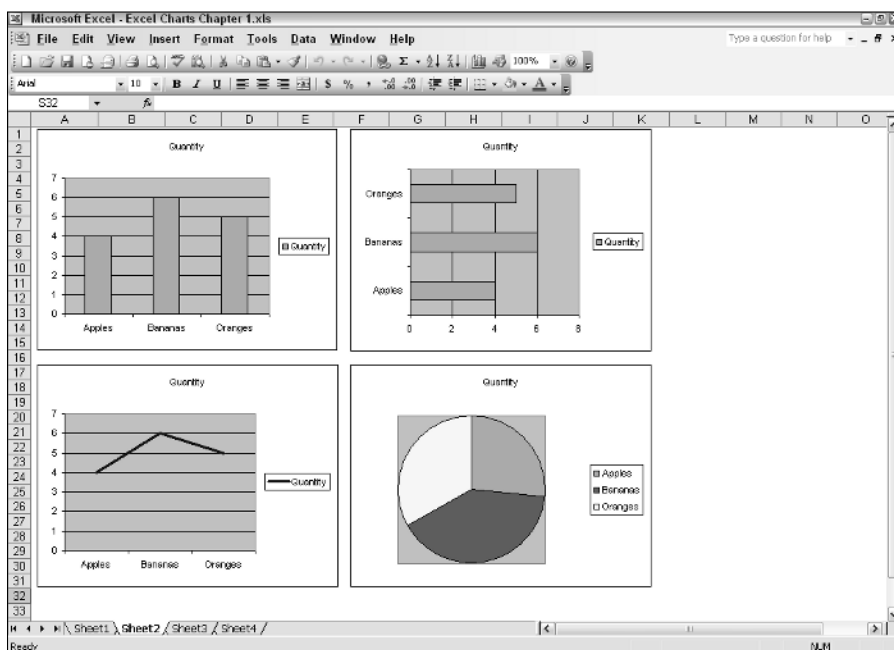
You can select a new chart type and then click on the Press and Hold to View Sample button to see how the chart looks without closing the dialog box.

4. **After you've selected a new chart type, click OK.**

Figure 1-7 shows my chart, which I changed to a Bar type.



Figure 1-5:
Top-left:
Column
chart;
top-right:
Bar chart;
bottom-left:
Line chart;
bottom-
right: Pie
chart.



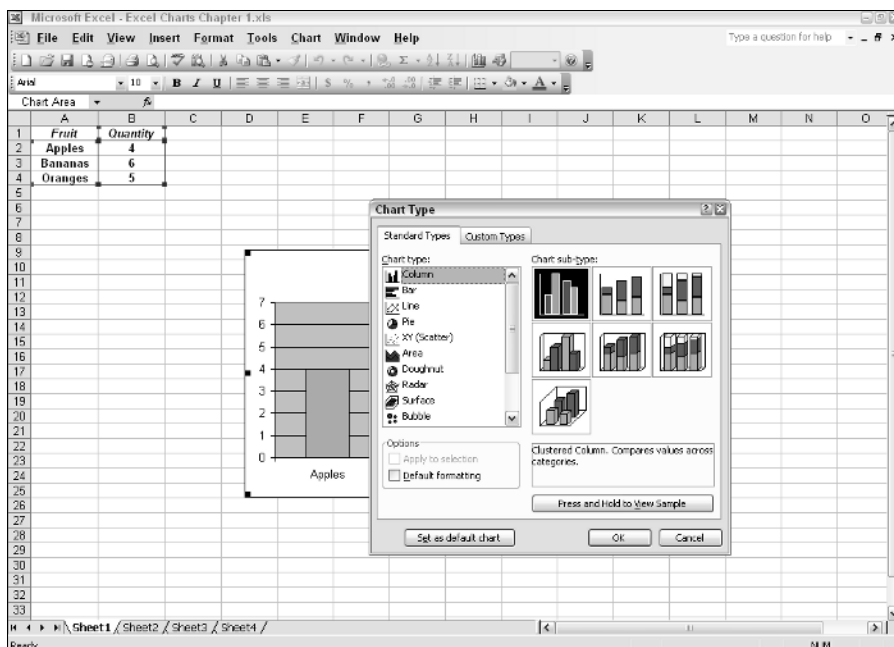


Figure 1-6:
The Chart
Type dialog
box.

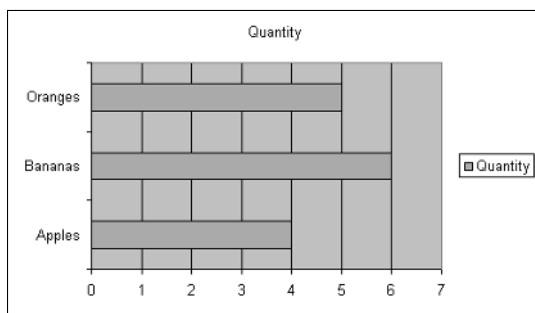


Figure 1-7:
Viewing the
new chart
type.



Some chart types require two or more data series. I tell you more about these in Part II of this book.

You can also select a chart subtype. Here's what to do:

1. Click once on the chart to select it.
2. Choose Chart ⇨ Chart Type.

The Chart Type dialog box appears.

The Standard Types tab should be on top; if it isn't, click on it to bring it to the top.



3. **The chart type is already selected on the left. On the right, select a different chart subtype.**

You may have one or more 3-D chart subtypes to choose from. Go for it!

4. **Click OK.**

The dialog box closes and the chart updates to the new subtype.

Making Your Chart Look Good

You may have noticed that the charts generated by the Chart Wizard, as they are, are not all that good looking. They may be the wrong size, the background may be a dull color, the font size may be too small, and so on.

The good news: You can change all of that, and this book shows you how. For example, Chapter 9 tells you how to format the chart area and the plot area. These two areas compose most of the chart's space, so knowing how to spiff them up is a good thing. Chapter 10 talks about font formatting, among other things. Chapters 11 and 12 tell you how to format the axes, a key thing to know!

Other chapters tell you about formatting the data series, formatting the 3-D views, and using graphics. My point: Getting up to speed on how to format charts will serve you well. How about a quick shot at it now? Here's how to format your charts a bit:

1. **Double-click directly in the middle of your chart, in an area that seems empty — in other words, not on a line, bar, column, and so on.**

The Format Plot Area dialog box, shown in Figure 1-8, appears.

In my charts the *plot area* (the area behind where the data is being plotted) has been coming out dark gray. I'm going to remove the color, and you can, too.

2. **In the Format Plot Area dialog box, in the Area section on the right, select None.**
3. **Click OK to close the dialog box and see the change on the chart.**

You can also click anywhere on the worksheet to deselect the chart.

Figure 1-9 shows how my chart now looks.

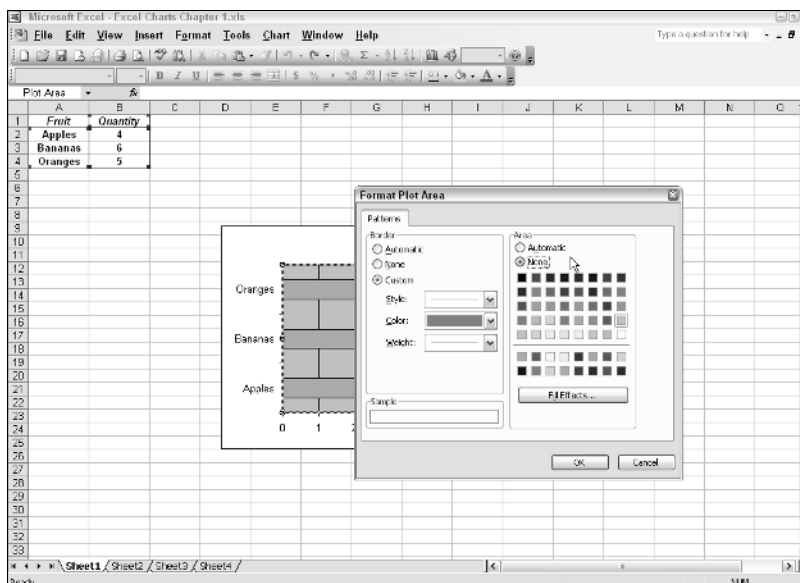


Figure 1-8:
Preparing to
format the
plot area.



Figure 1-9:
The
improved
formatting.

I also see a need to make my chart bigger. You may see the need to do the same. This is easy enough. Here's what you do:

1. Click on the chart once to select it.
2. Move the mouse over one of the handles (the little black boxes) around the border of the chart.
3. Click and hold down the mouse button.
4. With the mouse button down, move the mouse out from the center of the chart.

As you move the mouse, an outline of the chart border is visible. Figure 1-10 shows how it looks.

5. Release the mouse button when the desired size is arrived at.

Figure 1-11 shows how my chart now looks.

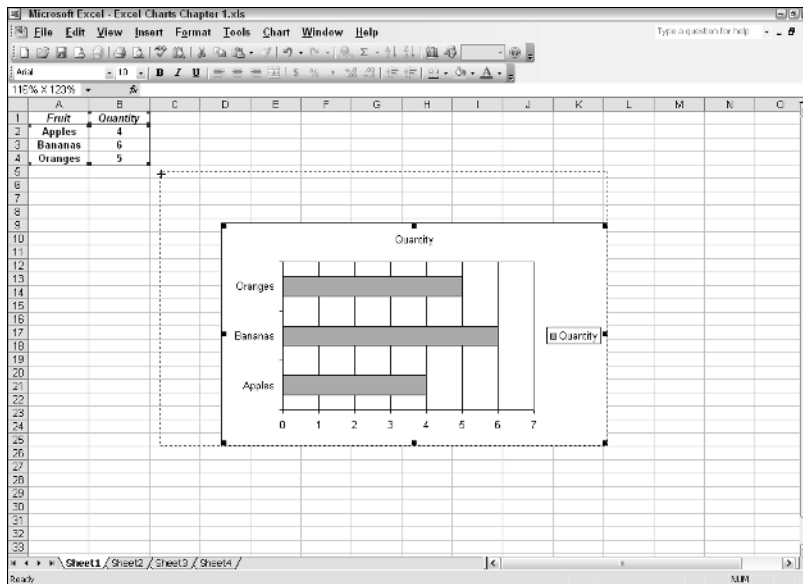


Figure 1-10:
Resizing
the chart.

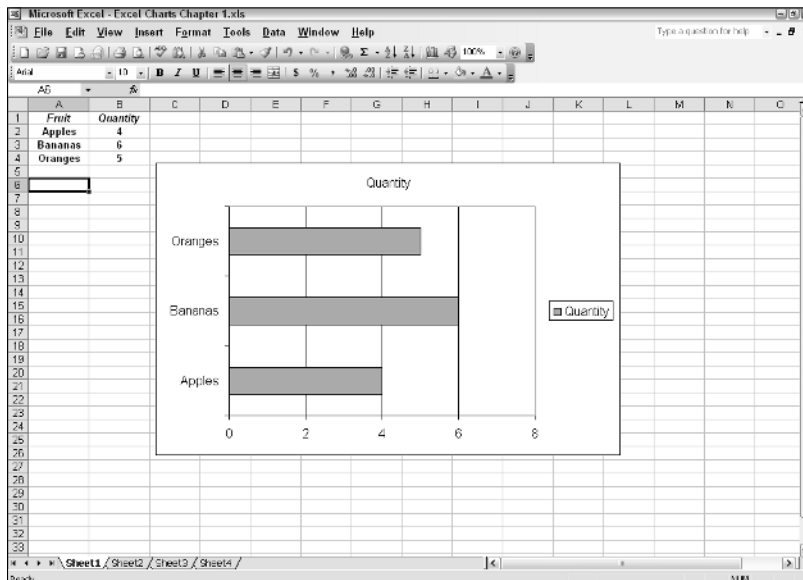


Figure 1-11:
The resized
chart.

Note: This is just the tip of the iceberg. Many formatting attributes are out there for you to find out about and conquer. If you work through some of the other chapters in this book, you'll be a pro in no time!

Taking Your Chart to the Next Level

You can use charts and make them work best for your data in many ways. In this book, I show you interesting items such as:

- ✓ Working with time-scale data
- ✓ Creating combination charts
- ✓ Working with 3-D
- ✓ Creating your own custom chart formats
- ✓ Creating pivot tables and pivot charts
- ✓ Placing your charts on Web pages

As you can see, there are many interesting facets to charts to find out about. I'm excited for you — working with charts is one of the more fun things you can do with Excel. (Yes, I am a chart geek.)