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Today, were diving into conditional formatting rules. Why? Well, to answer a question I received recently, which is basically: I want a cell to be conditionally formatted based on the value in another cell where the criteria is: if cell C7 is up to 10% less than D7 then have a yellow color and if its more than 10% less, then red. How is such a formula written in the conditional formatting tab? This is essentially asking how to conditionally format variances between two values, and Im going to answer that question in this post. In general, conditional formatting is a useful skill for those who like to provide a visual way to distinguish between values based on one or more conditions. The steps provided in this post intend to ensure a deep understanding so that you can easily tailor the rules to your specific needs. Well embark on this journey in a step by step manner using three exercises to understand how to create the rules and how to manage them. Firstly, lets warm up with conditional formatting and discover how to apply multiple conditional formatting rules. This essentially means applying multiple conditions to a single range. Lets say we have a range of cells that we want to conditionally format based on these rules: If the cell value is less than or equal to 200, apply a red format If its between 500 and 700 inclusive, apply an orange format If its greater than or equal to 800, apply a green format To apply these rules in Excel, begin by selecting the entire range you want to format. Then click Home > Conditional Formatting > Manage Rules. This opens the following dialog: Then do the following steps for each rule youd like to create for the range: Click New Rule Select a rule type, such as: Format only cells that contain Define your criteria Click Format to define the format to apply when the condition is met The rule may look something like this: Click OK to close and then you can repeat these steps to add multiple rules to the same range of cells. When complete, the manage rules dialog should show all rules: Click OK and bam: Now that we are warmed-up, lets head to the next exercise. Next, lets dig into how to calculate a variance column in Excel and apply conditional formatting to it. The Variance column uses the formula logic of (Current Prior) / Prior. We want any decreases up to 10% to be highlighted in yellow, while decreases greater than 10% should be marked in red. Our worksheet looks something like this: We begin by selecting the Variance range, and then Conditional Formatting > Manage Rules. Then we create the following two rules: If the cell value is between 0 and -0.1, apply a yellow font color. If the value is less than -0.1, apply a red font color. The dialog will look something like this: Apply and bam: And that works well when you want to show the variance in a column. In practice, this is extremely common. However, there may be times when you want to apply the formatting to the values without needing to compute or display a Variance column. Can we do that? Yes and we will in the next exercise. This exercise shows how to apply the same conditional formatting, but without needing to display a Variance column. Essentially, we will take the basic variance calculation and embed it directly into our conditional formatting rule. Select the range you want to conditionally format. Then Conditional Formatting > Manage Rules. This time, our new rule will use the Use a formula to determine which cells to format option. We write a formula that will return TRUE when we want the corresponding format applied. When we are writing our formula, we need to be sure (a) to use absolute column references by preceding them with a dollar sign like $C11 and (b) the row reference matches the row of the active cell, in this case 11. For example, if the Active Cell in our selection was 11, the current value is column C, the prior value column is D, and we want to apply the specified format to cell values less than -10%, the following formula will work: =(($C11-$D11)/$D11) New Rule -> Use a formula to determine which cells to format -> Format values where this formula is true:=C2/B2>10%format red repeat the steps but do this formula for green:=C2/B210% Thanks, if you have clicked on the * and added our rep. If you're satisfied with the answer, click Thread Tools above your first post, select "Mark your thread as Solved". "Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of what you already have." Tips & Tutorials I Compiled | How to Get Quick & Good Answers 08-24-2023,03:13 PM #1 Hello all - I am working on a project for my company and need assistance. I need a conditional formatting formula that will take the average percentage in a column from say C3:C80, and highlight any numbers that are greater or less than 20%. For example, if the average for a particular month is 64.80%, then it would highlight everything exceeding the numbers that are 20% higher or lower than the 64.80%. Been playing with different formulas all morning and cannot get them to work. Thanks. Dave 08-24-2023,03:25 PM #2 Fast answers need visual help. Please read the yellow banner at the top of this page on how to attach a file and a mocked up solution. Trevor Shuttleworth - Retired Excel/VBA Consultant I dream of a better world where chickens can cross the road without having their motives questioned 'Being unapologetic means never having to say you're sorry' John Cooper Clarke 08-24-2023,03:34 PM #3 Hello - Attached is my mockup Excel Sheet with my fake numbers and an average of all the numbers. Hope this helps. Dave Attached Files Excel Forum Demo.xlsx (9.7 KB, 5 views) Download Last edited by davidingilbert; 08-24-2023 at 04:03 PM. 08-24-2023,04:10 PM #4 Use the CF formula Formula: Please Login or Register to view this content. 08-24-2023,04:32 PM #5 It is working. Thank you. Dave 08-24-2023,04:33 PM #6 You're welcome. If that takes care of your original question, please select Thread Tools from the menu link above and mark this thread as SOLVED. Also, you may not be aware that you can thank those who have helped you by clicking the small star icon located in the lower left corner of the post in which the help was given. By doing so you can add to the reputation(s) of those who helped. 08-24-2023,04:51 PM #7 Hello Again - I am having one issue with the formula you provided me. When I input it into my Excel Sheet, it does not highlight all the items that are 20% higher than the average. Gets most of it, but not all of it. I have attached an updated copy of my Excel Forum Demo so you may see what I am referring to. Thank you. dave Attached Files Excel Forum Demo.xlsx (11.5 KB, 4 views) Download 08-24-2023,06:05 PM #8 I have attached an updated copy of my Excel Forum Demo so you may see what I am referring to. Given that there is no CF in this sample workbook, I do not know to what you refer. Column C works as expected. The average of the values in column D is zero; in fact, a very small number slightly less than zero (-0.002179487179%, give or take). Plus or minus 20% of that very small number is still going to be very close to zero. Please see the updated sample file. Attached Files Excel Forum Demo TMS.xlsx (13.3 KB, 3 views) Download Nothing makes information stand out like a little bit of color. Excel has a tool that automatically helps you out with that its called conditional formatting. If youre ready to take your data organization game to the next level, keep reading to learn how to use conditional formatting in Excel. In this resource, we'll apply conditional formatting to a pivot table. Note that the steps to apply pivot table conditional formatting are the same as applying it to data in other formats, so the instructions below will still work for you for any data in your range or table. Conditional formatting in Excel is a tool that applies formatting to your data depending on the conditional rules you lay out. It can be used in a number of ways, including visualizing your data and checking for specific information. Additionally, its a great way to highlight top values or differences in your data. Download your free Excel practice file! Use this free conditional formatting Excel file to practice along with the tutorial. When to use conditional formatting You can use conditional formatting in Excel to visualize month-over-month marketing statistics, highlight link building opportunities by difficulty, or color-code content calendars. Conditional formatting can also tell you when inventory levels fall below a certain number, your top ten selling products for the month, which tasks in your tracking sheet are incomplete, and so much more. Why use conditional formatting? With conditional formatting, you have a variety of rules at your disposal to customize your data according to your needs. You can generate rules for text, values, and even dates. Text Rules: Is a cell empty or not empty Does Text contain or not contain something Does Text start with or end with something Is Text exactly equal to something Date Rules: If a Date is If a Date is before If a Date is after something else Value Rules: Is a Value greater than or equal to Is a Value less than or equal to Is a Value equal to or not equal to Does a Value fall between or not between other values Now that youve been introduced to the conditions used at the core of conditional formatting, lets talk about how you can apply them to your data. How to use conditional formatting Lets apply conditional formatting to this pivot table of traffic data from Google Analytics, where our eventual goal is to only look at the top 15 countries. Conditional formattings various forms can help us highlight the most significant points in our pivot table, whether its top values or relative data point differences. Here are three versions of conditional formatting and how to apply them. Icon Sets Data Bars Top/Bottom Rules Icon sets Instead of spending hours sifting through an endless array of values, if only there were an easy, visual way to help you break up your data in Excel. Lucky for you, weve got just the thing: icon sets! Icon sets are exactly what youre thinking small images we can use to organize our data and its super easy to use them in Excel with conditional formatting. To start: Highlight the column you want to organize, then go to the Home tab. Click Conditional Formatting, then select Icon Set to choose from various shapes to help label your data. For this example, lets use the arrow icon set to show whether our highlighted data, the Variance column, has increased or decreased. Now, youll see that the data has arrow icons accompanying their values in the cells. Looking at the data though, the arrows are not accurately showing increases and decreases in data as expected. We want our data to show positive percentages as increases and negative percentages as decreases. This brings us to editing rules in conditional formatting, which is key to taming your data. To change the rule: Select your data again, then go back to Conditional Formatting. Select the bottom option, Manage Rules. Youll be shown the rule you just implemented, which was applied with the default values set in Excel. Click on the rule, then select Edit Rule to change the values your rule will follow. You can change how your icons are displayed based on the values set here. Download your free Excel practice file! Use this free conditional formatting Excel file to practice along with the tutorial. Lets go back to our example, which calls for our icons to show Variance increases and decreases. To do this: Set the green arrows Value to 0.01 and Type to Number to show all increases. Then set the yellow arrows Value to 0 and Type to Number so that when the Variance is between 0.01 and 0, this means that there was no change. Red arrows will be shown when the Variance is below 0. Once youre done, click OK, and then you can click Apply before you exit this screen to put the rule in place. Click OK once more to finalize your edits. With that, youll see that your wonderful set of arrows is accurately indicating all of the changes in your Variance data. Data bars Another way to display conditional formatting in your data is with data bars. If you highlight a column and apply data bars, you'll see that they appear in the column. Using this method, its easy to visualize your data relative to other values: the bigger the data bar, the bigger the value. You also have a choice between using a gradient or solid color bar in your visualization. In our table, lets apply data bars to the Aug-20 column. You can easily do this by going to Conditional Formatting, clicking Data Bars, then selecting any of the available bar fills. Top/bottom rules Top/bottom rules are another cool way to use conditional formatting. This allows you to organize your data based on the highest or lowest values in your data set. From there, you can further hone your data set by focusing on the values you care about most. Lets say you want to see the top three countries in the Sep-20 Sessions column displayed in green text with a green fill. Select Top/Bottom Rules, then click Top 10 Items. A window will pop up, where you can then indicate the number of cells that rank in the top. Change the number 10 to 3, then select Green Fill with Dark Green Text. Once you hit OK, your pivot table will now highlight those top three values in the color you chose. You can now see that the United States qualifies as one of the top three values. Since the list of countries is quite large, you can also use the Top Ten rules to make the pivot table smaller and more digestible. For this, navigate to the Row Labels header dropdown. Click Value Filters, then select Top 10 again. Edit the value 10 to however many items you want to display in the pivot table. Heres what the pivot table looks like when its condensed to the top 15 countries. Notice in the image above the Row Labels and Column Labels header drop-downs are missing. For a cleaner look to your pivot table, you can hide your row label and column labels. On the Pivot Table Analyze tab, just click Field Headers to make them disappear. To make them appear again, just click on the same button. So there you have it: a pivot table showing data bars, the top three countries in green, and highlighted variance increases and decreases all thanks to conditional formatting. And the nice thing about conditional formatting is that when your data changes, the rules you set in place adapt right with it too. Level up your Excel skills Conditional formatting does wonders in helping you to visualize your data, and its use cases are endless. To learn more about conditional formatting and other versatile Excel skills you can use to format and analyze your data, make sure to check out GoSkills and HubSpots free Excel for Marketers Crash Course. Level up your Excel skills Become a certified Excel ninja with GoSkills bite-sized courses Start free trial Today, well highlight recurring values within a dataset in order to answer a recent question. I was asked the following Im trying to get it to recognize if a specific letter, like X, is in a column at least three times. What could the formula look like? And Ill answer that question in this post. Lets just dive in! Well walk through a series of three exercises to demonstrate the key elements. First we need to understand how to determine how many times a cell matches a specific value. Well use the COUNTIF function since it has been around forever and is available in just about every Excel version in use today. Specifically, COUNTIF counts the number of cells that match the value we are seeking. It does not count the number of times the matching value is found. When each value is found within a cell only once, this is the same count. But, when the value we are seeking is found multiple times within a single cell, the count will be different. In other words, if we are looking for the letter x, and it is found two times in one cell, COUNTIF will return 1 because it has been found in that cell. COUNTIF is counting cells. I provide other formula variations below in case you need different logic. Lets provide an illustration. Consider the range below. We would like to count the number of times a given letter, say x, is found within the range. We type the letter we are trying to find into a cell, like C6, and then write the following formula in a cell like C8: =COUNTIF(B12:B21,C6) This counts the number of cells within the range B12:B21 where the cell matches cell C6. In our case it returns 4 since x is the cell value for 4 cells: So, to reiterate, this formula counts the number of cells where the cell value matches C6. Depending on what you are working on, you may want a variation. Depending on your data and goal, you may want to make some formula adjustments. The formula above includes in the count the number of cells that match the value exactly. Like, the full cell value is equal to the value we are seeking. But you may want other counts. Count cells with a partial match You may want to do a partial match. This is where we want to count the cell if the value in C6 is found anywhere within the cell. In other words, it doesnt need to be an exact match, it can be a partial match. That way, jax would still match when x is the value to find. If so, simply update the C6 argument from C6 to: "*" & C6 & "*" Placing the asterisk wildcard characters around the cell value tells Excel that the value in C6 can be located anywhere within the cell. We use the concatenation operator & to join the wildcards to the cell value. So the updated partial match formula would be: =COUNTIF(B12:B21, "*" & C6 & "*") Count number of occurrences If youd like to count the number of times that the individual letter is found in all of the text in all of the cells, we can create a helper column next to the range like this: =LEN(B12)-LEN(SUBSTITUTE(B12,$C$6,"")) We can then fill this helper column down: And then we can just sum up the helper column values to determine the number of times that character is found within the range. Now, what if we wanted to do this within a Table, and highlight it with conditional formatting. That leads us to the next exercise. Now that were familiar with the COUNTIF function, lets explore how to use Excel Tables and Conditional Formatting to better visualize our data. If youve yet to make the most out of Tables, dont worry transforming an ordinary list into a Table is a breeze. Simply select any cell on the range and click the Insert > Table command. To display the count of the number of matching cells in our Table, well use our trusty COUNTIF function. Our List column contains the values we would like to count: We can generate the count of the number of cells that match the value in the cell to the left by writing the following formula into the Count column: =COUNTIF([list], [@list]) We hit Enter, and bam: Note: since this formula is written inside the Table, we dont need the Table name prefix in our formula. We can just use the column name. To highlight the values that exist more than a given number of times, we can apply Conditional Formatting. Just select the entire Count column and select Home > Conditional Formatting > Highlight Cell Rules > Greater Than. In the resulting dialog, enter your desired value and formatting: Click OK and bam: But, what if you dont want to have to scroll down the Table to locate the matching the cells. What if instead, you wanted to pull the values that appeared more than twice out of the Table and into a concise list? Well, that brings us to our final exercise. Now, lets say we need a separate list of the values that appear more than 2 times. This is where we can use the FILTER and UNIQUE functions. Combining these functions, we can generate a unique, dynamic list of values that occur more than twice in our initial list. Well break the formula into two steps. First, we need to understand how the FILTER function works. It returns a subset of a range. The range will be our list values, and the subset of it will be those with a count greater than 2 (or whatever number you are after). We write the following formula: =FILTER(Table1[List],Table1[Count]>2) And bam: Note: since this formula is written outside of the Table, we need to include the Table name prefix. That formuls returns a list of the values found more than 2x. But, the result contains duplicates. We can remove the duplicates with the UNIQUE function. We simply wrap it around our existing formula like this: =UNIQUE(FILTER(Table1[List],Table1[Count]>2)) Hit Enter, and bam: And voil! With these handy techniques, we can identify and highlight values that pop up multiple times in our data. I hope this post is helpful, but if you have any follow up questions, suggestion, or alternatives, please share in the comments section below. Thanks! Download the sample file. CFItemsXTimes.xlsxDownload Q: How does COUNTIF function work in Excel? A: The COUNTIF function in Excel is used to count cells that meet a certain criterion. Q: What are Excel Tables? A: Excel Tables are a structured range of cells that allows for easier data management. Q: How do I apply Conditional Formatting in an Excel table? A: Select the cells you want to format, go to Home > Conditional Formatting > Highlight Cell Rules > and select your desired option. Q: How does the FILTER function work in Excel? A: The FILTER function is used to filter a range of data based on certain criteria. Q: What does the UNIQUE function do in Excel? A: The UNIQUE function gives a list of unique values in a range or array, eliminating any duplicates. In another handy tip, AccountingWEB.coms David H Ringstrom explains how to use conditional formatting as an aid for financial and performance analysis.Identifying variances that exceed particular limits are the bread and butter of accounting. But approaching this task by running your eye down columns of numbers can be mind-numbing and prone to oversights.Excel's conditional formatting capability, can make such variances leap out at you from the screen. This article will show how to use this technique to identify budget variances both by dollar value ($2,000+/-) and pecentange.Conditional formatting does have some quirks that can frustrate novices. The easiest way to apply the formatting is often to specify the conditions you want to apply to a single cell and then use Excel's Paste Special Formatting feature to replicate the formatting across the cells you want to analyse. Note that formula-based conditional formatting, as shown below, often won't return the desired results when you attempt to apply it to multiple rows or columns at once. Below is a typical actual-versus-budget comparison. We are going to apply yellow highlighting to any variances of more than $2,000 or 10%. In example shown, rows will only be highlighted when both tests are met. The step-by-step sequence is illustrated using Excel 2007 and will work for later versions, but there will be a brief summary of how to achieve similar results in Excel 2003.1. Excel 2007 and later:Click cell D2, choose Conditional Formatting on the Home tab, and then click New Rule, as shown in Figure 1.Excel 2003 and earlier:Click on cell D2, choose Format, and then Conditional Formatting.2. Excel 2007 and later:Choose Use a Formula to Determine Which Cells to Format, as shown in Figure 2.Excel 2003 and earlier:Change Cell Value Is to Formula Value Is.3. All Excel versions:Enter this formula:=AND(ABS($D2)>2000,ABS($E2)>0.1)4. All Excel Versions:Click the Format button, choose Fill tab, click the desired colour, such as yellow shown in Figure 3, and then click OK twice.5. All Excel versions:Select cell D2, click the Format Painter as shown below, and apply the formatting to cells D2 through E10. The Format Painter appears on the Standard toolbar in Excel 2003.6. All Excel versions:Reapply the percentage number formats in cells E2 through E10, as shown below. Excel cannot replicate conditional formatting by itself without overwriting the existing number formats. Its much easier to get Conditional Formatting right by applying it to a single cell first, and then copying any number formats as required.If you're using Excel 2007 or later, you can now right-click on one of the yellow cells, choose Filter, and then Filter by Selected Cells Color, as shown below. You can also sort by colour as well in Excel 2007 and later.This illustration shows the filtered list. To remove the filter, click the Filter icon on the Data tab in Excel's menu known as the Ribbon.If you are keen to apply this technique in similar situations, here are some pointers about the formula applied in this example:The ABS function returns the absolute value of a number - in other words ($17,396) converts to $17,396.The AND function allows you to test for up to 255 conditions at once. In this case, I'm testing for the absolute value of the variance in column D being greater than $2,000, and the absolute value of the variance percentage in column E being greater than 10%. If both tests are true, then conditional formatting will be applied.The dollar signs before the column letters make the cell references absolute and are crucial when using conditional formatting in this way. Because the format is effectively being copied and pasted to a second column, if the absolute references (eg $D) are left out, Excel will adjust the references and the conditional formula won't return the correct result.Other ExcelZone management reporting tutorials "Either you work Excel, or it works you!" saysDavid Ringstrom CPA, the head of Atlanta-based software and database consultancy Accounting Advisors. He presentsExcel training webcastsfor CPE Link andcontributes articles on Excel to AccountingWEB and Microsoft Professional Accountant's Network newsletter. Hecan be reached by email at david[AT]acctadv.com. You can findfurther ExcelZone tutorials from David H Ringstrom here. In todays Excel University blog post, were going to explore the incredible combination of the Conditional Formatting and Data Validation features in Excel. I was recently asked the following question: How do I highlight matching customers on one worksheet based on the customer selected in a data validation drop-down list on another? And Ill answer this question in this post. With Excel, highlighting specific data based on choices made elsewhere isnt as tricky as it sounds. Lets break this down into a step-by-step walkthrough using three exercises that highlight the key ingredients: data validation, defined names, and conditional formatting. Well start by setting up a data validation drop-down list so we can select a customer. Lets say your list of customers is in a range, like this: You can create a drop-down list in a cell to enable the user to pick one from the list. To create the drop-down, select the desired cell and then: Data > Data Validation Select Allow List Select the range of of choices in the Source field The resulting dialog should look a bit like this: Hit OK, and now you have a drop-down in the cell: With the Data Validation drop-down complete, we can move to the next exercise. Bonus If you dont have a unique list of customers as shown above, you can have Excel create it for you based on transactions in the workbook. One option, which would be good if the customer list is relatively static, is to copy/paste the customer name column from the data transactions into a single column and then use the Data > Remove Duplicates command to remove duplicates. You can also sort them by using Data > Sort. Another option, which would be good if the transactions are stored in a Table and you want Excel to update the list each time the Table data changes, is to use the UNIQUE function on the Tables Customer column, like this: =UNIQUE(TableName[ColumnName]) To use these results in the drop-down, we use data validation to create a list with a source of =$A$1#. Note the spill operator # follows the absolute cell reference which points to the cell that contains the formula. You can also sort the list returned by the UNIQUE function by wrapping a SORT function around it, like SORT(UNIQUE()). Note: the UNIQUE and SORT functions are not available in all Excel versions. To easily reference the customer selected, were going to assign a name to the cell that contains the drop-down. Heres how: Select the cell Navigate to the Name Box (it is just to the left of the formula bar) Type in the desired name, like Customer, and avoid spaces and funky characters Hit Enter Now that our cell is named Customer, we can refer to the cell via this name within our formulas. With the drop-down created, and the cell named Customer, it is time to head to the next exercise. Now, moving on to the main step setting up conditional formatting based on the selected customer. Once a user selects a customer from the drop-down, we want transactions in another worksheet to be highlighted, like this: To apply such conditional formatting to the data transactions: Select the entire transactions range Home > Conditional Formatting > New Rule In the resulting dialog, select Use a formula to determine which cells to format The formula will compare each row within the selected range to the customer selected in the drop-down. This will use a format like this: =$A1=Customer. Where $A1 is replaced with an absolute column that refers to the matching customer column, and a relative row reference that points to the row of the active cell. Customer is the defined name that points to the drop-down cell. Note that you create an absolute column reference to the customer column by preceding it with a dollar sign, like this: $A1. Finally, set the formatting you want applied when the condition is met, and click OK. The conditional formatting rule will look a bit like this: Voila! Weve linked our data validation with conditional formatting. By changing the customer selection in the drop-down list, Excel automatically highlights matching customers on the other sheet. To summarize, Excel provides the convenience to combine conditional formatting and data validation, granting a visual way of tracking data across worksheets based on the selection made. If you have any alternatives, enhancements, or questions, please post in the comment section below thanks! Heres a downloadable sample file that showcases this powerful technique: Q: Can I use conditional formatting with data validation in other scenarios? Absolutely! While this post uses the customer scenario as an example, you can apply the same principles in myriad ways in Excel. Q: Can I type my choices for Data Validation? Indeed, in addition to pointing the choices to a worksheet range, you can also type a list of choices just separate the choices with commas. Q: Can I change the formatting later? Surely! You can change the conditional formatting rule and related formatting by going to Home > Conditional Formatting > Manage Rules. Then you can Edit the rule as desired. Q: Can I import and use this on Google Sheets? While the steps may differ, Google Sheets also supports data validation, named ranges, and conditional formatting. Your recent budgets had significantly high variances--higher than 10%. Your management team will want to know why and they'll be asking questions such as: How much did we budget Production Volume Costs for in December?What was the difference between what we budgeted and the actuals?17%--why is it so high? What happened in December?You're the strategic advisor. To answer their questions and to provide possible causes, you need to know how to create a variance analysis report in Excel. Your report should be quick to create, easy to read and visualizes the data to tell a story, providing insights to your management team to inform their analysis and decision making.In this blog, we'll cover:Understanding a Variance report4 best practices for writing a variance report in Excel3 common problems in variance analysis and reportingWhat is a Variance Report?A variance report compares planned financial outcomes with the actual financial outcome that occurred - it's the difference between what was budgeted and planned vs what actually happened.How To Write A Variance Report: 4 Best Practices For Visualizing Variance Data in Excel1. Vertically Align Variance Amounts With Budgets and ActualsYour management needs to see variance amounts with their respective budgets and actuals--alongside other variance amounts and those respective budgets and actuals. Only when these variances are analyzed comparatively, can they gain insights to inform their decision making.Some examples of insights they may glean include:Which expenses have the highest cost increasesWhich product lines have the lowest sales increasesWhich territories have the highest employee tenure decreasesTo vertically align variance amounts with budgets and actuals:With your two charts (one for variance amounts, the other for budgets and actuals) completed, hold the alt (shift on Mac) key to align your variance amount chart underneath your budgets and actuals chart.Delete the title and x axis labels from your variance amount chart.Your two charts are now one--one chart that tells one story, and one story that provides multiple insights for your management.Watch the videoto learn from Excel nerd Chandoo how to vertically align variance amounts with their respective budgets and actuals to gain decision-making insights. To watch the full Advanced Excel Charts for Finance Professionals workshop on demand, become a Plan To Grow member and join the community. Don't miss out on mastering data storytelling.2. Apply Conditional FormattingNow that you've aligned your two charts together to tell one story, apply conditional formatting so that your management can quickly view which variances in your chart are adverse and which are favorable.To apply conditional formatting:Select your variance amount chart to open the Format Data Series menu.Check off the Invert If Negative box (located under the Fill heading).You now have the option to select your two colors--one for negative values--to fill the bars in your chart so your management won't lose time to guessing which are adverse and which are favorable.Notice how you can apply conditional formatting to quickly distinguish adverse variances from favorable variances. Bonus Time-Saving Tip: Watch how you can use this "secret" Excel menu to replicate the style of formatting from one chart to another. 3. Insert CommentsAfter applying conditional formatting, answer your management's questions about what's caused these variances by inserting comments. They'll have questions--you know they're coming--so be ready with answers in your report.Some questions they may ask include:What's causing our insurance costs to rise much quicker than projected?What's causing our electronics line to sell significantly fewer than planned?What's causing our employees in Australia to resign so much faster than predicted?To provide possible answers, add comments by right-clicking the cell and then select 'Insert Comment.'Your comments should address:What you think has caused the variance.Whether you predict it's a trend or an anomaly.Whether you believe it's positively or negatively impacted your company.While some organizations analyze only adverse variances, it's important to evaluate favorable variances as well. That's because not all adverse variances negatively impact a business and not all favorable variances have a positive impact. While you may already know this, don't assume your management does.Example: If your Total Production Volume Costs for December saw an adverse variance--17% higher than planned--perhaps your sales were higher than forecasted. Simply, it cost your company more to manufacture that month because your customers were buying more. Conversely, if your Total Production Volume Costs saw a favorable variance--13% lower than planned--perhaps your sales were lower than forecasted.Insert your comments to get ahead of your management's incoming questions. 4. Track Forecasts With Thermometer ChartsAfter addressing your management's possible questions, they'll want to know:Your company's performance up-to-date performanceWhether or not your company's on pace to meet year-end goalsExample: If an expense item saw a favorable variance--22% lower than planned--does that mean your company found efficiencies to save on costs, or is a project behind schedule? The answer is in your forecasts.To illustrate progress and monitor performance, create a thermometer chart out of your budgets vs actuals chart to overlap your budget and actual numbers. To do this in Excel:Right-click on your budgets and actuals chart.Open the Format Data Series menu.Drag the Series Overlap slider to 100% (Note: Ensure that your chart has multiple series within one category. Your bars won't overlap correctly if your chart is plotting multiple categories within one series. To verify this, right-click on your chart and select Select Data. Select Switch Row/Column to toggle and ensure that your Budgets and Actuals are correctly listed as Legend entries.)Select the Budget portion of the overlapped bar.Select the Format menu tab at the top.Select 'Shape Fill' and then select 'No Fill' to remove the color.Select the Format menu tab at the top.Select 'Shape Outline' and then select the color that matches the color of the Actual bar.Thermometer charts effectively and quickly visualize performance and progress to track your forecasts. Now your management can see--instantly--the company's up-to-date performance and whether your company is on track to meet year-end goals or not.Notice how you can create a thermometer chart to track forecasts and quickly illustrate progress.You've learned four best practices for creating a variance analysis report in Excel, so now it's time to find out which common problems may occur when analyzing and reporting variances.3 Common Problems in Variance Analysis and Reporting1. Time DelayIf last month's books still haven't closed, you can't create a report with only fresh numbers. You'll send an outdated report to your management, from which they'll analyze and then make decisions--but it's already too late. Your company needs to close last month's books faster so you can create a timely report that allows your leadership to make timely decisions.2. Disparate Data SourcesWithout data integration, you can't identify causes of high variances through a big-picture lens. Sure, your management may analyze your report, but neither you nor your leadership will feel confident that data isn't missing. You'll need to integrate your data sources--such as your ERPs, GLs and HRISs--before you can create a complete variance analysis report to get the full picture.3. Historical Budgeting LogicIf you don't know how previous budgets were set, you can't deliver a report with any value to your management. Your variance analysis report derives its logic from the budget, so if each budget evolved from previous versions, you need to know the historical budgeting logic and your company needs to be able to retain budget calculations. Looking at and understanding the progression of budgets and variances will help you create a historically informed report which your management can trust.Variance Analysis VisualizationEvery variance analysis report should provoke questions. If your leadership doesn't ask questions about your report, that's a sign that it's not well visualized. As a strategic advisor, how you illustrate your variance data and create your report--in a clear and easy-to-read presentation--should provide value to your organization, by spotlighting areas of improvement and subsequent actions to take.Variance Analysis SoftwareWhen you're inevitably asked, "What happened in December?" by using vertical alignment, conditional formatting, comments and thermometer charts in Excel, you'll be able to answer your management team's questions and provide them with the decision-making insights they need.With Vena's Excel-based Variance Analysis software, you can automate your variance reporting. By consolidating your spreadsheet data and automating the addition of your actuals at the end of every period, your company can eliminate user errors, retain your calculations and distribute your variance analysis reports faster. 05-09-2017,06:54 AM #1 I have a set of forecasted and actual dates for different projects. I want to be able to apply conditional formatting to the actual dates that fall before the forecasted date (in green) and after the forecasted date (in red) See the attached file This is an example data set Capture1.PNG So it should look like this with the formatting Capture2.PNG Of course I have about pairs of forecasted and actual dates and about 80 on-going projects. Ive created a column with the variance values and have tried to create rules using the variances as reference for the formatting. Where $BB$5:BB$74 is the column with the variance between the pair of forecasted and actual dates. Capture3.PNG And where$H$5:$H$74 is the column of the Actual date, the column that I want the formatting on Capture4.PNG Attached Files Dates Formatting.xlsx (137.1 KB, 11 views) Download 05-09-2017,07:16 AM #2 Welcome to the forum. To format your table of dates, you don't need the variance columns. Using your example file, do the following:1. Select the range D5:AN74 (from the 'Actual Date 1' of 'Project 1' to 'Actual Date 19' of 'Project 70');2. Click 'Conditional Formatting', 'New Rule', 'Use a formula to determine which cells to format';3. Enter the formula below and choose red text as the format: Formula: Please Login or Register to view this content. 4. Repeat with the formula below with green text as the format: Formula: Please Login or Register to view this content. Note that neither of these rules will format the text if the date is equal to the forecasted date. Change the > to >= for 'on or after the forecasted date' or the < to