

Excel is the Skill You Need or Need to Improve



It's Time to Improve Your Excel Skills

Excel (or any spreadsheet program, try [OpenOffice](#) if you don't have Excel) should be the go-to tool for any medical practice manager who is tasked with data analysis.

Examples of some of the data you should be analyzing in your practice:

- What are my net collection percentages by payer?
- Am I receiving reimbursement at cost plus for any vaccines and injectables I am supplying to patients?
- Do I know the potential value of a contract offered by a payer or an Independent Physician Association?
- What is the cost of adding a new physician, NP, PA or service line to my practice?

Your practice management system may already crunch numbers for you, but:

1. Is it exactly the information you need?
2. Is it in the format in which you need it?
3. Is all the data I need to analyze found inside the practice management system?

What if you don't trust the information coming from your practice management system? Many managers don't. One of the first rules to data analysis is "Know What You Are Looking At". Are you confident that the data you received is the data you asked for? You may need a conversation with your practice management system support team to be sure you understand where

the system is pulling data from and if it is the date you want.

A clear understanding of how your practice management system filters and reports your data is critical to producing INFORMATION. Data only has the potential to become information when it is accurate and actionable.

How to learn Excel or improve your Excel skills:

If you know only enough Excel to get by, Nate Moore's series on Excel is a great place to start. Because he is in the healthcare field, his examples make sense. His videos (new ones regularly) are free [here](#).

I first wrote about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) back in 2013 [here](#) and the list of offerings just keeps growing. Coursera offers buckets of **free** courses, including courses on Excel like these:

- Microsoft: [Microsoft office Fundamentals: Outlook, Word and Excel](#)
- PricewaterhouseCoopers Accounting Firm: [Problem Solving With Excel](#)
- Rice University: [Introduction to Data Analysis Using Excel](#)

For those of you that have the basics of Excel under your belt, proceed to learning about **Pivot Tables**. They will become your new best friend.

Big list of all kinds of free courses [here](#).

Learn This: File Extensions and the Generation Gap

☒ People of my generation (*the author is in the late afternoon of his twenties*) don't get it. What we don't get is how relatively new and modern personal computing technology is. We don't realize that we were one of the first generations to have computers in our classrooms when we started kindergarten, one of the first to have internet access in our libraries, and one of the first to have networked computer interaction as a fundamental part of our lives from a young age. We don't understand why other generations don't find computing as intuitive as we do.

Learning to use computers effectively is a process of repetition, immersion, and is ideally started early in life, just like learning a new language. I think there is both a challenge and an opportunity – for all generations – in the generational computing gap. The younger folks who can find ways to tailor their products and services towards usability, approachability and friendliness can often make big strides in taking new technologies mainstream. Boomers and older have tremendous opportunities to separate themselves from their peers and their competitors by balancing a willingness to be open minded about embracing technology with a keen eye towards results.

In this spirit I would like to talk about a basic computing concept: file extensions. First, what is a computer file?

A file is a block of information which can be used in conjunction with a computer program. A file is durable in the sense that it remains available for programs to use after the current program has finished. Computer files are the modern counterpart of paper documents which traditionally were kept in office files, which is the source of the term.

Every word processing document, spreadsheet, Microsoft PowerPoint presentation, MP3, and video on your computer is housed in its own "file". A program can use these files to achieve results, such as reading or editing a word processing document, using a spreadsheet to record and predict figures, showing a presentation at a meeting or conference, or to play a song or movie.

Each of these files has a name, and that file name usually has two parts. The actual name of the file, and then, after a period, or dot, a file extension.

For example, if you open your Microsoft Windows Notepad program in the accessories section of the start menu, click on the "File" menu, and then click "Save", you'll will be prompted to enter a name for the file, which is called "Untitled" until you name it. But you can also see that the file will be saved with the *extension* ".txt". If you choose to name the file "agenda", the official name of the file will be "agenda.txt". In newer operating systems, you rarely actually see the file extension on the screen. In Windows XP and Vista, you will see the file represented simply as "agenda" with a small icon next to it that looks like a sheet of paper from a small notepad – the symbol for the "Microsoft Notepad" program.

File extensions are less visible these days, but knowing how to interpret them can still pay big dividends. The file extension serves to give the computer and its operating system a sense of how to handle the file. By putting ".txt" after "agenda" in our Notepad document, we are notifying the computer what we intend to use the file for, which programs we want to use it with, and in general, what to expect when that file is opened. It's no different than labeling a physical file in a physical filing cabinet. If all your invoices are in red files, you don't have to look through the blue ones when searching for one.

File extensions are helpful in the same way to the user. When we are emailed a file, or trying to download one, the file name and the file extension are important clues as to what the file contains. If my CPA emails me a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet file, I'll know to look for the ".xls" extension. If my lawyer sends me a contract, it very likely will come with the extension ".doc" for a Microsoft Word Document. On the other hand, if someone says they are sending me a picture of a waterfall, and the program has a strange extension for an image, like ".dll" or ".exe", than I know I'm going to want to be sure this is something I can trust. From here, the only thing to really learn is what the different file extensions are.

Common Microsoft Office / Document files

File Extension	Description	Associated Program	What is it?
.doc	Document file with text formatting, often used with software's "doc"umentation.	Microsoft Word, Microsoft Wordpad	Text file with formatted text.
.docx	Microsoft Office 2007 OpenOffice format (without macro extensions)	Microsoft Word 2007	Microsoft Word 2007 (standard)
.docm	Microsoft Office 2007 OpenOffice format (with macro extensions)	Microsoft Word 2007	Microsoft Word 2007 (with macro extensions)

.pdf	Adobe "Portable Document Format"	Adobe Reader (to view), Adobe Acrobat (to create and edit)	A rich text file with extensive formatting. Often used to scan in complicated forms, or create portable, polished documents
.ppt	Microsoft Powerpoint Standalone Slideshow	None- the program can be run by itself, so you don't need to have Powerpoint on the computer you're presenting on	Microsoft Powerpoint Presentation
.pptx	Microsoft Powerpoint 2007 OpenOffice Extension	Microsoft Powerpoint 2007	Microsoft Powerpoint Presentation
.pps	Microsoft Powerpoint Slideshow	Microsoft Powerpoint	Microsoft Powerpoint Presentation
.xls	Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet	Microsoft Excel	Spreadsheet

.xlsx	Microsoft Excel 2007 OpenOffice Spreadsheet	Microsoft Excel 2007	Spreadsheet
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Common Multimedia Files

File Extension	File Extension	Associated Program	What is it?
.asf	“Advanced Streaming Format” – compressed Windows audio/visual file	Windows Media Player	An audio or video streamed online
.avi	“Audio/Video Interleaved” animation file	Windows Media Player, most any video playing software	Video file
.gif	“Graphics Interchange Format”	Web Browser, or photo editing / viewing software	Picture File
.jpeg	“Joint Photography Experts Group” image format	Web Browser, or photo editing / viewing software	Picture File
.jpg	“Joint Photography Experts Group” image format	Web Browser, or photo editing/ viewing software	Picture File
.mov	Apple Quicktime Movie File	Apple Quicktime, other available video software	Video File

.mpeg	“Moving Picture Experts Group” video format	Windows Media Player, most any video playing software	Video File
,mpg	“Moving Picture Experts Group video format	Windows Media Player, most any video playing software	Video File

Other Common File Types

File Extension	Description	Associated Program	What is it?
.exe	An EXEcutable program file. When opened, this file launches a program. Be careful! Most all programs will start with an .exe, good or bad	None, it is the program	A piece of software

.faq	A "Frequently Asked Questions" text file, often bundled with software to answer common questions	Any text editor	Something good to read before you get started
.rar	"Roshal Archive" compression file	WinRar	A "compressed" file is a large file made smaller to send over a network. The files are compressed and decompressed in a separate program (WinRar)
.txt	Basic text file	Any text editor	The most simple form of word processing document

.zip	ZIP "compression file"	PKUnzip, many other available decompression programs	A "compressed" file is a large file made smaller to send over a network. The files are compressed and decompressed in a separate program
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