

# Learn about Focus Cell: A hidden Excel setting that makes spreadsheets instantly easier to read.

The solution is a Microsoft Excel feature called Focus Cell. It addresses the readability issue by highlighting the active row and column with a subtle dynamic crosshair.

Working with large spreadsheets means constantly keeping track of rows and columns, and it's easy to lose your bearings when you're looking at hundreds of cells. People have tried various workarounds over the years—zooming in, using conditional formatting, adjusting column widths—but none have been truly effective.

The solution is a Microsoft Excel feature called Focus Cell. It solves the readability problem by highlighting the active row and column with a subtle dynamic crosshair. It's not flashy, but it eliminates visual clutter and makes navigating dense data much easier. This feature is now widely used in Excel for Microsoft 365 on Windows, macOS, and the web. It's quickly become a common setting when entering data. If you spend time working with spreadsheets, you need to know about this feature.

## Focus Cell is a much better alternative to conditional formatting tricks.

## Protect your spreadsheets from performance slowdowns caused by complex rules!

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the following data:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Date	Region	Product Category	Salesperson	Reference	Units Sold	Sales Amount	Commission	Profit Margin	Revenue	Territory Analy
2	1/5/2024	North	Electronics	John Smith	1001	15	3,750	188	High	116,247	High
3	1/5/2024	South	Clothing	Sarah Johnson	1002	23	2,300	115	High	117,093	High
4	1/5/2024	East	Home & Garden	Mike Wilson	1003	12	1,800	90	High	65,494	Medium
5	1/5/2024	West	Sports	Lisa Brown	1004	18	2,160	108	High	96,541	Medium
6	1/12/2024	North	Clothing	John Smith	1005	31	3,100	155	High	92,108	Medium
7	1/12/2024	South	Electronics	Sarah Johnson	1006	8	2,400	120	High	56,123	Medium
8	1/12/2024	East	Sports	Mike Wilson	1007	25	3,000	150	High	85,903	Medium
9	1/12/2024	West	Home & Garden	Lisa Brown	1008	14	2,100	105	High	57,358	Medium
10	2/3/2024	North	Sports	John Smith	1009	22	2,640	132	High	61,281	Medium
11	2/3/2024	South	Home & Garden	Sarah Johnson	1010	19	2,850	143	High	76,190	Medium
12	2/3/2024	East	Electronics	Mike Wilson	1011	11	3,300	165	High	54,851	Medium
13	2/3/2024	West	Clothing	Lisa Brown	1012	28	2,800	140	High	62,890	Medium
14	2/17/2024	North	Home & Garden	David Chen	1013	16	2,400	120	High	81,207	Medium
15	2/17/2024	South	Sports	Emma Davis	1014	33	3,960	198	High	85,903	Medium
16	2/17/2024	East	Clothing	Mike Wilson	1015	29	2,900	145	High	57,358	Medium
17	2/17/2024	West	Electronics	Lisa Brown	1016	7	2,100	105	High	61,281	Medium

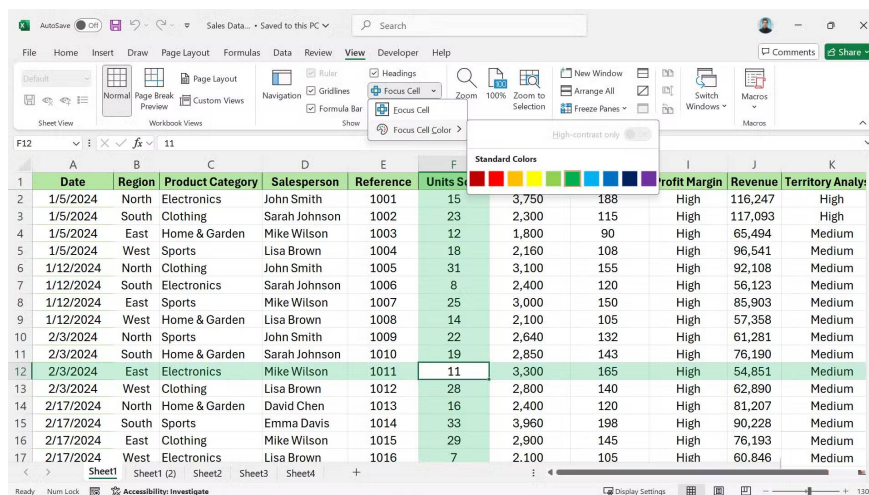
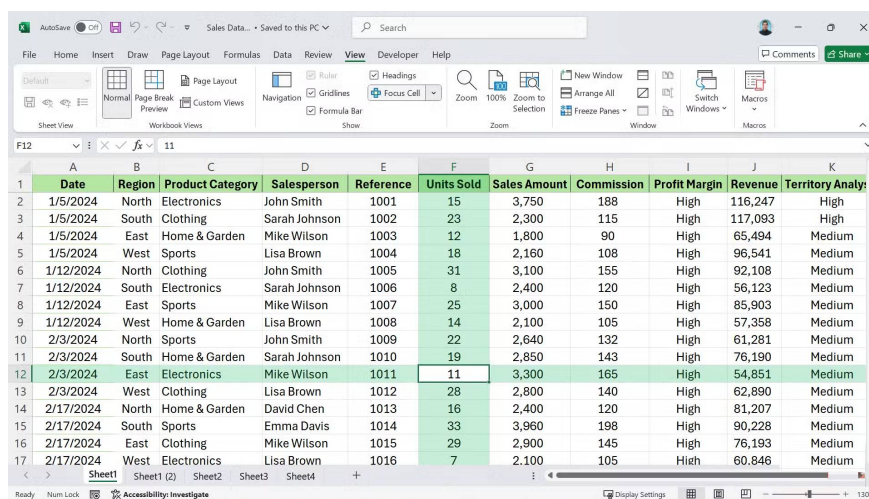
Before Focus Cell existed, the most common way to highlight active rows and columns was through conditional formatting combined with VBA macros. Technically, this method worked, but it was quite cumbersome and had real drawbacks.

The conventional method is to create a conditional formatting rule to check if a cell's row or column matches the currently selected cell. Because conditional formatting doesn't automatically detect the selected cell, you have to combine it with a "Worksheet\_SelectionChange" macro that forces the spreadsheet to recalculate every time you move. The result is a makeshift cursor that works reasonably well. After using this method for a while, many people discourage its use.

The biggest problem with the VBA method is that it disrupts the Undo chain. Because the macro runs every time you click a cell, Excel's memory of previous actions is cleared, meaning you can't easily correct errors. The Focus Cell function solves all of these problems. It's a native UI feature that provides similar visual guidance without touching the data, interrupting the workflow, or slowing down the spreadsheet's calculation speed.

## How to enable and customize Focus Cell in Excel

Choose a highlighting style that doesn't conflict with the existing theme.



Autosave Ctrl S Sales Data... Saved to this PC Search

File Home Insert Draw Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Developer Help

Default Normal Page Break Preview Custom Views Navigation Gridlines Formula Bar Show

Zoom 100% Zoom to Selection

New Window Arrange All Freeze Panes Switch Windows Macros

Comments Share

B2 fx North

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Date	Region	Product Category	Salesperson	Reference	Units Sold	Sales Amount	Commission	Profit Margin	Revenue	Territory Analy.
2	1/5/2024	North	Electronics	John Smith	1001	15	3,750	188	High	116,247	High
3	1/5/2024	South	Clothing	Sarah Johnson	1002	23	2,300	115	High	117,093	High
4	1/5/2024	East	Home & Garden	Mike Wilson	1003	12	1,800	90	High	65,494	Medium
5	1/5/2024	West	Sports	Lisa Brown	1004	18	2,160	108	High	96,541	Medium
6	1/12/2024	North	Clothing	John Smith	1005	31	3,100	155	High	92,108	Medium
7	1/12/2024	South	Electronics	Sarah Johnson	1006	8	2,400	120	High	56,123	Medium
8	1/12/2024	East	Sports	Mike Wilson	1007	25	3,000	150	High	85,903	Medium
9	1/12/2024	West	Home & Garden	Lisa Brown	1008	14	2,100	105	High	57,358	Medium
10	2/3/2024	North	Sports	John Smith	1009	22	2,640	132	High	61,281	Medium
11	2/3/2024	South	Home & Garden	Sarah Johnson	1010	19	2,850	143	High	76,190	Medium
12	2/3/2024	East	Electronics	Mike Wilson	1011	11	3,300	165	High	54,851	Medium
13	2/3/2024	West	Clothing	Lisa Brown	1012	28	2,800	140	High	62,890	Medium
14	2/17/2024	North	Home & Garden	David Chen	1013	16	2,400	120	High	81,207	Medium
15	2/17/2024	South	Sports	Emma Davis	1014	33	3,960	198	High	90,228	Medium
16	2/17/2024	East	Clothing	Mike Wilson	1015	29	2,900	145	High	76,193	Medium
17	2/17/2024	West	Electronics	Lisa Brown	1016	7	2,100	105	High	60,846	Medium

Sheet1 (2) Sheet2 Sheet3 Sheet4

Ready Num Lock Accessibility Investigate Display Settings 130%

Autosave Ctrl S Sales Data.xlsx Search

File Home Insert Draw Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Developer Help

Clipboard Paste Font Alignment Number Styles

Conditional Formatting Insert Delete Format Add-ins Analyze Copilot Show ToolPak

Comments Share

C4 fx Home & Garden

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Date	Region	Product Category	Salesperson	Reference	Units Sold	Sales Amount	Commission	Profit Margin	Revenue	Territory Analy.
2	1/5/2024	North	Electronics	John Smith	1001	15	3,750	188	High	116,247	High
3	1/5/2024	South	Clothing	Sarah Johnson	1002	23	2,300	115	High	117,093	High
4	1/5/2024	East	Home & Garden	Mike Wilson	1003	12	1,800	90	High	65,494	Medium
5	1/5/2024	West	Sports	Lisa Brown	1004	18	2,160	108	High	96,541	Medium
6	1/12/2024	North	Clothing	John Smith	1005	31	3,100	155	High	92,108	Medium
7	1/12/2024	South	Electronics	Sarah Johnson	1006	8	2,400	120	High	56,123	Medium
8	1/12/2024	East	Sports	Mike Wilson	1007	25	3,000	150	High	85,903	Medium
9	1/12/2024	West	Home & Garden	Lisa Brown	1008	14	2,100	105	High	57,358	Medium
10	2/3/2024	North	Sports	John Smith	1009	22	2,640	132	High	61,281	Medium
11	2/3/2024	South	Home & Garden	Sarah Johnson	1010	19	2,850	143	High	76,190	Medium
12	2/3/2024	East	Electronics	Mike Wilson	1011	11	3,300	165	High	54,851	Medium
13	2/3/2024	West	Clothing	Lisa Brown	1012	28	2,800	140	High	62,890	Medium
14	2/17/2024	North	Home & Garden	David Chen	1013	16	2,400	120	High	81,207	Medium
15	2/17/2024	South	Sports	Emma Davis	1014	33	3,960	198	High	90,228	Medium
16	2/17/2024	East	Clothing	Mike Wilson	1015	29	2,900	145	High	76,193	Medium
17	2/17/2024	West	Electronics	Lisa Brown	1016	7	2,100	105	High	60,846	Medium

Sheet1 (2) Sheet2 Sheet3 Sheet4

Ready Num Lock Accessibility Investigate Display Settings 130%

Autosave Ctrl S Sales Data.xlsx Search

File Home Insert Draw Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Developer Help

Clipboard Paste Font Alignment Number Styles

Conditional Formatting Insert Delete Format Add-ins Analyze Copilot Show ToolPak

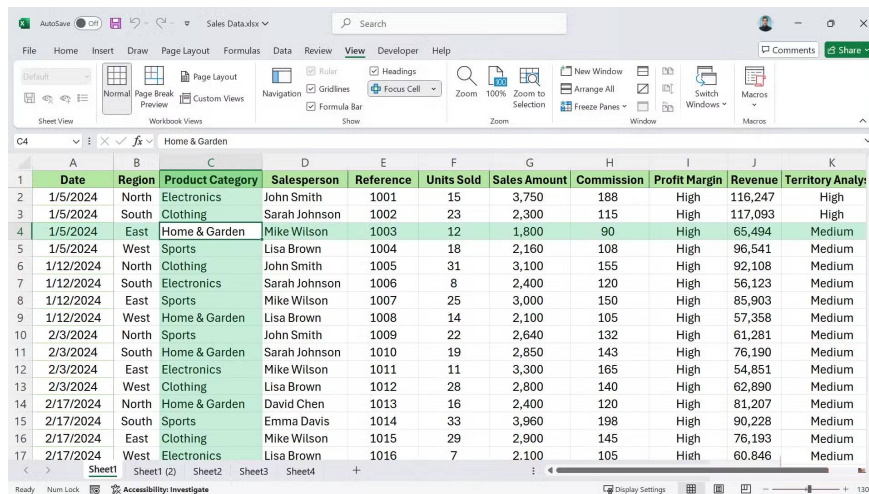
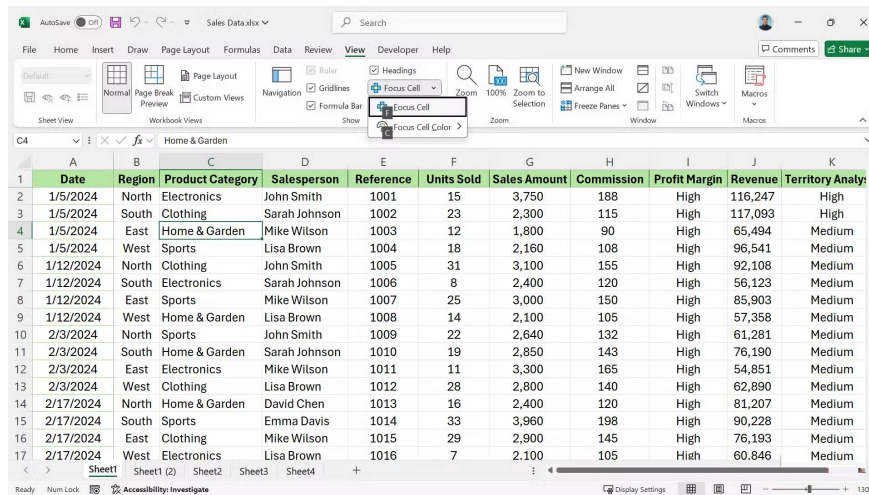
Comments Share

C4 fx Home & Garden

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Date	Region	Product Category	Salesperson	Reference	Units Sold	Sales Amount	Commission	Profit Margin	Revenue	Territory Analy.
2	1/5/2024	North	Electronics	John Smith	1001	15	3,750	188	High	116,247	High
3	1/5/2024	South	Clothing	Sarah Johnson	1002	23	2,300	115	High	117,093	High
4	1/5/2024	East	Home & Garden	Mike Wilson	1003	12	1,800	90	High	65,494	Medium
5	1/5/2024	West	Sports	Lisa Brown	1004	18	2,160	108	High	96,541	Medium
6	1/12/2024	North	Clothing	John Smith	1005	31	3,100	155	High	92,108	Medium
7	1/12/2024	South	Electronics	Sarah Johnson	1006	8	2,400	120	High	56,123	Medium
8	1/12/2024	East	Sports	Mike Wilson	1007	25	3,000	150	High	85,903	Medium
9	1/12/2024	West	Home & Garden	Lisa Brown	1008	14	2,100	105	High	57,358	Medium
10	2/3/2024	North	Sports	John Smith	1009	22	2,640	132	High	61,281	Medium
11	2/3/2024	South	Home & Garden	Sarah Johnson	1010	19	2,850	143	High	76,190	Medium
12	2/3/2024	East	Electronics	Mike Wilson	1011	11	3,300	165	High	54,851	Medium
13	2/3/2024	West	Clothing	Lisa Brown	1012	28	2,800	140	High	62,890	Medium
14	2/17/2024	North	Home & Garden	David Chen	1013	16	2,400	120	High	81,207	Medium
15	2/17/2024	South	Sports	Emma Davis	1014	33	3,960	198	High	90,228	Medium
16	2/17/2024	East	Clothing	Mike Wilson	1015	29	2,900	145	High	76,193	Medium
17	2/17/2024	West	Electronics	Lisa Brown	1016	7	2,100	105	High	60,846	Medium

Sheet1 (2) Sheet2 Sheet3 Sheet4

Ready Num Lock Accessibility Investigate Display Settings 130%



If you're using Excel on the web or the latest version of Excel for Microsoft 365, enabling this feature takes only a moment. You don't need to search through the hidden Options menu or write any code. This setting is hidden right on the main ribbon.

To enable this feature, follow these steps:

1. Open your workbook and click the **View** tab on the ribbon at the top.
2. Find the **Focus Cell** button (usually located next to the Gridlines and Headings toggle buttons).
3. Click the button once to activate the cursor.

Once enabled, you'll see a colored highlight area that tracks your movement. It will follow you as you use the arrow keys or click the mouse, providing instant horizontal and vertical reference points.

## Customize the Focus Cell interface to your liking.

The default highlight color is usually light green, but you can change it to suit your visual preferences. This is especially useful if the spreadsheet already uses specific background colors for headers or alternating row styles. You want a color that stands out without making the text below difficult to read.

To change the color, click the drop-down arrow on the **Focus Cell** button in the **View** tab . You can choose from several preset colors. Many people prefer high-contrast colors, such as green, when working with numerical datasets, as it highlights the active row. Because the highlight area has partial transparency, it won't obscure your cell borders or font formatting.

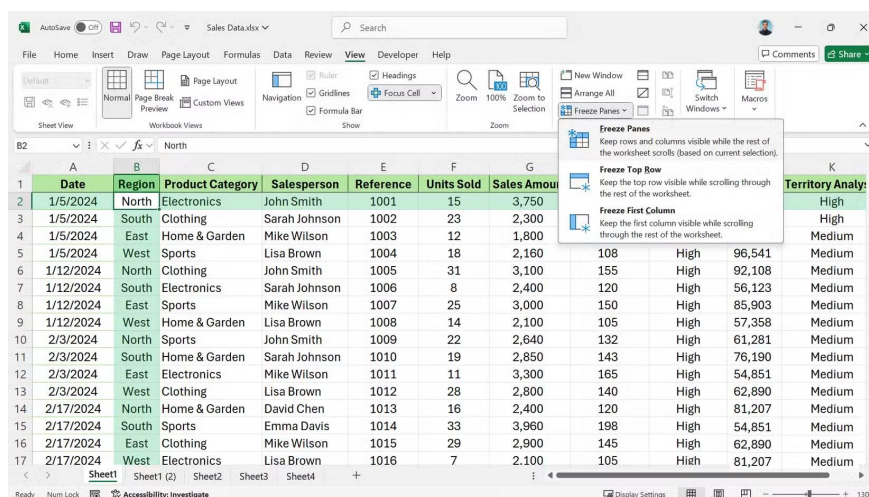
## Use keyboard shortcuts to quickly turn the highlight area on or off.

There are times when the cursor can get in the way—especially if you're trying to take a screenshot of a report or if you're presenting your screen to a group. Instead of navigating back to the **View** tab every time, you can use keyboard shortcuts on the Excel ribbon to toggle this feature on and off. Mastering essential Excel keyboard shortcuts for Windows can significantly speed up your workflow when dealing with these small toggle settings.

Press **Alt > W > E > F** in sequence (one key at a time). This sequence activates the **View** tab and toggles **Focus Cell** on/off . Remembering this shortcut allows you to use this feature as a temporary measure. You can turn it on while performing an audit and turn it off once you've found the data point you're looking for.

## Combine Focus Cell with Freeze Panes

Keep the column headers visible while the cursor tracks the data.



The Focus Cell function is very useful for knowing where you are, but it's even better when you combine it with Freeze Panes. On a large spreadsheet, you often lose track of column headers when scrolling down. When you combine these two features, you'll feel like you're in a control panel, where you always know which column you're in (thanks to the headers) and exactly which row (thanks to the Focus Cell cursor).

To set it up correctly:

1. Click the cell directly below the row you want to freeze and to the right of the column you want to freeze. For most spreadsheets, this is cell **B2** (freezing row 1 and column A).
2. Go to the **View** tab on the ribbon.
3. Click on **Freeze Panes** , then select **Freeze Panes** again from the drop-down menu.

This combination eliminates almost all obstacles when entering data. Freeze Panes tells you what each column is for; the Focus Cell function tells you exactly where your cursor is located within that structure. One function handles context, the other handles position, and both functions do not conflict with each other.

Always keep both of these features enabled on any spreadsheet with more than about 40 rows. It's a small setup step but it eliminates a lot of unnecessary hassle. If you want to use this feature even more, Excel offers additional display options like **Split View** and **Watch Window** that work well with these features.

You finished reading the article "**Learn about Focus Cell: A hidden Excel setting that makes spreadsheets instantly easier to read.**" edited by the [TipsMake](#) team. We hope this article has provided you with many useful tech tips and tricks. You can search for similar articles on tips and guides. Thank you for reading and for following us regularly.