

EXCEL <<<<<<<

By Bill Jelen

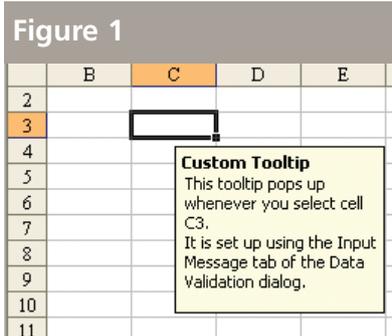
Creating Documentation Within a Worksheet

Microsoft Excel is a flexible development environment. You can build models that calculate everything from amortization to zero-coupon bonds. With that flexibility, however, you will often find worksheets where it's difficult to figure out how to use the worksheet. The tips in this article will allow you to create a worksheet with better documentation.

Adding Notes to Formulas

If you've spent some time coming up with a brilliant formula to solve a problem, you might want to add a note to the formula to help you remember how the formula is working.

There's a very old function in Excel left over from the early days of Lotus 1-2-3. If you take the N() of a number, you get the number. If you take the N() of any text, you get zero. So, at the end of your formula, add an N() function with a comment in quotation marks. Since the N() of text is zero, you are adding zero to the end of the formula, which won't change the result. For example, end your formula with +N("This formula uses the INDIRECT function to look up data from the worksheet name stored in column D").



Since the result of the N() function is zero, the note won't affect the result in the worksheet. If you later select the cell and examine the formula bar at the top of the worksheet, however, you'll be able to see the note that you left for yourself.

Adding Tooltips to a Cell

At a recent IMA chapter Power Excel seminar, an attendee asked about a worksheet where the cell comments don't behave as they normally do. You don't have to hover over the cell to see the comment. Instead, when you click on the cell, a yellow tooltip automatically pops up with instructions on what to enter in that cell (see Figure 1).

These tooltips aren't normal cell comments. Instead, they are created using a

clever twist on the Data Validation dialog. Normally, Data Validation allows you to specify that a cell should only accept a certain range of values. Most people use the Settings tab to control what can be entered in the cell, but this alternate technique makes use of the Input Message tab in the Data Validation dialog box.

To add a tooltip to a cell, follow these steps:

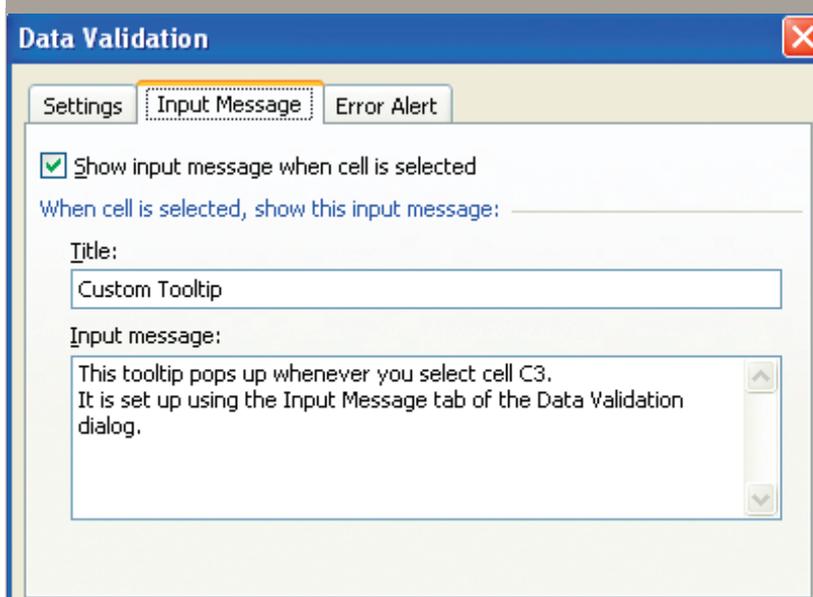
1. Select the cell.
2. From the Data menu, select Data Validation.
3. On the Settings tab of the Data Validation dialog, leave the Allow box set to "Any Value."
4. On the Input Message tab, type a title for the tooltip and then a few sentences of instructions for the cell (see Figure 2). You can press ENTER to move to a new line in the tooltip.
5. Click OK to finish the tooltip.

When someone selects the cell, the input message pops up in a note near the cell, as shown in Figure 2.

Formatting Traditional Cell Comments

While the tooltip shown in Figure 2 is clever, most people instead use the tradi-

Figure 2



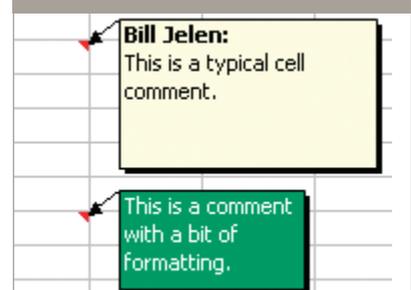
tional comments from Insert, Comment in Excel 2003 or Review, New Comment in Excel 2007.

Inserting a traditional cell comment adds a red triangle in the corner of the cell. If you hover over the red triangle, the comment appears. This type of comment doesn't work well for people who use the arrow keys to navigate through the worksheet.

You can right-click a cell with a

comment and choose Show/Hide Comments. This will force the comment to always be visible. Once the comment is visible, you can select it by holding down CTRL and clicking on the comment. You can then use any formatting tools to change the comment's fill color, font color, font size, and font type. You can use the handles to resize the comment. Using this method, you can change the colors of the comments to

Figure 3



address different types. For example, comments for the Sales department could be in one color, and comments for Marketing could be in another color, as shown in Figure 3.

Using the methods in this article, you can directly add a number of notes and help to your worksheets in Excel. These comments can form the basis of an on-grid help system to guide the people using your worksheet. **SF**

Bill Jelen is the author of Excel Gurus Gone Wild and 31 other books about Microsoft Excel. Visit MrExcel.com to book him for your chapter's Professional Development seminar. Send questions for future articles to IMA@MrExcel.com.