



An Extended Guide · No. 1926

Excel Lists That Sort Themselves — Addresses, Inventories & Medication Logs

Use a table to sort, filter, and
search a list without scrambling it

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★ The secret word is 'table'

Turn your list into an Excel 'table' and it gains little arrow buttons that let you sort A-to-Z, filter to just what you want, and keep each row's details together so nothing scrambles. One setting unlocks all of it.

Lists that organize themselves

If you keep a list — addresses, a collection, a medication log — Excel can sort and search it for you, instantly, without ever jumbling who goes with what. The trick is a feature called a table, and it's wonderfully easy.

I'm Bill, from Bill's Home Tech in Portage County. The fear people have with lists in Excel is scrambling them — sorting one column and having the names end up with the wrong phone numbers. A table prevents exactly that. Let's set one up together.

We'll keep it gentle and practical. By the end you'll have a list you can sort, filter, and search with a click or two — and that always keeps each row's information safely together.

The whole guide, on one page

If these points stick, your lists will practically manage themselves.

- ❑ Give each column a clear heading in the top row (Name, Phone, City...).
- ❑ Select your list and turn it into a table (Insert > Table).
- ❑ Little arrow buttons appear on each heading — those do the magic.
- ❑ Click an arrow to sort A-to-Z, Z-to-A, or by number.
- ❑ Use the same arrows to filter — show only one city, say.
- ❑ Sorting a table keeps every row's details together, so nothing scrambles.

✓ A table is the whole secret

Everything good in this guide comes from turning your list into a table. One click of that button and your plain list gains superpowers.

Start with clear column headings

Before the magic, a little groundwork: every column needs a clear name at the top. This is what lets Excel sort and filter sensibly.

In the top row, type a heading for each column — for an address list, that might be First Name, Last Name, Phone, Street, City, State, ZIP. Each piece of information gets its own column, and its own heading.

Then type your entries beneath, one person (or one item) per row. Keep it tidy: no blank rows in the middle, and each column holding just one kind of thing. That tidiness is what makes sorting and searching work flawlessly.

✓ One kind of thing per column

Keep first names in one column and last names in another, phone in its own, and so on. Splitting things up feels fussy but makes the list far more powerful.

Turning your list into a table

Here's the single step that unlocks everything. It takes about ten seconds.

- ❑ Click any cell inside your list.
- ❑ Click the Insert ribbon at the top.
- ❑ Click the Table button.
- ❑ Excel guesses the edges of your list and asks to confirm — make sure 'My table has headers' is checked, then click OK.
- ❑ Your list gains color banding and little arrow buttons on each heading.

That's it — your plain list is now a table. Those arrow buttons on the headings are your new controls for sorting, filtering, and searching. The color banding isn't just pretty; it helps your eye follow each row across.

★ If you can't find the Table button

Every version tucks things slightly differently. If the Insert ribbon or the Table button is hiding, call me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll point you right to it.

Sorting without scrambling

This is the feature people most want — and most fear. With a table, it's safe and simple.

Click the little arrow button on any column heading and you'll see options like 'Sort A to Z' and 'Sort Z to A' (or smallest-to-largest for numbers). Click one, and the whole list rearranges by that column — and crucially, every row stays intact, so each name keeps its own phone number and address.

That's the magic of a table: it understands that a row belongs together. You can sort your address book by last name, then by city, then by ZIP, however you like, and the information never comes unglued.

! This is why we use a table

Sorting a plain, un-tabled list is where people scramble their data — sorting one column while the others stay put. A table sorts whole rows together, so that disaster simply can't happen.

Filtering: showing just what you want

Filtering hides everything except the rows you care about, without deleting anything. It's like asking your list a question.

- ❑ Click the arrow on a column heading — say, City.
- ❑ You'll see a checklist of every value in that column.
- ❑ Untick 'Select All,' then tick only the one you want (for example, Akron).
- ❑ Click OK, and the list shows only those rows.
- ❑ To bring everything back, click the arrow again and tick 'Select All.'

Nothing is deleted when you filter — the other rows are just hidden until you clear the filter. It's a safe way to focus: show only the people in one town, only items in one category, only medications taken in the morning.

✓ Filtering never deletes

Don't worry that filtered-out rows are gone — they're only hidden. Clear the filter and they all return, safe and sound.

Finding one entry fast

When you just need to find one person or item in a long list, searching beats scrolling.

Press Control+F (Command+F on a Mac) to open a little Find box. Type part of what you're looking for — a last name, a street, a drug name — and Excel jumps straight to it, highlighting the match. Press Enter again to find the next one.

Between filtering (show all rows that match) and finding (jump to one match), you never have to scroll a long list hunting with your eyes again. The computer does the looking for you.

✓ Find for one, filter for many

Use Find (Control+F) to jump to a single entry; use the column filters when you want to see every row that matches. Two tools, two jobs.

Three lists worth keeping this way

Almost any list benefits from being a table. Here are three that folks find especially useful.

- **An address book:** names, phones, addresses, birthdays. Sort by last name, filter by town, find anyone in a second.
- **A home inventory:** belongings, what room, value, serial numbers. Priceless for insurance after a loss. Sort by room or value.
- **A medication log:** drug name, dose, time of day, prescriber. Filter to 'morning' meds, or sort by name to spot duplicates.
- **A collection list:** coins, stamps, books, recipes — whatever you keep. Sort and filter to your heart's content.

The same handful of skills — table, sort, filter, find — serves every one of these. Learn them once on an address book and you can organize anything.

★ A medication list can be a real help

A clear, sortable medication log is something I'm often glad to help set up — it's genuinely useful at doctor visits. (I help organize it; your doctor handles the medical side.) Call (330) 200-8042.

Adding to and tidying your list

A table grows gracefully. Here's how to add new entries and keep things neat.

To add a new row, just click in the first empty row right below the table and start typing — the table stretches to include it automatically, arrows and all. No special steps needed.

To fix an entry, click the cell and retype. To remove a row, right-click its row number and choose Delete. The table keeps itself tidy and the sorting and filtering keep working as it grows.

✓ The table grows with you

You don't have to re-make the table when you add people or items. Type in the next empty row and it simply absorbs the new entry.

Two kinds of readers, two sets of needs

How much the table features help depends on how long your list is. Find yourself below.

If you keep a short household list

A page of addresses, a modest collection, a handful of medications. Short enough to see at once, but still nicer when it's tidy and sortable.

- A table keeps it neat and lets you sort alphabetically in a click.
- Even a short list is easier to read with the color banding.
- Find (Control+F) jumps to an entry without scrolling.
- It's a gentle, low-pressure way to learn tables.

If you keep a longer list

A big address book, a full home inventory, a long medication history. Too long to eyeball — this is where tables truly shine.

- Filtering lets you see just one town, room, or category at a time.
- Sorting instantly reorders hundreds of rows without scrambling them.
- Find leaps to any single entry in a heartbeat.
- The longer the list, the more time these features save you.

★ Short or long, I'll help you set it up

Whether it's a one-page address list or a whole home inventory, I'll turn it into a tidy table you can sort and search with ease. Call (330) 200-8042.

A home inventory for peace of mind

Of all the lists worth keeping, a home inventory may be the most valuable — and a table makes it easy.

List your belongings with columns for the item, the room, roughly what it's worth, and any serial number. If you ever face a theft, fire, or flood, this list is exactly what your insurance company asks for — and it's far easier to make now than to reconstruct from memory after a loss.

As a table, you can sort by room to check you've covered the whole house, or by value to see your most important items. Snap photos of valuables too and keep them with the list — our photo-backup guides show how to store them safely.

★ A worthwhile afternoon's work

A home inventory is one of those quietly important projects folks are always glad they did. I'm happy to help you build one, room by room. Call (330) 200-8042.

Saving and protecting your list

A list you rely on deserves to be safe. A moment of care keeps years of entries protected.

Save with a clear name — 'Address Book' or 'Home Inventory 2026' — in your Documents folder, and tap Control+S after you make changes. That keeps your latest additions.

Because these lists can be hard to recreate, keep a backup copy too — on a USB stick or in an online folder. For something like a home inventory or medication log, a backup isn't fussiness; it's genuine insurance. Our backup guides make it easy.

! Back up the lists you'd hate to lose

An address book or inventory represents real time and memory. One backup copy means a dead computer can never erase it.

Common mistakes, and easy fixes

A few beginner snags cause most list trouble. Here they are, with cures.

- **Sorting a plain list** and scrambling it — make it a table first, so rows stay together.
- **No column headings**, so sorting and filtering have nothing to work with — always label the top row.
- **Blank rows in the middle**, which can confuse the table's edges — keep entries continuous.
- **Cramming two things in one column**, which blocks clean sorting — split them up.
- **Forgetting to clear a filter** and thinking rows vanished — they're just hidden; tick 'Select All.'

✓ Table first, then sort

Burn this into memory: never sort a list until it's a table. Tabled lists sort safely; plain ones scramble. That one habit prevents the worst mistake.

If a filter leaves you puzzled

Filters sometimes make people think their data vanished. It didn't — here's how to reassure yourself.

When a filter is on, you'll notice the column's arrow button changes to a little funnel shape, and some row numbers skip (because rows are hidden, not deleted). That funnel is your clue that a filter is active.

To see everything again, click the funnel arrow and tick 'Select All,' or use the Clear Filter option. Your full list springs right back. Nothing was ever lost — it was only resting out of sight.

✓ Spot the funnel

A funnel-shaped arrow and skipping row numbers mean a filter is hiding rows. Clear it and all is restored — a filter never deletes a thing.

You don't need to buy Excel

Everything here works in free spreadsheet programs, so cost needn't stop you.

Google Sheets (free with a Google account) and LibreOffice Calc (free to install) both do tables, sorting, filtering, and finding. The menus differ a little, but every idea in this guide carries straight over.

So if you don't own Excel, you can still keep beautifully organized lists. Our free-ways-to-write and LibreOffice guides help you get set up without spending a dime.

✓ Same powers, free tools

Tables that sort and filter aren't an Excel-only treat. Pick whichever spreadsheet you have, and these skills work the same.

This is easier than it sounds

If organizing data in a spreadsheet feels like 'advanced computer stuff,' let me gently disagree.

You're really learning just four friendly moves — make a table, sort, filter, find — and each is a click or two. The old fear of scrambling your list disappears the moment you use a table, because tables keep every row together by design.

Start with a short, familiar list, like your address book, and practice the four moves. Within one patient sitting it'll feel natural, and you'll wonder how you managed lists any other way.

★ A gentle first lesson

Tables are a lovely, confidence-building thing to learn, and I enjoy teaching them. We'll start with a list you know and take it slowly. Call (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask yourself

A few answers shape the list that fits you.

Q: What list would help me most?

An address book, a home inventory, and a medication log are the three folks find most useful — pick whichever you'd reach for.

Q: What details belong in columns?

One kind of thing per column. For addresses: name, phone, street, city. For meds: drug, dose, time, prescriber.

Q: How long is the list likely to get?

Long lists benefit most from filtering and finding; short ones still enjoy tidy sorting.

Q: Do I have Excel, or need a free option?

Google Sheets and LibreOffice Calc do all of this free, if you don't have Excel.

✓ Start with the list you'd use

Pick the list you'll actually open often. Practicing on something real makes the skills stick far better than a made-up example.

A few more worth answering

These come up as folks get going with tables.

Q: How do I add a new person or item?

Click the first empty row just below the table and type. The table stretches to include it automatically, keeping its arrows and banding.

Q: Did sorting mix up my data?

Not if it's a table — tables sort whole rows together. If something looks off, you may have sorted a plain list; undo with Control+Z and make it a table first.

Q: Where did my rows go?

A filter is probably hiding them. Look for a funnel on a column arrow, click it, and tick 'Select All' to bring everything back.

Q: Can I print just the filtered rows?

Yes — filter to what you want, then print as usual; only the visible rows print. Handy for, say, just the morning medications.

★ Stuck on a step?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll get you past it. Tables are very teachable once someone walks you through the first one.

The whole thing, recapped

Here's everything as a short, repeatable routine.

- ❑ Put a clear heading atop each column.
- ❑ Type your entries, one per row, no blank rows.
- ❑ Select the list and Insert > Table (keep 'My table has headers' ticked).
- ❑ Use the heading arrows to sort A-to-Z or by number.
- ❑ Use the same arrows to filter to just what you want.
- ❑ Press Control+F to jump to a single entry, and save with a clear name.

Follow that and any list you keep becomes something that sorts, filters, and searches itself — while always keeping each row's details safely together.

✓ Four moves, endless uses

Table, sort, filter, find. Those four moves organize an address book, an inventory, a medication log — anything you list.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about organizing lists in Excel.

Q: How do I sort a list without scrambling it?

Turn it into a table first (Insert > Table), then use the arrow on a column heading to sort. A table always moves whole rows together, so nothing gets scrambled.

Q: What is a 'table' in Excel?

It's your list with a special setting switched on that adds sort-and-filter arrows to each heading, keeps rows together, and grows automatically as you add entries.

Q: How do I show only certain rows?

Click the arrow on a column heading, untick 'Select All,' and tick just the value you want. That filters the list to matching rows; clear it to see all again.

Q: Can I do this without Excel?

Yes — Google Sheets and LibreOffice Calc both offer tables, sorting, and filtering for free. Every step here works in them too.

★ Want help with your first list?

Organizing a list into a tidy, sortable table is a satisfying little skill, and I love teaching it. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The bottom line

Here's the heart of it in a few sentences.

Give your list clear headings, turn it into a table, and you gain arrow buttons that sort, filter, and keep every row's details together. Add Find (Control+F) to jump to any single entry, and you've got a list that practically manages itself.

The one rule to remember: make it a table before you sort, so your data never scrambles. Do that, and address books, inventories, and medication logs all become tidy, searchable, and safe — in Excel or any free spreadsheet.

✓ Table first — always

If you take one thing from this guide, let it be this: turn your list into a table before you sort it. That single habit prevents the scramble and unlocks everything else.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made organizing lists in Excel feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site — installing Office, sorting out a sign-in, setting up a document — I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

The Four Moves

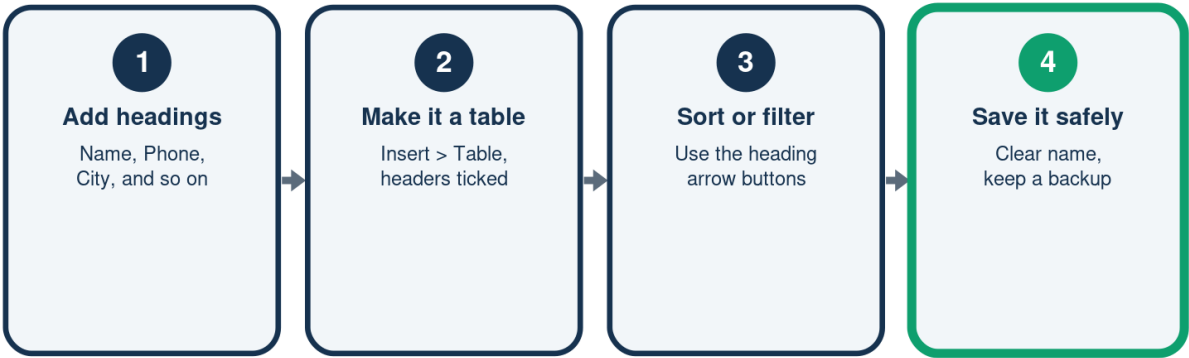
Everything a list needs

	Move	What it does
Make a table	Insert > Table	Unlocks the rest
Sort	Heading arrow	A-to-Z, by number
Filter	Heading arrow	Show only some
Find	Control + F	Jump to one

Learn these four and any list organizes itself.

From Plain List to Smart List

Four calm steps



The table step is what keeps rows together when you sort.

Sort vs. Filter vs. Find

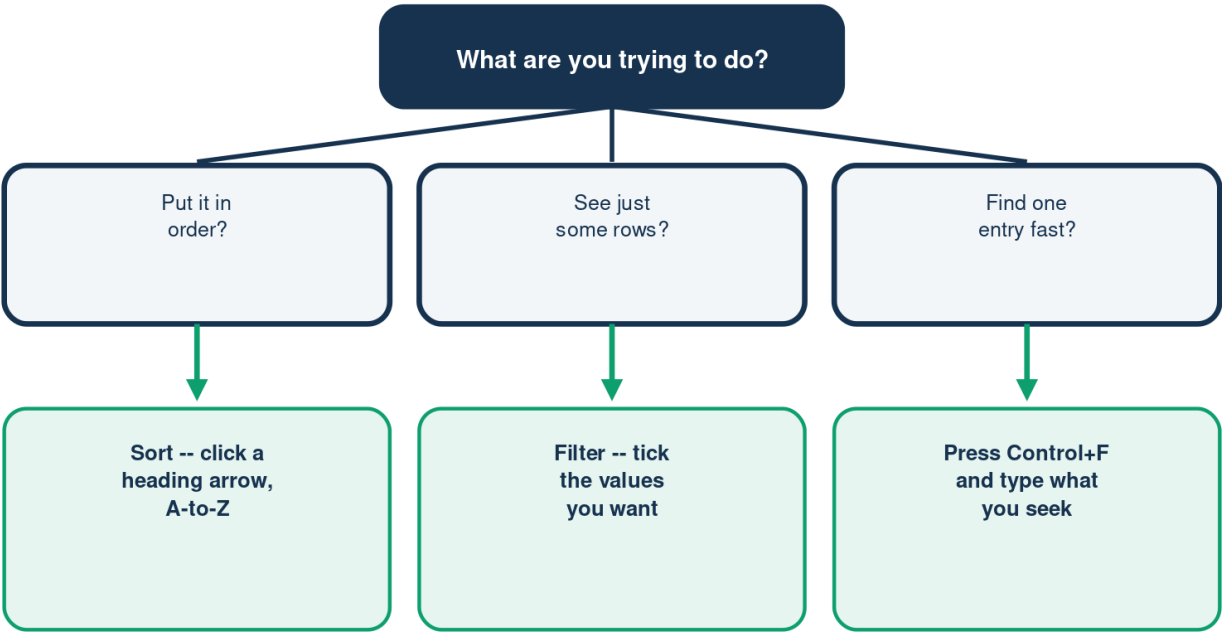
Three tools, three jobs

	Use it to	How
Sort	Reorder the list	A-to-Z arrow
Filter	Show only some	Tick values
Find	Jump to one	Control + F
Clear filter	See all again	Tick Select All

Sort reorders, filter hides, find jumps -- nothing ever deletes.

What Do You Want to Do?

Pick the matching tool



Always make the list a table first -- then sorting never scrambles it.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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