

How to Calculate the Average of Multiple Rows in Excel (Without VLOOKUP)

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The VLOOKUP function is a foundational tool in Excel, primarily designed to search for a specific value in the first column of a table and return a corresponding value from a designated column in the same row. It is fundamentally a single-lookup, single-return function. Consequently, using VLOOKUP alone is not suitable for complex statistical calculations like determining the average of multiple rows or columns based on a matching criterion.

To calculate the average of multiple values, the dedicated AVERAGE function must be employed. This function accepts a range of cells as its argument and yields the arithmetic mean of all numeric values within that specified range of cells. While VLOOKUP is indispensable for data retrieval, integrating it with other functions, or using advanced lookup methodologies, is necessary to achieve conditional averaging across multiple records.

Excel: Integrating Lookups to Average Multiple Rows

Although the standard VLOOKUP function cannot inherently return multiple values to be averaged, we can utilize advanced techniques, often involving array constants or conditional array processing, to force lookup logic to interact with the AVERAGE function. The method chosen depends entirely on whether you need to average values across columns within the first matched row, or average values across all columns and all subsequent matched rows.

Below are two powerful methods for combining lookup criteria with statistical calculation, allowing users to move beyond simple retrieval and perform complex data analysis directly within their spreadsheets. These solutions address two distinct scenarios frequently encountered when dealing with large datasets requiring calculated metrics based on specific criteria.

Method 1: VLOOKUP and Averaging Values in the First Matched Row

This technique is specifically designed for scenarios where the user needs to find the very first instance of a lookup value and calculate the average of several adjacent columns corresponding to that single row. This approach relies on leveraging the power of array constants within the standard VLOOKUP structure.

The following formula structure employs the AVERAGE function nested around a VLOOKUP that uses an array constant for the column index number argument:

```
=AVERAGE(VLOOKUP(A14, $A$2:$D$11, {2,3,4}, FALSE))
```

In this construction, the VLOOKUP searches for the value present in cell **A14** within the table range of cells **A2:D11**. Crucially, the array constant **{2,3,4}** forces VLOOKUP to return an array of values corresponding to columns 2, 3, and 4 from the first matching row. The outer AVERAGE function then calculates the average of these three returned values.

Illustrative Example 1: Averaging Across Columns in the First Match

Consider the following dataset, which tracks points scored by various basketball players across three separate games. Our objective is to find the first instance of a player and average their scores for Game 1, Game 2, and Game 3.

The dataset includes multiple entries for some players, highlighting why we must distinguish between averaging the first match (Method 1) versus averaging all matches (Method 2).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Player	Game 1	Game 2	Game 3			
2	Andy	10	8	31			
3	Bernard	12	17	9			
4	Chad	16	15	9			
5	Derrick	9	15	14			
6	Eric	14	14	15			
7	Frank	34	17	13			
8	George	29	18	12			
9	Harry	18	10	22			
10	Chad	14	20	28			
11	John	20	22	27			
12							
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							
18							
19							
20							
21							
22							

To calculate the average points scored by "Chad" in the first row he appears, we input the following formula into cell **B14**, assuming **A14** contains the lookup value "Chad":

```
=AVERAGE(VLOOKUP(A14, $A$2:$D$11, {2,3,4}, FALSE))
```

After confirming the formula, the result is displayed as shown below:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Player	Game 1	Game 2	Game 3				
2	Andy	10	8	31				
3	Bernard	12	17	9				
4	Chad	16	15	9				
5	Derrick	9	15	14				
6	Eric	14	14	15				
7	Frank	34	17	13				
8	George	29	18	12				
9	Harry	18	10	22				
10	Chad	14	20	28				
11	John	20	22	27				
12								
13	Player							
14	Chad	13.33333						
15								
16								
17								

The result of **13.33** is derived from the scores in the first row matching "Chad" (15, 12, 13). This calculation confirms that this method successfully uses VLOOKUP to identify a single row and subsequently averages the specified columns within that specific row.

Method 2: Averaging Values Across All Matched Rows (Advanced Array Formula)

When the requirement is to calculate the average of values across **all** rows that satisfy a given criteria--for instance, averaging scores from every game played by "Chad," regardless of how many times his name appears--a different approach is necessary. This requires the use of a conditional Array formula that filters the entire data set before applying the AVERAGE function.

The structure utilizes the AVERAGE function coupled with the **IF** function. In modern versions of Excel, this is often automatically handled as a dynamic array, but in older versions, it may require confirmation using **CTRL+SHIFT+ENTER** to denote it as an Array formula.

The formula is as follows:

=AVERAGE(IF(A2:A11=\$A\$14,B2:D11))

This powerful formula first checks every cell in the criterion range of cells (A2:A11) against the lookup value in **A14**. Where the condition is true, the corresponding values from the scoring columns (**B2:D11**) are included in the calculation set; where it is false, the formula returns **FALSE**, which the AVERAGE function ignores. This effectively isolates all points scored by the target player across the entire data range and calculates their overall mean score.

Illustrative Example 2: Averaging Across All Matched Rows

Using the same basketball dataset, we now apply the Array formula to determine the cumulative average points scored by "Chad" across all recorded games, ensuring all instances of his name are included in the calculation. We place the conditional AVERAGE function in cell **B15**:

=AVERAGE(IF(A2:A11=\$A\$14,B2:D11))

Upon execution (using **CTRL+SHIFT+ENTER** if required by your Excel version, or simply **Enter** in modern versions), the results are presented:

B14 : X ✓ fx =AVERAGE(IF(A2:A11=\$A\$14,B2:D11))							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Player	Game 1	Game 2	Game 3			
2	Andy	10	8	31			
3	Bernard	12	17	9			
4	Chad	16	15	9			
5	Derrick	9	15	14			
6	Eric	14	14	15			
7	Frank	34	17	13			
8	George	29	18	12			
9	Harry	18	10	22			
10	Chad	14	20	28			
11	John	20	22	27			
12							
13	Player						
14	Chad	17					
15							
16							

In this second scenario, the formula identifies all points scored by "Chad" across both rows where he appears (Row 2: 15, 12, 13; and Row 10: 20, 18, 24). The calculation includes all six scores

($15+12+13+20+18+24 = 102$). Since there are six games recorded for him, the resulting average is $102 / 6$, which equals **17**.

This demonstrates the significant difference between the two methods: Method 1 calculates an average across columns for a single matching row, while Method 2 calculates an average across columns and rows for all matching records.

Choosing the Right Lookup and Average Strategy

Selecting between Method 1 and Method 2 depends on the specific analytical goal. If data integrity dictates that only the first record for an identifier is relevant, Method 1 offers a streamlined solution using standard VLOOKUP syntax combined with array constants. However, when comprehensive summary statistics are required across potentially duplicated entries, Method 2, leveraging the power of conditional Array formula structures (AVERAGE/IF), is the superior and more accurate choice for conditional aggregation.

Mastery of these combined functions allows Excel users to perform sophisticated queries and calculations that extend far beyond the capabilities of simple lookup functions.

Further Resources on Advanced Excel Operations

The following tutorials explain how to perform other common operations in Excel:

Understanding the nuances of lookup functions like INDEX/MATCH.

Creating dynamic range of cells using OFFSET and INDIRECT.

Implementing advanced statistical analysis using functions like MEDIAN and MODE.