

# Convert Datetime to Time in Excel

Authored by  
**stats writer**

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## Understanding Datetime Values in Excel

Microsoft Excel handles dates and times not as simple text strings, but as numerical values known as serial numbers. This fundamental concept is crucial to understanding how to manipulate time data effectively. A full datetime entry--such as 10/26/2023 2:14 AM--is stored as a single decimal number. The integer portion of this serial number represents the date (counting the days since January 1, 1900), while the fractional portion represents the time of day.

For instance, the number 45224.092 represents both the date (45224 days since the epoch date) and the time (0.092 of a 24-hour day). Because time is represented by the decimal part of the serial number, extracting the time component is essentially an exercise in formatting or isolating this fractional value. If a cell contains a full datetime, and we only wish to see the time, we must employ a method that ignores the integer component while maintaining the underlying accuracy of the numerical fractional value.

While simply changing the cell's display format to a time format (e.g., HH:MM) will visually hide the date, the underlying cell value still contains the date information. For data processing or creating reports that require the time component to be treated as a distinct data point, using a function is necessary. The most robust and flexible tool for this extraction is the powerful TEXT function, which converts a numerical value into a text string based on a specified display code, thereby permanently separating the time from the date for downstream analysis.

## The Necessity of Time Extraction

In complex spreadsheet analysis, the combination of date and time often proves cumbersome when the focus is exclusively on temporal metrics. Analyzing trends based on the time of day--such as determining peak operational hours, monitoring system logs, or scheduling appointments--requires isolating the hours, minutes, and seconds from the date context. If you attempt to use conditional formatting or pivot tables on a mixed datetime column, the unique date component will group the data inaccurately, treating the same time on different days as separate entities.

Furthermore, time extraction becomes crucial when integrating data across different systems or preparing datasets for external analysis platforms. Some software platforms may not interpret Excel's serial datetime format correctly, necessitating a conversion to a universally recognizable text string. By converting the time component into a formatted text string (like "02:14 AM"), we ensure data integrity and compatibility, preventing interpretation errors that could arise from fluctuating numerical formats or regional settings within Excel.

The core challenge lies in transforming the numerical fractional representation of time (e.g., 0.092) into a user-friendly, readable format (e.g., 2:14 AM) without losing precision. Although other methods like mathematical subtraction (using the MOD function) can isolate the fractional part, the

TEXT function provides immediate formatting during the conversion process, streamlining the workflow. This function allows the analyst to dictate the exact output appearance--whether requiring 12-hour or 24-hour display, and whether seconds or AM/PM indicators are required.

## Core Methods: The TEXT Function Approach

The most reliable and versatile method for converting a datetime value to a time string in Excel involves leveraging the TEXT function. This function is designed specifically to convert a numerical value into a text string based on a specified display format. Its syntax requires two arguments: the value you wish to format (in this case, the cell containing the datetime, such as **A2**) and the specific formatting instructions, often referred to as the format code, enclosed in quotation marks.

The power of the TEXT function in this context stems from its ability to interpret the underlying serial number. When we apply a time-specific format code (like "H:MM") to a cell containing a full datetime, Excel automatically uses only the fractional component of that number for formatting, effectively ignoring the date component (the integer). The result is a text string that precisely represents the time.

Below are the three most common and practical formulas used to extract and format the time component from a cell assumed to be **A2**. Each formula caters to a slightly different requirement in terms of precision and time system (12-hour vs. 24-hour). These formulas ensure that the extracted time is a static text value, preventing any accidental changes if the original cell formatting were to be altered.

## Formula Breakdown: Extracting Time with Different Formats

Depending on reporting requirements, you may need the time displayed in a 12-hour clock format with AM/PM indicators, a standard 24-hour clock format, or a highly precise format including seconds. The flexibility of Excel formatting allows for all these variations simply by adjusting the format code string within the TEXT function.

The first formula is ideal for standard reports where clarity regarding morning or afternoon is essential. It utilizes the "H:MM AM/PM" format, which instructs Excel to display the hour (H) followed by the minutes (MM), and explicitly append the AM or PM designator based on the fractional value of the datetime. This results in a highly readable output, such as "2:14 AM" or "3:45 PM".

**Formula 1: Convert Datetime to Time with AM/PM** (e.g., 2:14 AM)

**=TEXT(A2,"H:MM AM/PM")**

The second formula provides a more concise output, omitting the AM/PM indicator, which is suitable for internal logs or situations where the 24-hour clock is utilized. By simply using "H:MM" as the format argument, the function extracts the time in the specified hour and minute format. It is important to note that while the output appears in 12-hour time (e.g., 14:14 would show as 2:14 if H is used), the standard time format code in Excel often relies on the computer's regional settings to determine 12-hour versus 24-hour display unless the format explicitly uses :MM for 24-hour representation. For simplicity, we stick to the provided H:MM for minute-level extraction.

**Formula 2: Convert Datetime to Time without AM/PM** (e.g., 2:14)

**=TEXT(A2,"H:MM")**

Finally, for applications requiring millisecond or second-level precision, such as analyzing financial trades or system latency, the third formula is necessary. By adding the seconds component (SS) to the format string, we ensure that the output captures the full detail contained in the fractional part of the serial number. The format "H:MM:SS" provides a high-resolution time stamp, such as "2:14:00". These formulas all assume the initial datetime value is correctly located in cell **A2**.

**Formula 3: Convert Datetime to Time with Hours, Minutes and Seconds** (e.g., 2:14:00)

**=TEXT(A2,"H:MM:SS")**

### Practical Application: Step-by-Step Example

To demonstrate the practical application of these conversion techniques, consider a scenario where we have a dataset containing a column of combined date and time entries. This scenario mimics common data logging outputs or data imported from external database sources. Our goal is to derive three separate columns, each showing the time extracted from the original datetime entry, formatted according to the three primary requirements discussed above.

Suppose we begin with the following column of datetime entries in column A of our Excel sheet, starting at cell **A2**:

	A	B	C	D	E
1	<b>Datetime</b>				
2	1/1/2023 2:14 AM				
3	1/4/2023 5:19 AM				
4	2/12/2023 10:40 PM				
5	2/14/2023 8:59 AM				
6	3/1/2023 9:34 PM				
7	7/25/2023 10:13 PM				
8	10/26/2023 1:09 AM				
9	12/1/2023 12:45 PM				
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

We will now populate columns B, C, and D with the respective time conversions. Column B will use the 12-hour AM/PM format, Column C will use the simple hour/minute format, and Column D will include seconds for maximum detail. We must enter the appropriate formula into the second row of each target column (**B2**, **C2**, and **D2**) and reference the source cell **A2**.

The following list outlines the exact formulas to be entered into the corresponding cells to convert the datetime in **A2** to the desired time format:

**B2:** =TEXT(A2,"H:MM AM/PM") (This yields "2:14 AM")

**C2:** =TEXT(A2,"H:MM") (This yields "2:14")

**D2:** =TEXT(A2,"H:MM:SS") (This yields "2:14:00")

Once the formulas are correctly entered into the starting row (row 2), the final step is to efficiently apply these calculations to the rest of the dataset. By using the fill handle--clicking and dragging the small square at the bottom-right corner of the selected cells (B2, C2, and D2) down the respective columns--we ensure that the relative cell reference **A2** automatically adjusts to **A3**, **A4**, and so forth, for every subsequent row. This action rapidly converts the entire column of datetimes into the desired time strings.

The result of applying this drag-and-fill operation is a perfectly structured table where the time component is accurately extracted and formatted into three distinct columns, enabling immediate

use in further analysis or presentation. The image below illustrates the final appearance of the spreadsheet after applying the formulas and dragging them down:

	A	B	C	D
1	<b>Datetime</b>	<b>Time (AM/PM)</b>	<b>Time (no AM/PM)</b>	<b>Time (with seconds)</b>
2	1/1/2023 2:14 AM	2:14 AM	2:14	2:14:00
3	1/4/2023 5:19 AM	5:19 AM	5:19	5:19:00
4	2/12/2023 10:40 PM	10:40 PM	22:40	22:40:00
5	2/14/2023 8:59 AM	8:59 AM	8:59	8:59:00
6	3/1/2023 9:34 PM	9:34 PM	21:34	21:34:00
7	7/25/2023 10:13 PM	10:13 PM	22:13	22:13:00
8	10/26/2023 1:09 AM	1:09 AM	1:09	1:09:00
9	12/1/2023 12:45 PM	12:45 PM	12:45	12:45:00
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				

## Deep Dive: Understanding Format Codes (H, M, S, AM/PM)

A thorough understanding of the format codes is key to mastering the TEXT function for time extraction. These codes are not arbitrary; they are specific instructions that tell Excel how to interpret and display the underlying numerical value. When dealing with time, the primary codes are H (Hours), M (Minutes), S (Seconds), and AM/PM (Meridiem designation).

The Hour code, **H**, displays the hour without leading zeros for single-digit hours (e.g., 2). Using **HH** forces a leading zero (e.g., 02). Crucially, unless a time system is specified, H typically defaults to a 12-hour display. The Minute code, **M**, operates similarly, but requires careful attention: if M is used immediately after H (H:M), it displays minutes. If M is used after D (D/M), it displays months. Therefore, when formatting time, it is standard practice to use **MM** to ensure minutes are always displayed with two digits (00-59).

The Seconds code, **SS**, ensures seconds are displayed with two digits (00-59). For high-precision requirements, you might even encounter format codes involving fractions of seconds, though SS is sufficient for most standard applications. Finally, the inclusion of **AM/PM** is what enforces the 12-hour clock standard. When AM/PM is present, Excel automatically divides the 24-hour cycle,

displaying times before noon as AM and times from noon onwards as PM. This format code is essential for user clarity and presentation.

Consider the initial formula used in cell **B2**:

```
=TEXT(A2,"H:MM AM/PM")
```

This formula uses the **TEXT** function, which allows you to change the way that a number appears by using a specific format code. In this construction, the format code "**H:MM AM/PM**" tells Excel to display the hour (**H**), minutes (**MM**), and the AM or PM status, with a colon acting as a separator. The resulting output is a perfectly formatted time string that only represents the fractional time portion of the original serial number, completely eliminating the date component from the display. The date portion is simply not shown, achieving the intended objective of focused time extraction.

## Alternative Methods for Time Isolation

While the TEXT function is preferred for generating formatted text outputs, there are mathematical methods to isolate the time component numerically, which can be useful if the output needs to remain a numerical value (allowing for time calculations like summing or averaging) rather than a text string.

One popular mathematical approach uses the MOD function. Since the date component is the integer part of the serial number and the time component is the fractional part, we can use the following formula structure: **=MOD(A2, 1)**. The MOD function returns the remainder after a number is divided by a divisor. When dividing the serial number by 1, the remainder is strictly the fractional part, which corresponds precisely to the time value.

After using **=MOD(A2, 1)**, the resulting cell will display a decimal number (e.g., 0.092). To make this output readable as a time, you must manually change the cell's number format code (via the Format Cells dialog box, typically Ctrl+1) to a time format, such as **h:mm AM/PM**. While this retains the output as a numerical value ready for calculations, it requires two steps (formula entry and manual formatting) compared to the single-step formatting provided by the TEXT function.

## Conclusion: Mastering Time Management in Spreadsheets

Effective data management in Excel often hinges on the ability to cleanly separate and format date and time components. By understanding that datetime values are complex serial numbers comprising both integer (date) and fractional (time) parts, analysts can confidently employ the right tools for extraction. The TEXT function, coupled with precise format codes such as "H:MM AM/PM," offers the most direct, flexible, and error-proof method for converting a datetime entry into a standardized, readable time string.

Whether your requirement is a high-level overview of operating hours or a detailed log tracking events down to the second, the formulas presented provide robust solutions. Mastering these techniques ensures that your data is not only accurate but also presented in a manner that facilitates immediate understanding and advanced computational analysis, reinforcing your ability to manage temporal data effectively within your spreadsheets.

**Note:** You can find the complete documentation for the **TEXT** function in Excel [here](#).

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