

# How to Rearrange Columns in Power BI with Drag and Drop

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January 9, 2026

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammed loot (2026). *How to Rearrange Columns in Power BI with Drag and Drop*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=125235>

The ability to organize and structure data effectively is paramount in any powerful analytical tool. In Power BI, the arrangement of columns plays a critical role in both data modeling efficiency and report visualization clarity. While the most intuitive method involves directly manipulating fields through simple clicking and dragging actions within the **Fields pane**, this simplicity often masks deeper organizational strategies required for complex datasets. Understanding how and when to apply different rearrangement techniques--whether for underlying data structures or for end-user report presentation--is essential for transforming raw information into actionable insights.

Beyond simple visual sorting, users can employ advanced functionalities like "Sort by Column" to define sorting criteria based on auxiliary fields, or, crucially, leverage powerful DAX functions when the goal is to permanently redefine the column sequence in a new, calculated table. This flexibility grants data professionals precise control over how their data models are structured, ensuring that every visualization, matrix, or table is presented in the most logical and meaningful order possible, thereby significantly enhancing data exploration and interpretability. Overall, the ability to rearrange columns in Power BI allows for more flexibility and control in organizing and visualizing data.

## Understanding the Importance of Data Order

In data analysis, the sequence in which columns appear is not merely an aesthetic choice; it is a fundamental aspect of data hygiene and user experience. When working in the Table View (Data View), a logical column order facilitates easier data profiling and validation, allowing data modelers to quickly trace relationships, identify dependencies, and ensure data quality before moving to the visualization stage. A disorganized schema, conversely, can lead to confusion, increased error rates, and slower model development, particularly when dealing with wide tables containing dozens of attributes.

The importance of ordering extends directly into report consumption. Users interacting with a Report View table expect critical identifying information, like names or IDs, to appear first, followed by key metrics in a predictable sequence. If financial metrics such as 'Revenue' and 'Cost' are randomly placed far apart, the cognitive load required to interpret the table increases dramatically, diminishing the report's effectiveness. Therefore, intentional column ordering directly impacts the narrative flow of the data story being told through the report, ensuring that the presentation is as clear as the underlying data is sound.

Achieving optimal order requires a strategic approach that differentiates between structural changes and cosmetic adjustments. Structural changes, often performed via tools like the Power Query Editor or DAX, physically alter the underlying data structure seen in the Model and Data Views. Cosmetic adjustments, on the other hand, are limited to the visual layer of a specific report element, such as a Matrix or Table visualization, affecting only how the columns are rendered on that particular canvas. Understanding this distinction is key to selecting the appropriate method for

rearrangement based on the required scope.

## Core Methods for Reordering Columns

Power BI offers distinct pathways for column rearrangement, tailored to the specific context--whether you are defining the inherent structure of a table or merely adjusting a visualization's presentation. These methods generally fall into two broad categories: permanent schema restructuring and temporary visualization configuration. The schema restructuring often occurs upstream, either during the data transformation phase in Power Query or when creating calculated tables using DAX, providing a lasting change to the dataset available in the model.

The most common, non-destructive method involves utilizing the drag-and-drop functionality within the **Visualizations pane** while in Report View. This is quick, intuitive, and preserves the original table structure, ensuring that changes are confined solely to that specific visual element. However, when the requirement is to ensure a default, standardized column order for all subsequent uses of a dataset, relying on visual rearrangement is insufficient for maintaining model consistency.

Consequently, addressing complex ordering requirements necessitates embracing tools that allow for explicit definition of the output schema. This leads us to the two primary scenarios that dictate the choice of technique, which often depend on whether the user needs to modify the order of columns as they appear in the fundamental data model or simply within a report visual.

### Scenario 1: Change Order of Columns in Table View

### Scenario 2: Change Order of Columns in a Table in Report View

The following detailed examples illustrate how to achieve column reordering effectively in both structural and visual contexts.

## Scenario 1: Rearranging Columns in the Data View using DAX

When the goal is to define a new, preferred column order that persists across the entire data model and is visible in the Table View (Data View), the most efficient approach often involves creating a calculated table using DAX. Unlike modifications made in Power Query, which affect the source query, this method allows for the dynamic generation of a structured table within the existing data model environment, leveraging the powerful **SELECTCOLUMNS** function to explicitly define the output structure and sequence.

Suppose we have the following table in Power BI named **my\_data** that contains information about various basketball players:

The screenshot shows the Power BI interface with the 'Table tools' ribbon active. The ribbon contains several groups of options: 'Name' (with a text box containing 'my\_data'), 'Structure' (with 'Mark as date table'), 'Relationships' (with 'Manage relationships'), and 'Calculations' (with 'New measure', 'Quick measure', 'New column', and 'New table'). Below the ribbon, a data table is displayed with the following columns and rows:

Team	Points	Assists	Rebounds
Mavs	22	4	9
Rockets	14	5	10
Spurs	19	5	4
Spurs	15	4	5
Mavs	20	8	5
Rockets	34	7	12
Spurs	37	9	4
Hornets	27	6	9
Mavs	15	5	14
Mavs	18	4	6
Hornets	10	4	7

If the desired analytical flow dictates that team affiliation should be followed immediately by rebounding statistics, then passing, and finally scoring, we must systematically define this new sequence. Suppose that we would like to change the columns to be in the following order:

**Team**

**Rebounds**

**Assists**

**Points**

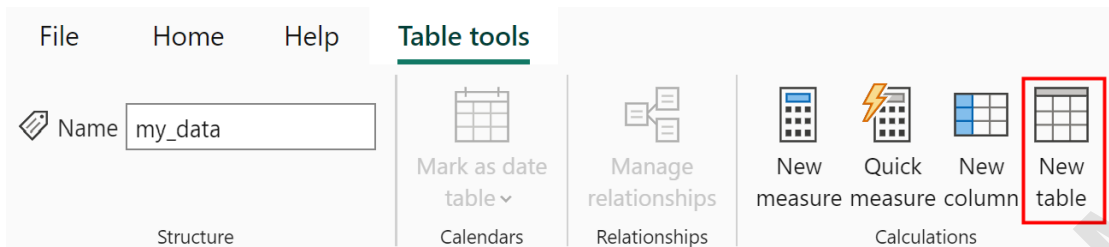
This structural change ensures that any future measure or visualization built upon this new table inherently adopts the optimized order, streamlining subsequent reporting efforts.

## Step-by-Step Guide to Applying the SELECTCOLUMNS Function

The easiest way to do this is by using the SELECTCOLUMNS function in DAX to create a new table in which the columns are in the exact order that you specify. This function is specifically designed to return a table containing only the selected columns from the source table, crucially allowing the user to rename those columns and define their exact sequence in the resulting output. The order in which the columns are listed within the function's arguments dictates their final

placement in the newly calculated table.

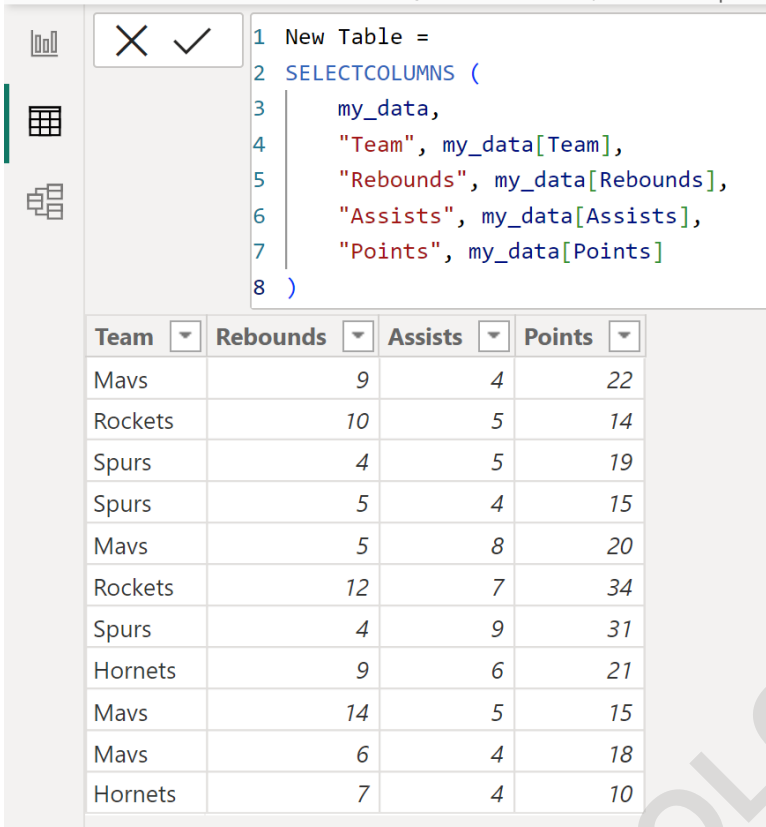
To do so, click the **Table tools** tab and then click the **New table** icon:



Then type the following formula into the formula bar, defining the exact structure of the output table:

```
New Table =  
SELECTCOLUMNS (  
my_data,  
"Team", my_data,  
"Rebounds", my_data,  
"Assists", my_data,  
"Points", my_data  
)
```

This will create a new table named **New Table** in which the columns are in the exact order that we specified. This method is highly effective for preparing streamlined datasets intended specifically for reporting or subsequent modeling steps where a fixed, optimized order is mandatory.



The screenshot shows the DAX editor in Power BI. The formula bar contains the following DAX code:

```
1 New Table =  
2 SELECTCOLUMNS (  
3     my_data,  
4     "Team", my_data[Team],  
5     "Rebounds", my_data[Rebounds],  
6     "Assists", my_data[Assists],  
7     "Points", my_data[Points]  
8 )
```

Below the formula bar, a table visualization is displayed with the following data:

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Points
Mavs	9	4	22
Rockets	10	5	14
Spurs	4	5	19
Spurs	5	4	15
Mavs	5	8	20
Rockets	12	7	34
Spurs	4	9	31
Hornets	9	6	21
Mavs	14	5	15
Mavs	6	4	18
Hornets	7	4	10

**Note:** You can find the complete documentation for the [SELECTCOLUMNS](#) function in DAX documentation, which details its advanced usage and limitations.

## Scenario 2: Controlling Column Order in the Report Visualization

In contrast to structural changes in the data model, frequently the need to rearrange columns is restricted to the visual presentation within a single report artifact, such as a table or matrix visualization. This cosmetic adjustment is simpler, non-destructive to the underlying data model, and managed entirely within the [Report View](#) interface. This scenario is ideal when the goal is to customize the display order for specific audiences or analytical contexts without impacting the global schema of the dataset.

Suppose we insert the following table in [Report View](#) that summarizes the points, assists and rebounds for each unique team:

Team	Sum of Points	Sum of Assists	Sum of Rebounds
Hornets	31	10	16
Mavs	75	21	34
Rockets	48	12	22
Spurs	65	18	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>85</b>

Suppose that we would like to change the columns in the table to be in the following order to optimize readability:

Team  
 Sum of Rebounds  
 Sum of Assists  
 Sum of Points

This rearrangement is confined solely to the selected visual, ensuring that other reports utilizing the same data source are unaffected by this localized change in presentation.

## Optimizing Report View Order using the Visualization Pane

The easiest way to do so is by clicking and dragging the column names up or down within the **Columns** pane of the **Visualizations** tab to the exact order that you'd like. This provides immediate visual feedback, allowing report developers to rapidly iterate on the optimal display sequence for their consumers. Crucially, this method works for any visualization that supports multiple data fields in a sequence.

To execute this rearrangement, first ensure the target table visualization is selected on the canvas.

Within the Visualizations pane, locate the **Columns** field well, which lists all currently included fields. Dragging a field upwards moves it earlier (to the left) in the table display, while dragging it downwards moves it later (to the right). This manual manipulation allows for precise control over the final presentation sequence without altering the data model.

Team	Sum of Rebounds	Sum of Assists	Sum of Points
Hornets	16	10	31
Mavs	34	21	75
Rockets	22	12	48
Spurs	13	18	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>219</b>

The Visualizations pane shows the following fields in the Columns field well:

- Team
- Sum of Rebounds
- Sum of Assists
- Sum of Points

Notice that the columns in the table are now in the exact order that we specified, confirming that the visual on the report canvas instantaneously updates according to the adjustments made in the Visualizations pane.

## Considerations for Choosing the Right Rearrangement Method

Selecting between structural rearrangement (DAX/Power Query) and visual rearrangement (Drag-and-Drop in [Report View](#)) depends fundamentally on the scope and permanence required for the change. If the required order is the definitive, analytical structure that every subsequent report and calculation should rely upon, then permanent structural changes are necessary. This ensures consistency and simplifies the data modeling process for downstream consumers using the [Table View](#).

The use of [SELECTCOLUMNS](#), while effective for defining a new table structure, introduces data

duplication and increased memory consumption, as a new physical table is created within the model. Therefore, this method should be reserved for cases where the default source table cannot be modified or when defining a subset of columns in a specific order is paramount for performance optimization or clarity.

Conversely, visual rearrangement is the universally preferred method for customizing the report experience. It is lightweight, non-impacting on the data model size, and highly flexible for catering to different presentation needs across various dashboards. If the primary goal is simply to make a single table look better on a single report page, utilizing the Visualizations pane is the definitive best practice. Data professionals must evaluate the trade-offs between model consistency, memory usage, and report customization flexibility before committing to a method.

## Conclusion and Best Practices

The flexibility offered by Power BI in managing column order empowers users to tailor both the underlying data structure and the final report presentation to meet specific business intelligence requirements. Whether through the calculated table generation capabilities of DAX or the intuitive drag-and-drop mechanisms in the Visualizations panes, control over data sequence is readily available, ensuring maximum clarity for data consumers.

For modelers focusing on standardization and performance, structural changes implemented via the use of calculated tables ensure that the foundational data schema is optimally arranged for query efficiency and model readability. Always prioritize rearranging columns at the earliest stage of the data pipeline possible, as this minimizes complexity later on when developing complex models.

For report developers, the visualization pane remains the most efficient and least disruptive way to control the presentation layer. Use this method liberally to enhance the user experience, ensuring that key metrics flow logically from left to right within report tables. Mastering both the structural and visual rearrangement techniques is crucial for creating robust, efficient, and highly consumable Power BI solutions.

The following tutorials explain how to perform other common tasks in Power BI: