

How to Add Data Labels from Another Column in Excel

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A frequent challenge encountered when visualizing data in Excel is the requirement to use descriptive identifiers, such as names or categories, as data labels, rather than the plotted numerical values. By default, charts in Excel often use the Y-value or X-value as the label, but when the desired label text resides in an entirely separate column, a specific customization procedure is required.

To successfully add data labels derived from a secondary data range, you must first ensure your chart is correctly generated. Subsequently, access the advanced formatting options for the data labels. This method ensures that your visualization is not only accurate in its representation of the quantitative data but also highly informative through the inclusion of relevant textual labels, making the resulting chart much easier to interpret.

It is often necessary to enrich a visual representation by applying descriptive labels that correspond to data points but are stored in an auxiliary column within the spreadsheet. This capability is especially critical for visualizations like a scatter plot, where identifying individual points is essential for comprehensive analysis. Although the process requires navigating through a few specific menu options, it is highly straightforward once the steps are understood.

The following detailed, step-by-step example walks through the entire process, starting from data entry and concluding with the successful application of custom data labels from a column distinct from those used to generate the primary plot coordinates. We will use a typical sports dataset to illustrate this advanced labeling technique, providing maximum clarity regarding the manipulation of data ranges.

Understanding Custom Data Labels in Excel

Custom data labels provide a significant advantage over standard labeling options because they allow the user to pull specific textual information directly onto the chart points. This is paramount in scenarios where the numerical values plotted (e.g., assists vs. points) must be immediately associated with a non-numeric identifier (e.g., player names) for effective communication and analysis.

The core concept involves defining two distinct data ranges: the range used for plotting the X and Y coordinates, and a separate, parallel range dedicated solely to providing the label text. Excel allows the user to link this secondary range to the chart elements through the advanced formatting pane, overriding the default behavior of displaying coordinates.

Successful implementation of custom data labels drastically enhances the narrative power of the chart. Instead of forcing the viewer to cross-reference the plotted points with a separate data table, the necessary identifying information is placed directly adjacent to the relevant point, streamlining

the data interpretation process and highlighting specific outliers or clusters within the visualization.

Prerequisite Steps: Preparing Your Data Range

Before initiating the chart creation process, careful organization of the source data is vital. For this demonstration, we are using a dataset pertaining to basketball players. This dataset includes columns for the quantitative data we intend to plot (Assists and Points) and a dedicated column for the desired labels (Player ID or Name).

It is important that the label column is structured in a manner parallel to the plotting data. This means that the label in row 5 must accurately correspond to the coordinates (Assists, Points) also located in row 5. Any misalignment between these rows will result in inaccurate labeling and misleading visualizations.

While the label column does not need to be physically adjacent to the plotted data columns, maintaining proximity or ensuring a clear organizational structure minimizes errors during the selection of the custom cell range later in the process. Ensure all required labels are present and correctly formatted (e.g., names are spelled correctly) before proceeding to chart generation.

Step 1: Entering the Sample Dataset into Excel

To begin this example, we must first populate our Excel sheet with the necessary data. The dataset we are utilizing contains performance statistics for several basketball players, detailing their assists and points, along with a custom label identifier. This setup accurately simulates real-world data analysis requirements where descriptive labels often coexist with statistical measurements.

Please enter the following dataset, ensuring the column headers are placed in row 1, and the data begins in row 2. Note the inclusion of the 'Player ID' column (Column F) which will serve as our custom label source, distinct from the plotted axes (Columns B and D). While we are only plotting assists and points, the names in column F are crucial for identifying each data point.

The structure of the data table should resemble the image shown below. Specifically, the data we are concerned with spans rows 2 through 9. Columns B (Assists) and D (Points) will form the core of the scatter plot, while column F contains the unique identifiers intended to be used as data labels for each marker.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Assists	Points				Player
2	4	13				Andy
3	5	25				Bob
4	5	22				Chad
5	9	35				Doug
6	12	30				Eric
7	6	12				Frank
8	8	10				Greg
9	8	15				Henry
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						

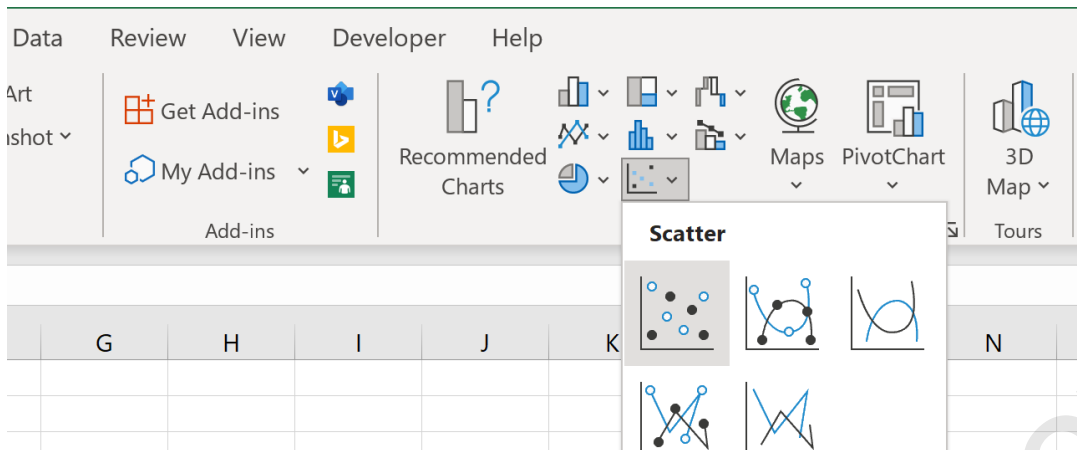
Crucially, the data labels that we will ultimately link to the chart points are specifically located in the cell range of column F. This separation emphasizes the need for the custom labeling method, as these textual values are not inherently part of the coordinates plotted on the chart axes.

Step 2: Generating the Initial Scatter Plot

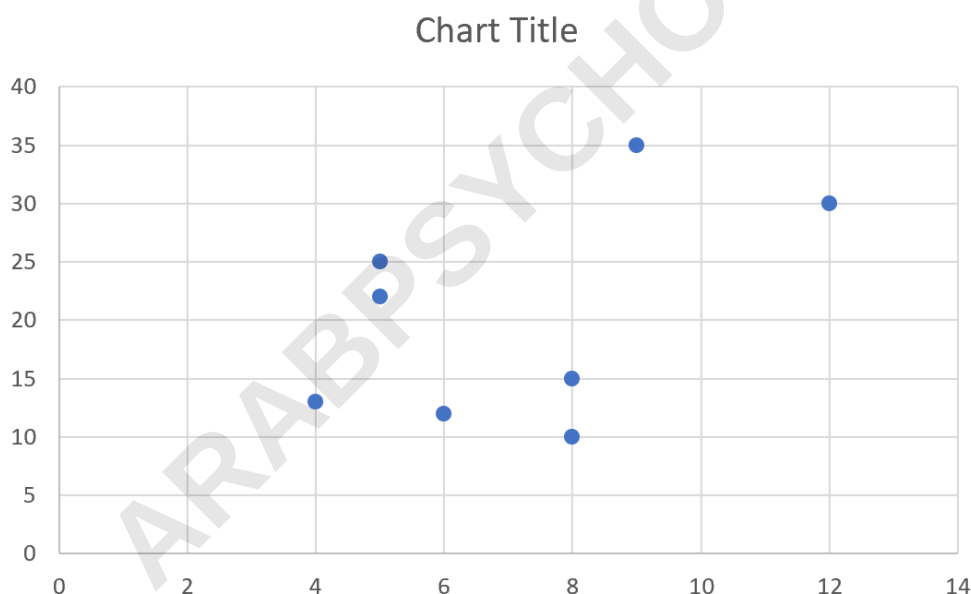
The next phase involves selecting the quantitative data and creating the base chart. Since we are comparing two numerical variables (Assists and Points), a scatter plot is the most appropriate visualization type. This chart type effectively displays the relationship, or correlation, between two sets of data.

To initiate the chart creation, carefully highlight the cells containing the numerical data required for plotting. In our example, this corresponds to the range **B2:D9**, ensuring both the Assists (X-axis) and Points (Y-axis) data are included. Once the data selection is complete, navigate to the top ribbon of Excel.

Click the **Insert tab** found along the top ribbon interface. Within the **Charts** group, locate and click the **Scatter** option. Selecting this option will prompt Excel to generate a basic scatter plot based on the highlighted coordinates, representing each player's performance as a distinct marker on the grid.



Upon execution, the following scatter plot will automatically appear on your worksheet. The visualization maps the assists values along the horizontal X-axis and the points values along the vertical Y-axis. At this stage, it is important to observe that the default data markers (the circles in the plot) do not yet contain any descriptive identifiers or data labels by default, meaning we cannot immediately discern which point belongs to which player.



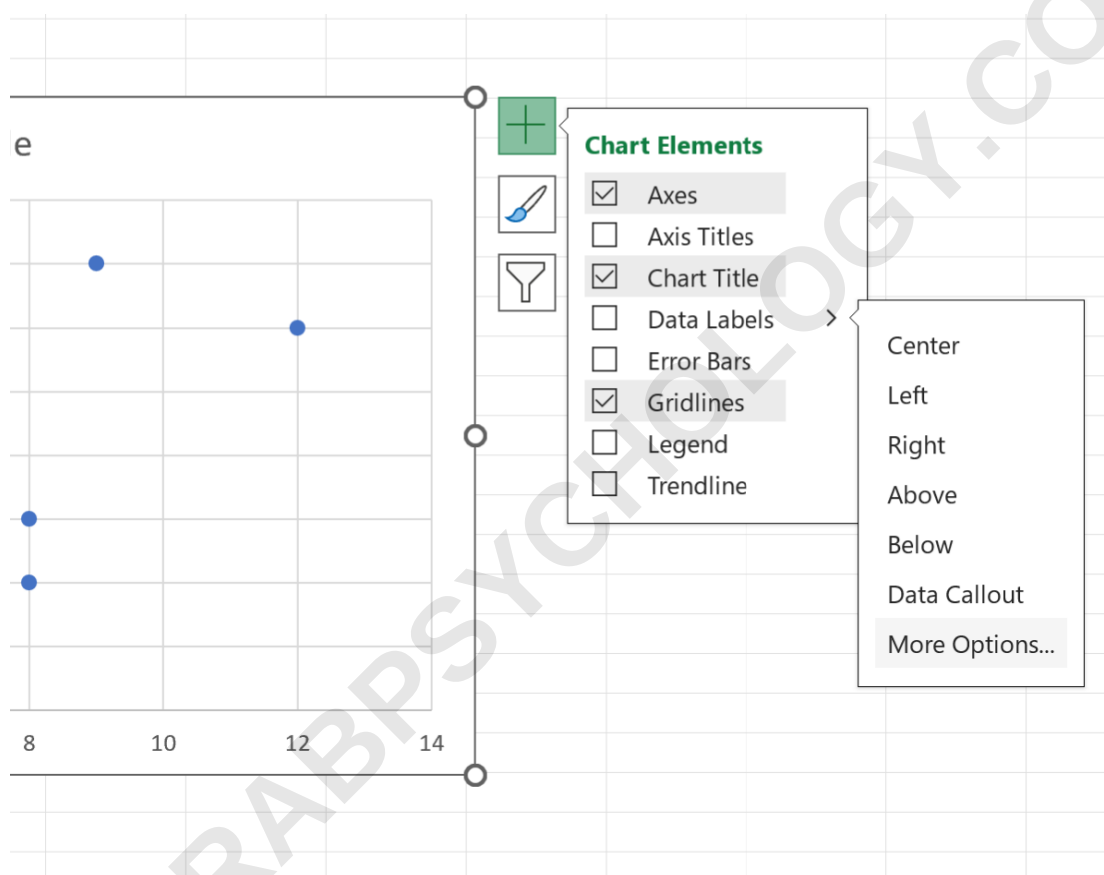
Step 3: Initiating the Data Label Customization Process

With the base chart successfully generated, the next critical step is to enable and customize the data labels to pull information from our dedicated label column (F). This process begins by accessing the chart customization tools that are available when the chart object is selected.

Click anywhere on the body of the chart to select it. Upon selection, three contextual buttons will

usually appear near the top-right corner of the chart boundary. We are interested in the green plus sign (+) icon, which represents the **Chart Elements** feature. Click this symbol to reveal a list of elements that can be added or modified on the visualization.

From the displayed list of elements, hover over the **Data Labels** option. Instead of clicking the checkbox immediately (which would apply the default numerical labels), click the small arrow that appears next to the label name. This action opens a sub-menu providing various placement and formatting choices. Within this dropdown menu, select **More Options** to open the detailed configuration task pane.



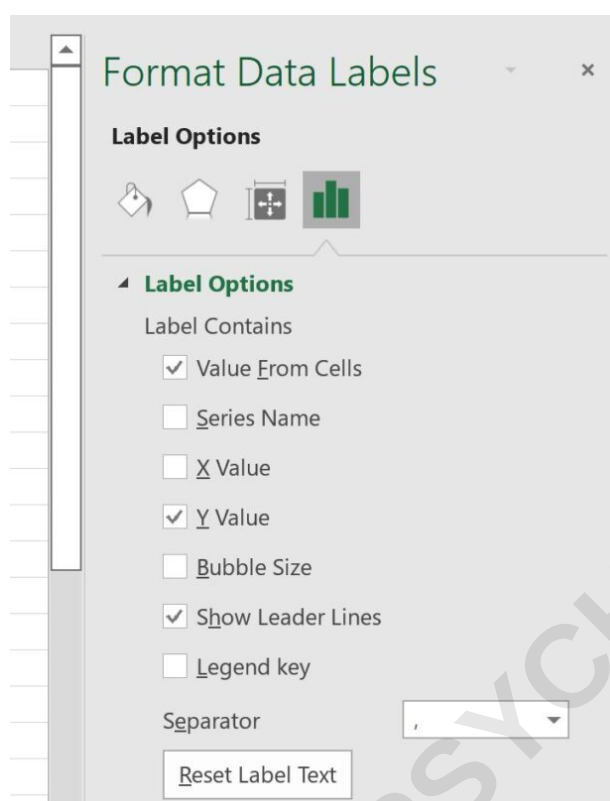
Selecting "More Options" will open the **Format Data Labels** task pane on the right side of the Excel window. This pane provides comprehensive control over the appearance, content, and position of the labels. Within this pane, you will navigate to the Label Options section, which contains the crucial setting for defining the custom data source.

Step 4: Specifying the Custom Data Label Range

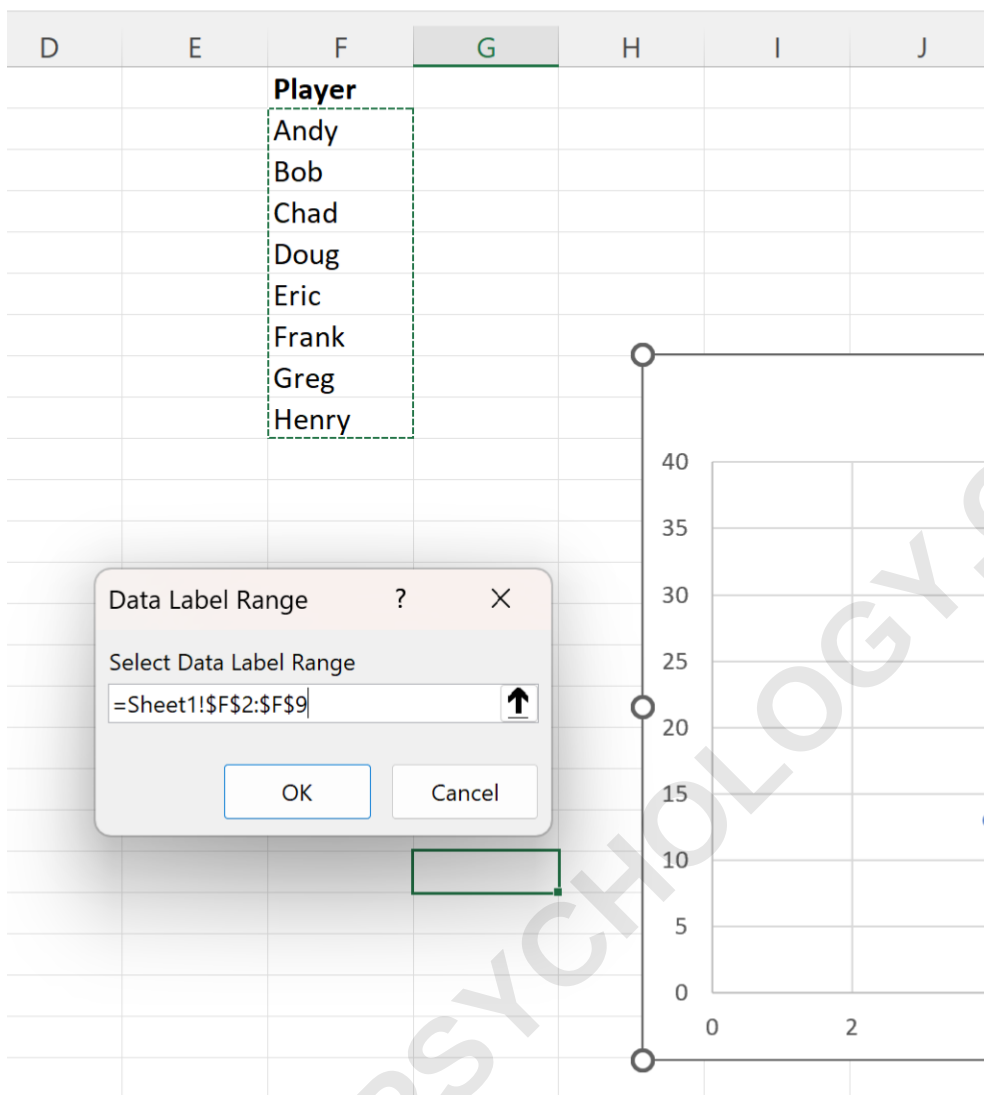
Once the **Format Data Labels** task pane is open, look for the section labeled **Label Options** (usually indicated by a chart icon). Within the formatting options, you will find several checkboxes

that determine what content the label displays (e.g., Series Name, X Value, Y Value).

The key to using an external column for labeling is the **Value From Cells** checkbox. Check this box. A new window, titled **Data Label Range**, will immediately appear, prompting you to specify the exact cell range that contains your custom labels. This is where we link Column F to our scatter plot points.



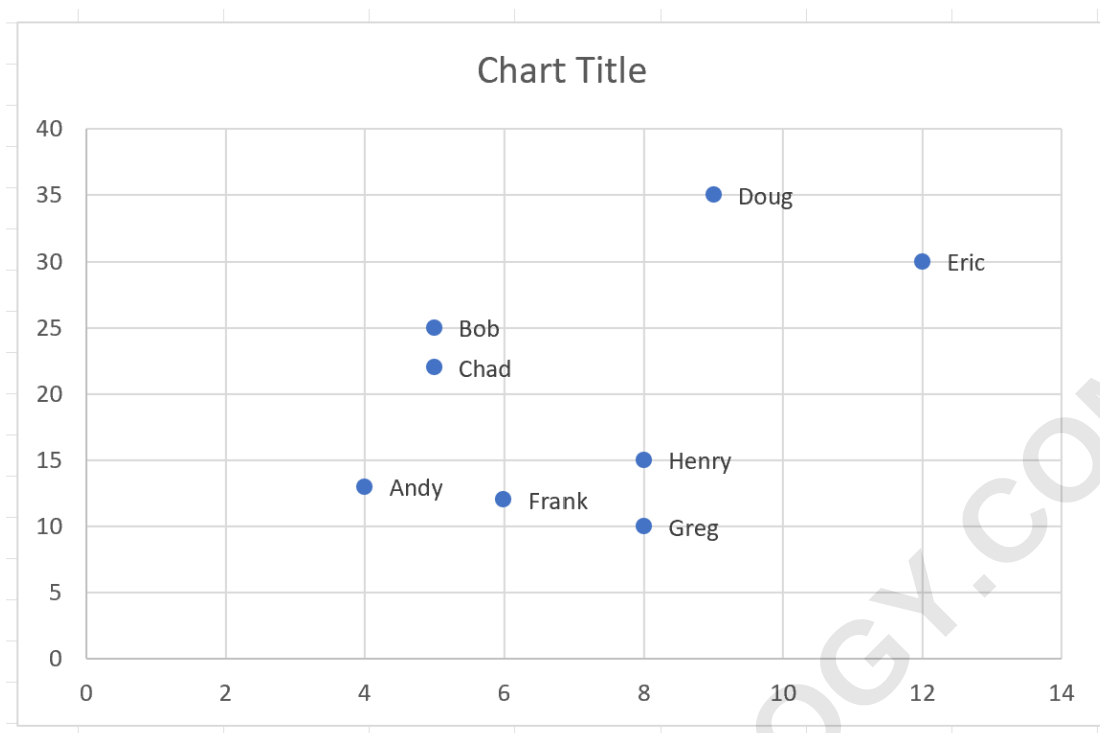
In the **Data Label Range** dialog box, input or select the cell range **F2:F9**, which holds the player identifiers we wish to display. It is paramount that this range corresponds exactly in number and order to the data points defined in Step 2. Click **OK** to confirm this selection. At this point, the player names will likely appear alongside the existing Y-Value or X-Value labels, resulting in cluttered presentation.



To finalize the customization and clean up the visual display, return to the **Format Data Labels** panel on the right side of the screen. Since we only want the custom player name labels, ensure that only the **Value From Cells** box is checked. Explicitly **uncheck** any other options, such as **Y Value** or **X Value**. This action isolates the custom label text, resulting in a clean and highly specific visualization.

Conclusion and Advanced Label Formatting Tips

Following the removal of the default numerical labels, the scatter plot will instantly update, displaying only the custom labels pulled from column F (the player identifiers). The result confirms that we have successfully added data labels from a column separate and distinct from the plotted axes to the points in our visualization.



To further enhance the readability of the visualization, consider utilizing the remaining options in the **Format Data Labels** task pane. For instance, you can adjust the label position (e.g., Center, Above, Below) to prevent overlap, especially in dense areas of the plot. Additionally, the text formatting options allow you to change the font, size, and color of the labels, potentially adding a border or background fill for improved contrast against the chart background.

Mastering this technique is fundamental for generating professional-grade charts in Excel, enabling you to clearly annotate complex data points with descriptive textual information derived from auxiliary columns. The ability to define custom label sources transforms raw numerical plots into insightful, narrative-driven visualizations.

If you are looking to explore additional advanced visualization techniques in Excel, the following resources provide further tutorials on creating and customizing other common chart types:

[How to Create a Box Plot in Excel](#)

[Using the Insert tab for Generating Pareto Charts](#)

[Step-by-Step Guide to Creating a Waterfall Chart](#)