

How can I find the first number in a text string (using excel)?

Authored by
stats writer

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1. Introduction: The Challenge of Extracting Numerical Data from Text

In modern data analysis, it is exceedingly common to encounter datasets where identifiers, codes, or metadata are stored as combined alphanumeric text strings. For users of Excel, the challenge often lies in isolating the numerical components required for calculations or sorting. Specifically, finding the **position** or **value** of the very first digit within a lengthy alphanumeric code can be a significant hurdle when performing data cleansing or transformation tasks.

While Excel offers a vast suite of functions, there is no single, dedicated command for identifying the location of the first number. Instead, expert users leverage sophisticated combinations of functions, including **MIN**, **FIND**, and **MID**, coupled with array processing techniques. These composite formulas allow for robust identification of numerical characters, regardless of their placement within the text.

This detailed guide explores two crucial formula constructs designed to solve this problem efficiently. We will first examine how to determine the precise character position where the first number appears, and subsequently, how to extract that numerical **value** itself. Mastering these techniques is fundamental for anyone dealing with structured data formats like employee IDs, product SKUs, or specialized reference codes. You can use the following formulas in Excel to find the first number in a text string:

2. Formula 1: Determining the Position of the First Digit (MIN and FIND)

The initial step in data extraction is determining where the sequence of numbers begins. The following formula utilizes array searching techniques to scan the entire string for any digit from 0 to 9, identifying the earliest instance found. This formula is designed to return the **position of the first number** in a given string.

Assuming the target text string is located in cell A2, the structure is as follows:

```
=MIN(FIND({0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9},A2&"0123456789"))
```

This formula returns the exact character position of the first number in the string.

For example, if the string is **A0095B**, the formula will return **2** since this is the position in the string where the first number ('0') occurs. The logic relies on the MIN function finding the smallest valid position returned by the array-based FIND function.

3. Formula 2: Extracting the Value of the First Digit (MID Integration)

Once the starting position is reliably identified using the **MIN/FIND** method, we can proceed to

isolate and extract the actual numerical value. This is achieved by nesting the entire position formula within the MID function.

This structure returns the **value of the first number** in the text string:

```
=MID(A2,MIN(FIND({0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9},A2&"0123456789")),1)
```

This formula returns the value of the first number in a string by starting at the calculated position and extracting one character.

For example, if the string is **A0095B**, the formula will return **0** since this is the value of the first number that occurs at the calculated position 2 in the string. Note that the result of the MID function is always text, even if the extracted character is a digit.

4. Preparing the Example Dataset for Analysis

The following example demonstrates how to utilize both formulas in practice against a common business dataset--a list of employee ID strings in Excel. These IDs often pose a challenge because of their mixed alphanumeric nature, requiring precise character manipulation.

This initial view shows the raw Employee ID data located in Column A, which will be the source data for our calculations in Column B:

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Employee ID				
2	A0095B				
3	43387BR				
4	BCDD7D				
5	8002DE				
6	RR0038				
7	D5D7809				
8	RTJT804				
9	ER9220G				
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					

By systematically applying the formulas to this list, we can quickly derive the necessary positional and numerical information required for data cleaning or advanced sorting operations.

5. Example 1: Determining and Returning the Position of the First Number

In this first practical application, our goal is to populate Column B with the starting position of the first numerical digit found in each Employee ID string in Column A. This information is vital for fixed-width data parsing or subsequent text splitting.

We begin by typing the following formula into cell **B2**. This uses the **MIN/FIND** combination to determine the earliest occurrence of any digit (0 through 9) within the string:

=MIN(FIND({0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9},A2&"0123456789"))

After entering the formula into B2, we utilize the autofill feature--clicking and dragging this formula down--to apply the logic to each remaining cell in column B:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Employee ID	Position of First Number				
2	A0095B	2				
3	43387BR	1				
4	BCDD7D	5				
5	8002DE	1				
6	RR0038	3				
7	D5D7809	2				
8	RTJT804	5				
9	ER9220G	3				
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						

As evident in the output, Column B successfully returns the position of the first number in each corresponding text string in column A, allowing for immediate positional reference.

The first number in **A0095B** occurs in position **2** of the string.

The first number in **43387BR** occurs in position **1** of the string, as it is the very first character.

The first number in **BCDD7D** occurs much later, specifically in position **5** of the string.

This method reliably identifies the exact starting point of the numerical data sequence, regardless of how many alphanumeric characters precede it.

6. Example 2: Utilizing MID to Return the Value of the First Number

Building upon the positional knowledge, we now implement the full extraction formula using the MID function to isolate the specific numerical character at the identified starting position.

We type the complete nested formula into cell **B2** to return the value of the first number in the Employee ID text string:

=MID(A2,MIN(FIND({0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9},A2&"0123456789")),1)

We then click and drag this formula down to each remaining cell in column B, effectively extracting the first digit for the entire dataset:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Employee ID	Value of First Number					
2	A0095B	0					
3	43387BR	4					
4	BCDD7D	7					
5	8002DE	8					
6	RR0038	0					
7	D5D7809	5					
8	RTJT804	8					
9	ER9220G	9					
10							
11							
12							
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							

Column B now returns the exact numerical value of the first number found in each corresponding text string in column A.

For example:

The value of the first number in **A0095B** is **0**.

The value of the first number in **43387BR** is **4**.

The value of the first number in **BCDD7D** is **7**.

7. Conclusion: Mastering Data Cleansing Techniques in Excel

The ability to quickly and accurately locate and extract specific character types--such as the first numerical digit--from complex text strings is a cornerstone of proficient data management in Excel. By utilizing the combined power of the MIN function, the FIND function, and the MID function, analysts can overcome common limitations imposed by unstructured alphanumeric data.

These array-based formula solutions offer superior performance and flexibility compared to

simpler, repetitive search methods. Whether the goal is to standardize unique identifiers, prepare data for database migration, or simply clean up imported reports, these two formulas provide the necessary tools for powerful text manipulation.

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