How to Easily Remove the First Two Digits from Excel Cells

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In the contemporary landscape of professional data management, the ability to efficiently manipulate and clean datasets is a fundamental skill for any analyst. Within the robust environment of **Microsoft Excel**, users frequently encounter scenarios where specific characters must be extracted or removed to maintain consistency across a **Spreadsheet**. This task, often categorized under the broader umbrella of **Data Cleaning**, is especially critical when dealing with imported data from external databases or **CSV** files that include unwanted prefixes. Whether you are dealing with country codes in telephone numbers, legacy department codes in employee identifiers, or standardized prefixes in inventory SKU numbers, knowing how to strip the first few digits programmatically is essential for accurate data processing and reporting.

The process of removing the first 2 digits from a **Cell** is not merely about aesthetic cleanliness; it is about ensuring that the data remains functional for subsequent operations like sorting, filtering, or performing lookups. When data is cluttered with unnecessary leading characters, standard formulas may fail to recognize matching values, leading to errors in complex financial models or administrative logs. By utilizing built-in text functions, **Excel** provides a non-destructive way to transform these strings into a more usable format without losing the integrity of the original source information. This guide provides a comprehensive overview of how to achieve this using a combination of logical functions designed for text manipulation.

To remove the first 2 digits from a cell in **Excel**, follow these steps:

Select the cell or cells that contain the data you want to edit.
Right-click on the selected cells and choose "Format Cells" from the drop-down menu.
In the "Format Cells" window, go to the "Number" tab.
In the "Category" section, select "Custom."
In the "Type" section, enter the following formula:

=RIGHT(A1,LEN(A1)-2)

Note: A1 refers to the cell you want to edit. If you are editing multiple cells, the formula will automatically adjust for each cell. Click "OK" to apply the formula and remove the first 2 digits from the selected cells.

Remove First 2 Digits from Cell in Excel

Often you may want to remove the first 2 digits from a cell in **Excel** to streamline your data analysis tasks.

You can use the **RIGHT** function combined with the **LEN** function to do so effectively across any range of data:

=RIGHT(A2,LEN(A2)-2)

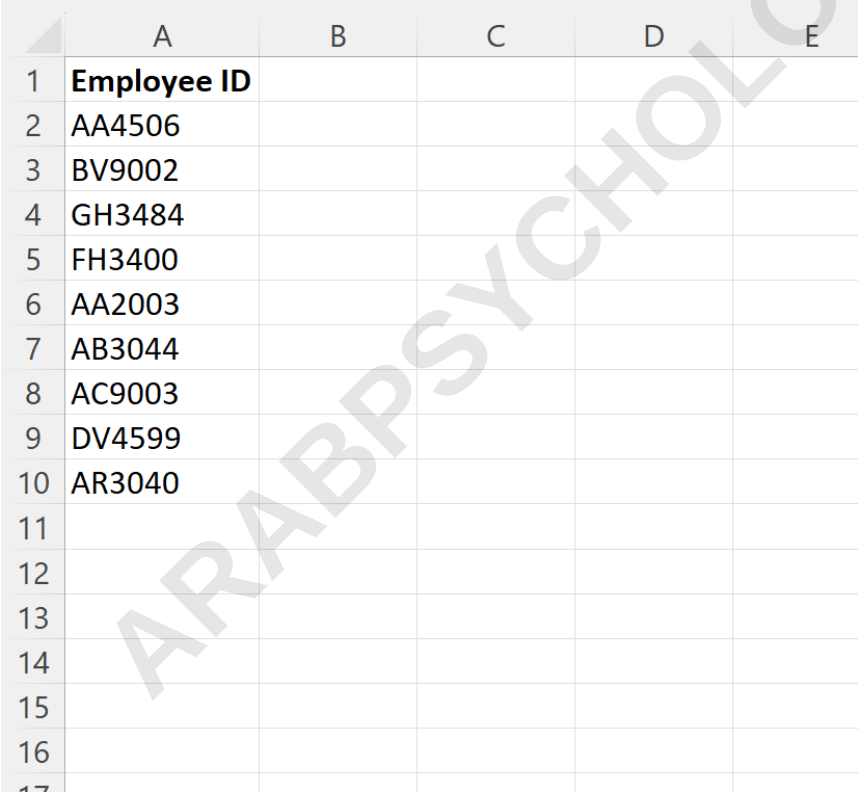
This particular formula removes the first 2 digits from cell **A2** by calculating the total length of the **String** and subtracting the prefix.

For example, if cell **A2** contains **AA4506** then this formula would return just **4506**, effectively stripping the alpha characters and leaving only the numeric portion.

The following example shows how to use this formula in practice, illustrating the transformation of raw data into a clean, standardized format.

Example: Remove First 2 Digits from Cell in Excel

Suppose we have the following list of employee ID's in **Excel**, where each ID is prefixed with a two-letter department code that is no longer required for our specific report:



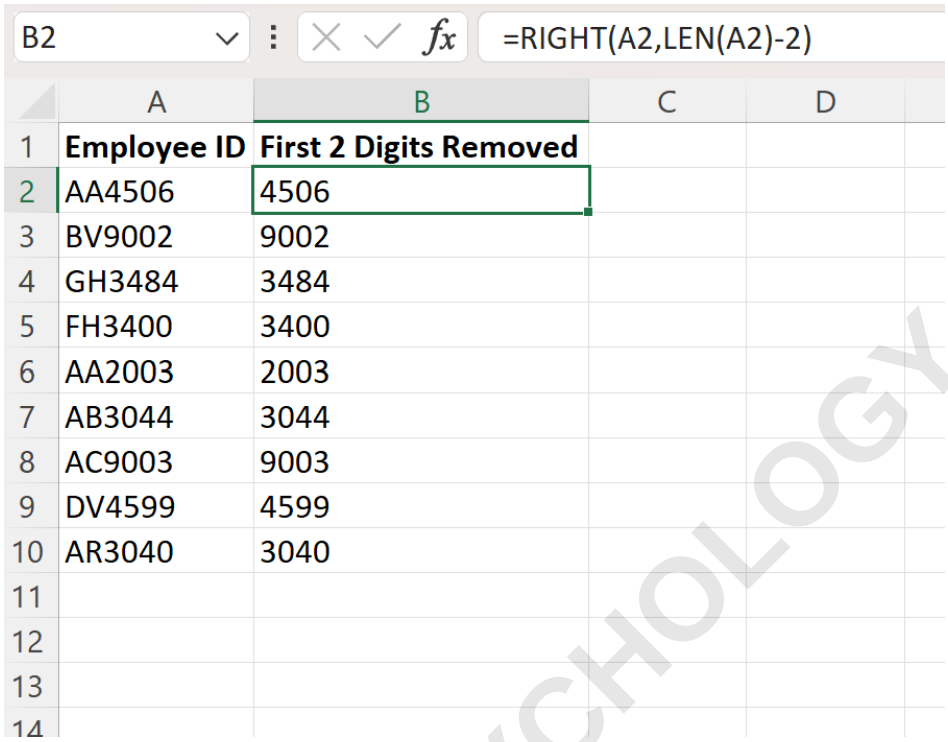
	A	B	C	D	E
1	**Employee ID**				
2	AA4506				
3	BV9002				
4	GH3484				
5	FH3400				
6	AA2003				
7	AB3044				
8	AC9003				
9	DV4599				
10	AR3040				
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					

Suppose we would like to remove the first two digits from each employee ID to isolate the unique identification number for a system migration.

We can type the following formula into cell **B2** to do so, utilizing a relative reference so the formula can be easily scaled:

=RIGHT(A2,LEN(A2)-2)

We can then click and drag this formula down to each remaining cell in column B, allowing **Excel** to automatically update the cell references for each row:



	A	B	C	D
1	**Employee ID**	**First 2 Digits Removed**		
2	AA4506	4506		
3	BV9002	9002		
4	GH3484	3484		
5	FH3400	3400		
6	AA2003	2003		
7	AB3044	3044		
8	AC9003	9003		
9	DV4599	4599		
10	AR3040	3040		
11				
12				
13				
14				

Column B now displays the employee ID's in column A with the first two digits removed from each employee ID, resulting in a clean list of numerical values.

Understanding the Formula Logic

The **RIGHT** function in **Excel** is designed to extract a specific number of characters starting from the far-right side of a text **String**. By itself, the function requires two arguments: the text source and the number of characters you wish to retain. However, when the goal is to remove a fixed number of characters from the beginning, the total number of characters to retain varies based on the length of each individual cell.

This is where the **LEN** function becomes indispensable; it calculates the total character count of a given cell. By nesting the **LEN** function within the **RIGHT** function and subtracting 2, you are essentially telling the software to determine the length of the entire string and then return everything except for the first two characters.

Thus, our formula tells **Excel** to extract the amount of characters equal to the length of the string

minus two characters, providing a dynamic solution that works regardless of whether the original ID is five characters long or fifty characters long.

Note: **Whitespace** characters or blank spaces at the start of a string count as characters just like letters or numbers. If your data contains inconsistent spacing, you may need to first apply the **TRIM** function to remove blank spaces to get your desired result and ensure accuracy in your **Data Cleaning** process.

Alternative Method: Using the MID Function

While the combination of **RIGHT** and **LEN** is highly effective, another popular approach involves the **MID** function. The **MID** function is designed to return a specific number of characters from the middle of a text **String**, given a starting position and a length. To remove the first two digits, you would set the starting position to 3, effectively skipping the first two characters entirely.

The syntax for this method would be **=MID(A2, 3, LEN(A2))**. In this configuration, the formula starts at the third character and extracts a total number of characters equal to the length of the original string. Because the starting point is character three, **Excel** naturally stops once it reaches the end of the text, providing an identical result to the previous method without the need for subtraction.

Many advanced users prefer the **MID** function because it is slightly more intuitive for removing prefixes. It explicitly defines where the "good" data begins. Regardless of which function you choose, both methods are foundational to high-level **Data Cleaning** and ensure that your **Spreadsheet** remains professional and error-free.

Utilizing Flash Fill for Rapid Results

For users who prefer a more visual or automated approach without writing complex formulas, **Excel** offers a powerful feature known as **Flash Fill**. This tool uses pattern recognition technology to sense what you are trying to accomplish and completes the task for you across the entire dataset. To use this, you simply type the desired result for the first two cells in an adjacent column, and **Excel** will suggest a completion for the rest of the column.

Flash Fill is particularly useful for one-time tasks where you do not need the results to update dynamically if the source data changes. While formulas are better for live dashboards, this feature is a significant time-saver for quick data audits. It effectively identifies the removal of the first two digits as the intended pattern and applies that logic to thousands of rows in a matter of seconds.

To activate this feature, you can navigate to the Data tab on the ribbon and click the **Flash Fill** button, or simply press **Ctrl+E** on your keyboard. This shortcut is a favorite among data

professionals who need to perform rapid **Data Cleaning** without getting bogged down in syntax.

Advanced Cleaning with Power Query

When dealing with massive datasets that exceed the standard row limits of a **Spreadsheet**, or when the data transformation needs to be part of a repeatable pipeline, **Power Query** is the superior choice. This engine allows you to perform advanced transformations, including removing a set number of leading characters, through a user-friendly graphical interface. Within the **Power Query** editor, you can select a column and use the "Transform" options to "Remove Characters" from the "Start" of the string.

The primary advantage of using **Power Query** is that every step you take is recorded. If you refresh your data source with new information next month, the tool will automatically apply the "Remove first 2 digits" step to the new data, ensuring consistency without any manual intervention. This is a cornerstone of modern business intelligence and data engineering workflows within the **Excel** ecosystem.

Furthermore, **Power Query** can handle complex logic that simple formulas might struggle with, such as removing digits only if they are numeric, or removing a variable number of characters based on a delimiter. For anyone looking to scale their data processing capabilities, mastering these tools is a logical next step after learning basic text functions.

Best Practices and Troubleshooting

When applying these techniques, it is crucial to keep a few best practices in mind to avoid common pitfalls. First, always work on a copy of your data or in a new column to ensure that you do not accidentally overwrite your original source values. Data loss can be catastrophic in financial or research settings, so maintaining a backup of the raw **String** data is highly recommended.

Secondly, be mindful of the data type in the resulting **Cell**. If you remove the first two digits from a string and the remaining characters are numbers, **Excel** might still treat the result as text. If you need to perform mathematical calculations on the result, you can wrap your formula in the **VALUE** function, like so: **=VALUE(RIGHT(A2, LEN(A2)-2))**. This converts the text string back into a numeric format that can be summed, averaged, or used in charts.

Finally, always check for hidden **Whitespace**. Non-printing characters can often sneak into datasets during exports from web-based tools. Using the **CLEAN** and **TRIM** functions in conjunction with your character removal formulas will ensure that you are targeting exactly the two digits you intended to remove, leading to a much higher success rate in your **Data Cleaning** efforts.

The following tutorials explain how to perform other common operations in **Excel**, helping you build a comprehensive toolkit for data management and analysis: