

How to Count Cells with Multiple OR Criteria Using COUNTIF in Excel

Authored by
stats writer

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Analyzing large datasets often requires counting occurrences that satisfy multiple conditions simultaneously. While the standard COUNTIF function is excellent for single-criterion counting, combining it with OR statement logic--the ability to count if **Criteria A** is met *or* if **Criteria B** is met--is essential for comprehensive data analysis in Excel. Achieving this logical disjunction requires a powerful combination of **COUNTIF** and the SUM function, typically leveraging an array constant.

This technique transforms the single-criterion capability of the COUNTIF function into a versatile counting mechanism. Instead of running multiple separate formulas for each condition, we embed all desired conditions into a single formula using an array. This array causes **COUNTIF** to iterate through the criteria internally, returning a count for each condition met within the specified range. The overarching SUM function then aggregates these individual results, delivering the total count of cells that satisfy at least one of the criteria defined in the array.

Mastering this combined approach is critical for efficiency when dealing with high-volume data. It significantly reduces complexity and improves formula readability compared to chaining multiple standard functions together. This guide will detail the exact syntax and provide step-by-step examples demonstrating how to implement **COUNTIF** with OR logic successfully in various real-world scenarios, from counting text strings to applying numerical comparisons.

Understanding the SUM(COUNTIF) Array Logic

When you need to count cells that meet one of several alternative criteria, the straightforward application of the COUNTIF function is insufficient because it is designed to evaluate only a single condition at a time. To simulate the logical OR statement, we must structure the criteria as an array constant and wrap the entire expression within the SUM function.

The core principle is that **COUNTIF** processes the provided array constant, which contains all the OR criteria, and treats each criterion as a separate calculation. If the array contains three values, **COUNTIF** essentially performs three distinct counts on the specified range. The result is not a single number, but an array of numbers, where each number represents the count for its respective criterion.

For instance, if you are counting cells equal to "Value1", "Value2", or "Value3", the COUNTIF function returns `{Count for Value1, Count for Value2, Count for Value3}`. Since we are interested in the total number of cells matching *any* of these criteria, we use the SUM function to efficiently add up these individual counts, providing the final, cumulative result.

General Syntax and Formula Breakdown

The syntax employed to combine these functions for OR logic is standard and highly versatile. It involves specifying the range to be evaluated and then listing all required criteria within curly

braces, forming the crucial array constant.

You can use the following basic syntax to count the number of cells in a range that meet one of several criteria:

=SUM(COUNTIF(A:A,{"Value1", "Value2", "Value3"}))

This particular formula counts the number of cells in column **A** that are equal to "Value1", "Value2", or "Value3." Notice the comma separation within the curly braces, which acts as the delimiter for the array elements, signifying the different OR statement conditions.

It is important to understand the role of the SUM function here. While older versions of Excel required array entry (Ctrl+Shift+Enter) for this formula to execute correctly, modern versions (like Excel 365 or newer desktop versions) often automatically handle the array operation within this specific **SUM(COUNTIF)** structure, making the entry process seamless. The use of the curly braces `{}` defines the conditions as an array constant, instructing **COUNTIF** to calculate multiple results simultaneously.

Example 1: Counting Multiple Text Criteria

To solidify this concept, let us apply the **SUM(COUNTIF)** formula to a practical scenario involving text criteria. Suppose we have a dataset listing basketball teams, and we want to determine how many entries belong to the "East" or "South" regions.

Consider the following dataset in Excel that shows information about various basketball teams:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Division	Team	Points			
2	West	Mavericks	99			
3	South	Hawks	95			
4	West	Suns	98			
5	West	Spurs	105			
6	West	Rockets	103			
7	West	Lakers	114			
8	East	Celtics	109			
9	East	Hornets	85			
10	West	Blazers	91			
11	North	Knicks	95			
12	North	Bulls	99			
13	South	Magic	104			
14	South	Heat	103			
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						

Our goal is to count all occurrences in the "Team" column (Column A) that meet either the condition "East" or the condition "South". Since these are text strings, they must be enclosed in double quotes within the array constant.

We can use the following formula to count the number of cells in column **A** that have a value of "East" or "South":

=SUM(COUNTIF(A:A,{"East", "South"}))

When executed, the COUNTIF function first counts the occurrences of "East" (which is 2) and then counts the occurrences of "South" (which is 3). It returns the array `{2, 3}`. The outer SUM function then adds these values together, resulting in the final count of 5.

The following screenshot illustrates the implementation and the resulting total count:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Division	Team	Points		Count of "East" or "South"	
2	West	Mavericks	99		5	
3	South	Hawks	95			
4	West	Suns	98			
5	West	Spurs	105			
6	West	Rockets	103			
7	West	Lakers	114			
8	East	Celtics	109			
9	East	Hornets	85			
10	West	Blazers	91			
11	North	Knicks	95			
12	North	Bulls	99			
13	South	Magic	104			
14	South	Heat	103			
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We can confirm that a total of **5** cells have a value of "East" or "South" in column **A**. This powerful method ensures that we count every cell that meets at least one of the specified criteria without double-counting, as the criteria are mutually exclusive.

Example 2: Counting Specific Numeric Criteria

The **SUM(COUNTIF)** structure is not limited to text strings; it is equally effective when dealing with specific numeric values that are spread across a dataset. When utilizing numbers in the array constant, an important distinction must be made regarding the use of quotation marks.

Unlike text criteria, which require quotes, specific numbers listed within the array constant should generally **not** be enclosed in quotes if you are looking for an exact match. If we were to quote the numbers, Excel might treat them as text strings, potentially leading to errors or inaccurate results if the comparison is strictly numeric.

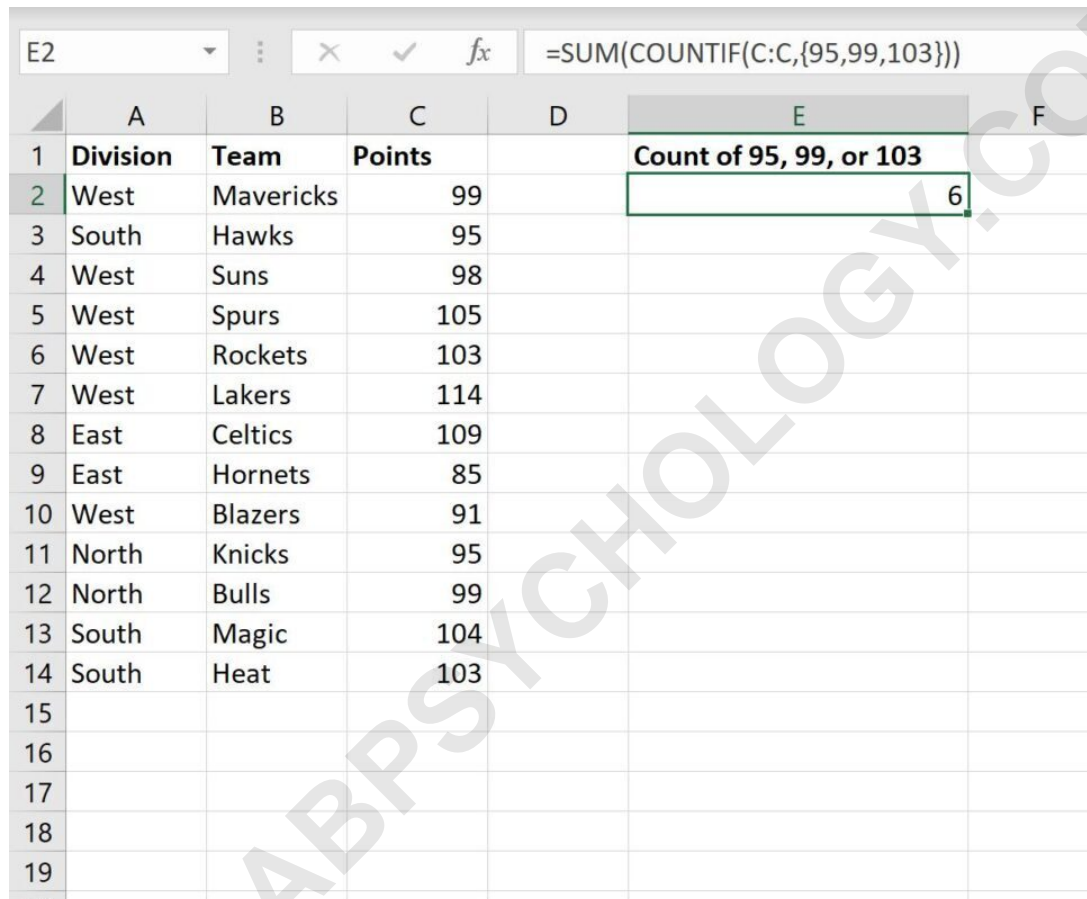
For example, suppose we want to count the number of basketball players whose score (in column **C**) is exactly 95, 99, or 103. We use the following syntax, ensuring the numerical criteria within the array are unquoted:

We can use the following formula to count the number of cells in column **C** that have a value of 95, 99, or 103:

=SUM(COUNTIF(C:C,{95, 99, 103}))

The formula processes each numeric condition separately: it counts the 95s, then the 99s, and finally the 103s. The outer SUM function adds the results of these three counts together to yield the final, comprehensive total.

The following screenshot shows how to use this formula in practice:



	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Division	Team	Points		Count of 95, 99, or 103	
2	West	Mavericks	99		6	
3	South	Hawks	95			
4	West	Suns	98			
5	West	Spurs	105			
6	West	Rockets	103			
7	West	Lakers	114			
8	East	Celtics	109			
9	East	Hornets	85			
10	West	Blazers	91			
11	North	Knicks	95			
12	North	Bulls	99			
13	South	Magic	104			
14	South	Heat	103			
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Based on the data shown, we can see that a total of **6** cells have a value of 95, 99, or 103 in column **C**. This demonstrates the versatility of using the COUNTIF function combined with the SUM function for multiple exact matches, regardless of whether the target values are text or numbers.

Example 3: Handling Comparative Operators with OR Logic

A more complex requirement involves counting cells that satisfy conditions based on inequalities (greater than, less than, greater than or equal to, etc.). When using comparative operators within the COUNTIF function, whether inside an array or not, the entire criterion (the operator and the

value) must be treated as a text string and enclosed in double quotation marks.

This convention is necessary because the operator (like `>` or `<`) is a literal character, and Excel requires text criteria to be quoted. Since we are implementing an OR statement, we simply list these quoted comparative criteria within the array constant.

For example, we can use the following formula to count the number of cells in column **C** that have a value greater than 100 *or* less than 90:

=SUM(COUNTIF(C:C,{">100", "<90"}))

In this structure, the **COUNTIF** function generates two separate counts: one for all values meeting `*>100*` and one for all values meeting `*<90*`. The SUM function then combines these results to give the total count of cells falling outside the inclusive range of 90 to 100.

The following screenshot shows how to use this formula in practice, confirming the successful application of multiple comparative criteria:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Division	Team	Points		Points < 90 or Points > 100	
2	West	Mavericks	99		7	
3	South	Hawks	95			
4	West	Suns	98			
5	West	Spurs	105			
6	West	Rockets	103			
7	West	Lakers	114			
8	East	Celtics	109			
9	East	Hornets	85			
10	West	Blazers	91			
11	North	Knicks	95			
12	North	Bulls	99			
13	South	Magic	104			
14	South	Heat	103			
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We can see that a total of **7** cells have a value greater than 100 *or* less than 90 in column **C**. This method is highly effective for quickly isolating outliers or measuring frequency across disparate value ranges within a dataset.

Refining Your OR Logic: Avoiding Common Pitfalls

While the **SUM(COUNTIF)** structure is robust, analysts should be aware of a few nuances. One common mistake is failing to enclose text criteria or comparative operators (like `>100`) in quotation marks, which causes Excel to return a `#VALUE!` error or incorrect results. Always remember that any criteria that isn't a simple, unquoted number reference must be contained within double quotes inside the array constant.

Another important consideration is handling criteria that might overlap. For instance, if you count cells that are "greater than 50" OR "less than 100," most cells will satisfy both conditions. However, the **SUM(COUNTIF)** array method counts the matches for each criterion independently and then adds them up. If a cell matches both criteria, it is counted twice. This approach is only suitable when criteria are mutually exclusive (like "East" OR "South") or when double-counting overlapping categories is acceptable for the analysis.

If you need to count based on conditions that are **not** mutually exclusive and must enforce strict OR logic (meaning a cell is counted only once even if it meets multiple criteria), alternative functions like **SUMPRODUCT** combined with logical tests might be more appropriate, although they often involve more complex syntax. For standard, specific OR counting where criteria are distinct, **SUM(COUNTIF)** remains the simplest and most efficient method.

Related COUNTIF Operations and Advanced Counting

Understanding the array constant methodology opens the door to more sophisticated counting and aggregation techniques in Excel. While **COUNTIF** handles single-range criteria, related functions allow for counting cells based on multiple criteria across multiple ranges, known as AND logic (requiring Criteria A **and** Criteria B to be met). This is typically achieved using the **COUNTIFS** function.

The following tutorials explain how to perform other common **COUNTIF()** operations in Excel, building upon the foundational knowledge of criteria application:

Tutorial on implementing AND logic using **COUNTIFS** across different columns.

Methods for counting based on dates, wildcards, and partial matches within the COUNTIF function.

Advanced uses of the **SUMPRODUCT** function for flexible array calculations that substitute for traditional array entry formulas.

By combining the simplicity of COUNTIF with the power of array manipulation, analysts can quickly tackle complex counting tasks that would otherwise require tedious manual filtering or helper columns.