

# How to Perform an ANCOVA in Excel and Analyze Results

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## Understanding ANCOVA and Its Application in Statistical Analysis

The **Analysis of Covariance**, commonly referred to as ANCOVA, represents a sophisticated statistical procedure that blends the principles of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with linear regression. The primary objective of an ANCOVA is to evaluate whether the means of a dependent variable are equal across levels of a categorical independent variable--often called a factor--while statistically controlling for the effects of other continuous variables that are not of primary interest. These additional variables are known as **covariates**. By incorporating these covariates into the model, researchers can reduce the error variance and provide a more precise estimate of the treatment effect, thereby increasing the statistical power of the test.

Performing an ANCOVA is particularly beneficial when experimental control is difficult to achieve. In many real-world scenarios, such as educational research or clinical trials, subjects may differ in ways that could influence the outcome of the study. For instance, if a researcher is testing the efficacy of a new teaching method, the students' prior knowledge or baseline intelligence acts as a nuisance variable. By using Microsoft Excel to perform an ANCOVA, the researcher can adjust the final exam scores based on these initial differences, ensuring that the observed differences in group means are truly attributable to the teaching method rather than pre-existing disparities among the participants.

While specialized statistical software like SPSS or R is often used for such complex calculations, Microsoft Excel remains a highly accessible and versatile tool for performing these analyses. Although Excel does not feature a dedicated "ANCOVA" button within its standard Data Analysis Toolpak, the procedure can be executed systematically by utilizing a combination of regression functions and ANOVA tools. This tutorial provides a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to mastering this technique, ensuring that your data analysis is both rigorous and accurate.

### Defining the Experimental Scenario: A Practical Use Case

To illustrate the practical application of an ANCOVA, let us consider a scenario involving an educator who wishes to determine the effectiveness of three distinct studying techniques. The teacher has divided a class into three groups, each utilizing a different method to prepare for a final examination. However, the teacher recognizes that a student's performance on the final exam is likely influenced by their **current grade** in the class. To isolate the impact of the studying techniques, the teacher must account for this pre-existing academic standing. Without this adjustment, a group that happens to have higher-performing students might appear to benefit more from a technique simply because they were already excelling.

In this specific study, the teacher will utilize the following **statistical variables** to perform the analysis:

**Factor Variable:** The independent categorical variable, which in this case is the specific **studying technique** applied to each group.

**Covariate:** The continuous variable being controlled, which is the **current grade** of each student prior to the experiment.

**Response Variable:** The dependent variable being measured, which is the **exam score** achieved after using the assigned studying technique.

The study involves 15 students, with five students assigned to each of the three studying techniques. The data must be organized meticulously to ensure that the relationship between the covariate and the response variable can be analyzed across all groups. The following table illustrates the dataset as it would appear in a raw format before being processed for the ANCOVA procedure:

Student	Study Technique	Current Grade	Exam Score
Student 1	A	67	77
Student 2	A	88	89
Student 3	A	75	72
Student 4	A	77	74
Student 5	A	85	69
Student 6	B	92	78
Student 7	B	69	88
Student 8	B	77	93
Student 9	B	74	94
Student 10	B	88	90
Student 11	C	96	85
Student 12	C	91	81
Student 13	C	88	83
Student 14	C	82	88
Student 15	C	80	79

## Step 1: Organizing and Structuring Data for Analysis

The first critical phase in performing an ANCOVA within Microsoft Excel is the structured input of data. Proper formatting is essential because Excel's mathematical functions require specific ranges to calculate **variances** and **means** accurately. You should arrange your data so that the **covariate** (Current Grade) and the **response variable** (Exam Score) for each group are placed in adjacent columns. This side-by-side layout facilitates the calculation of slopes and other regression components necessary for the adjusted means.

When inputting the data, ensure that each row represents a unique observation--in this case, an individual student. The columns should be clearly labeled to avoid confusion during the later stages of the analysis. A clean data structure not only prevents errors but also makes the final results

easier to interpret for stakeholders or academic peers. High-quality data management is a cornerstone of data analysis, and taking the time to format your spreadsheet correctly will save significant effort during the computational steps.

Refer to the image below for the recommended data configuration in Excel. Note how the studying techniques are categorized, and the corresponding grades and scores are aligned for each participant:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1		<b>Exam Scores</b>				<b>Current Grade</b>			
2									
3		Technique A	Technique B	Technique C		Technique A	Technique B	Technique C	
4		77	78	85		67	92	96	
5		89	88	81		88	69	91	
6		72	93	83		75	77	88	
7		74	94	88		77	74	82	
8		69	90	79		85	88	80	
9									
10									
11									
12									
13									
14									
15									
16									

## Step 2: Calculating Descriptive Statistics for Each Group

Once the data is correctly formatted, the next step involves calculating the **descriptive statistics** for each column. This includes determining the mean and the variance for both the covariates and the response variables within each group. These values are fundamental because they provide an initial overview of the data distribution and serve as the building blocks for the more complex **sum of squares** calculations required in the final ANCOVA table. The mean represents the average performance, while the variance measures the spread of the data points around that average.

In Excel, you can use the `AVERAGE()` function to find the mean and the `VAR()` or `VAR.S()` function to determine the sample variance. By analyzing these figures, you can identify if one group significantly outperforms another even before the covariate adjustment is made. Furthermore, checking the variances helps ensure that the assumption of **homogeneity of variance** is not blatantly violated, which is a prerequisite for a valid ANCOVA.

The following screenshot demonstrates the calculation of these values for each of the three studying techniques. These metrics will eventually be used to compute the total and within-group variations:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1		<b>Exam Scores</b>				<b>Current Grade</b>		
2								
3		Technique A	Technique B	Technique C		Technique A	Technique B	Technique C
4		77	78	85		67	92	96
5		89	88	81		88	69	91
6		72	93	83		75	77	88
7		74	94	88		77	74	82
8		69	90	79		85	88	80
9	Mean	76.2	88.6	83.2		78.4	80	87.4
10	Variance	59.7	40.8	12.2		69.8	93.5	42.8
11								
12								
13								

### Step 3: Determining Regression Slopes for Group Comparison

A central component of **Analysis of Covariance** is the relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable. Specifically, we need to calculate the **slopes** of the regression lines for each group. The slope indicates how much the exam score is expected to change for every one-unit increase in the student's current grade. In a standard ANCOVA, we assume that these slopes are roughly equal across all groups--a concept known as the **homogeneity of regression slopes** assumption.

To calculate the slope in Excel, you can utilize the `SLOPE()` function, where you select the range of the response variable as the "known\_y's" and the range of the covariate as the "known\_x's." Calculating these individual slopes allows us to understand the specific dynamics within each group and ensures that the covariate is indeed a relevant predictor of the outcome. If the slopes were drastically different, it might suggest an interaction effect between the technique and the current grade, which would require a different analytical approach.

The visual below shows the calculation of slopes for the three studying techniques. These values are essential for adjusting the treatment effects later in the process:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1		<b>Exam Scores</b>				<b>Current Grade</b>		
2								
3		Technique A	Technique B	Technique C		Technique A	Technique B	Technique C
4		77	78	85		67	92	96
5		89	88	81		88	69	91
6		72	93	83		75	77	88
7		74	94	88		77	74	82
8		69	90	79		85	88	80
9	Mean	76.2	88.6	83.2		78.4	80	87.4
10	Variance	59.7	40.8	12.2		69.8	93.5	42.8
11								
12		<b>Slopes</b>						
13	SSx	279.2	374	171.2	824.4			
14	Slope	0.299	-0.414	0.074				
15	SSx * Slope	83.6	-155	12.6	-58.8			
16								
17	bw	-0.071						
18	bt	0.012						
19								
20		<b>Equations Used</b>						
21		=DEVSQ(F4:F8)	=DEVSQ(G4:G8)	=DEVSQ(H4:H8)	=SUM(B21:D21)			
22		=SLOPE(B4:B8, F4:F8)	=SLOPE(C4:C8, G4:G8)	=SLOPE(D4:D8, H4:H8)				
23		=B21*B22	=C21*C22	=D21*D22	=SUM(B23:D23)			
24								
25		=E23/E21						
26		=SLOPE(B12:D16, F12:H16)						
27								
28								

## Step 4: Executing Preliminary One-Way ANOVA Tests

Before finalizing the ANCOVA table, it is necessary to perform a **One-Way ANOVA** on the response variable (Exam Score) and the covariate (Current Grade) separately. This step is vital because it provides the **Sum of Squares (SS)** and **Degrees of Freedom (df)** for the "Between Groups" and "Within Groups" categories. These values are the raw materials needed to construct the adjusted ANCOVA model. The One-Way ANOVA on exam scores tells us if there is a difference between groups without considering the covariate, while the ANOVA on grades tells us if the groups were balanced to begin with.

To perform this in Excel, navigate to the **Data** tab, select **Data Analysis**, and choose **Anova: Single Factor**. You will need to run this tool twice--once for the Exam Score columns and once for the Current Grade columns. For a detailed guide on this specific tool, you may refer to authoritative documentation on [One-Way ANOVA](#) procedures.

First, observe the results of the ANOVA for the **Exam Scores**:

19							
20	<b>ANOVA (Exam Scores)</b>						
21	<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
22	Between Groups	386.533	2	193.267	5.145	0.024	3.885
23	Within Groups	450.8	12	37.567			
24							
25	Total	837.333	14				
26							

Next, observe the results of the ANOVA for the **Current Grades**. These outputs provide the necessary statistical components for our final calculation:

29	<b>ANOVA (Current Grade)</b>						
30	<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
31	Between Groups	230.533	2	115.267	1.678	0.228	3.885
32	Within Groups	824.4	12	68.7			
33							
34	Total	1054.933	14				

## Step 5: Constructing and Populating the ANCOVA Summary Table

This is the most complex phase of the process, as it requires manually integrating the data from the previous steps into a comprehensive **ANCOVA table**. In this table, we calculate the adjusted sum of squares for the factor (studying technique) and the error. The goal is to determine the **F-statistic** for the factor after the influence of the covariate has been removed. This requires calculating the "product of deviations" between the covariate and the response variable to adjust the total variation.

The formulas used in this step involve subtracting the portion of variance explained by the covariate from the total variance. Specifically, the error sum of squares in ANCOVA is derived by taking the error sum of squares from the ANOVA of the response variable and subtracting the squared correlation between the covariate and the response. This ensures that the resulting **Mean Square** and **F-value** accurately reflect the impact of the studying techniques alone.

The image below provides a detailed look at the final ANCOVA table. The note within the image highlights the specific Excel formulas used to bridge the gap between the raw ANOVA outputs and the final adjusted figures:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
11													
12		<b>Slopes</b>											
13	SSx	279.2	374	171.2	824.4								
14	Slope	0.299	-0.414	0.074									
15	SSx * Slope	83.6	-155	12.6	-58.8								
16													
17	bw	-0.071											
18	bt	0.012											
19													
20	<b>ANOVA (Exam Scores)</b>												
21	<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>						
22	Between Groups	386.533	2	193.267	5.145	0.024	3.885						
23	Within Groups	450.8	12	37.567									
24													
25	<b>Total</b>	<b>837.333</b>	<b>14</b>										
26													
27													
28													
29	<b>ANOVA (Current Grade)</b>												
30	<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>						
31	Between Groups	230.533	2	115.267	1.678	0.228	3.885						
32	Within Groups	824.4	12	68.7									
33													
34	<b>Total</b>	<b>1054.933</b>	<b>14</b>										
35													
36													
37	<b>ANCOVA Table</b>							<b>Equations Used</b>					
38	<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>							
39	Study Technique	390.575	2	195.288	4.810	0.032		=B25-B18^2*B34-B41	=C22	=B39/C39	=D39/D41	=F.DIST.RT(E39, C39, C41)	
40	Current Grade	4.194	1	4.194	0.103	0.754		=B17*E15	=1	=B40/C40	=D40/D41	=F.DIST.RT(E40, C40, C41)	
41	Within	446.606	11	40.601				=B23-B17^2*B32	=C23-1	=B41/C41			
42													
43	<b>Total</b>	<b>837.333</b>						=B25					

### Step 6: Statistical Interpretation and Decision Making

The final step in any **Analysis of Covariance** is the interpretation of the results, specifically focusing on the **P-value**. The p-value represents the probability of observing the results, or more extreme results, assuming that the null hypothesis is true. In this study, the null hypothesis states that there is no difference in the average exam scores among the three studying techniques once the students' current grades are controlled for.

Upon reviewing our final ANCOVA table, we find that the p-value for the study technique factor is **0.032**. In most scientific research, a significance level (alpha) of **0.05** is used as the threshold for decision-making. Since 0.032 is less than 0.05, we possess sufficient evidence to **reject the null hypothesis**. This leads us to the conclusion that the studying techniques do indeed have a **statistically significant** impact on exam performance, even after adjusting for the baseline academic proficiency of the students.

By using this rigorous approach in **Microsoft Excel**, researchers can move beyond simple averages and uncover deeper insights within their data. This method accounts for the complexities of real-world variables, providing a more "level playing field" for comparing different treatments or groups. Whether you are a teacher, a business analyst, or a scientist, mastering the ANCOVA technique ensures that your conclusions are backed by sound **statistical significance** and comprehensive data control.