

How to Highlight Dates Within 90 Days Using Conditional Formatting

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November 21, 2025

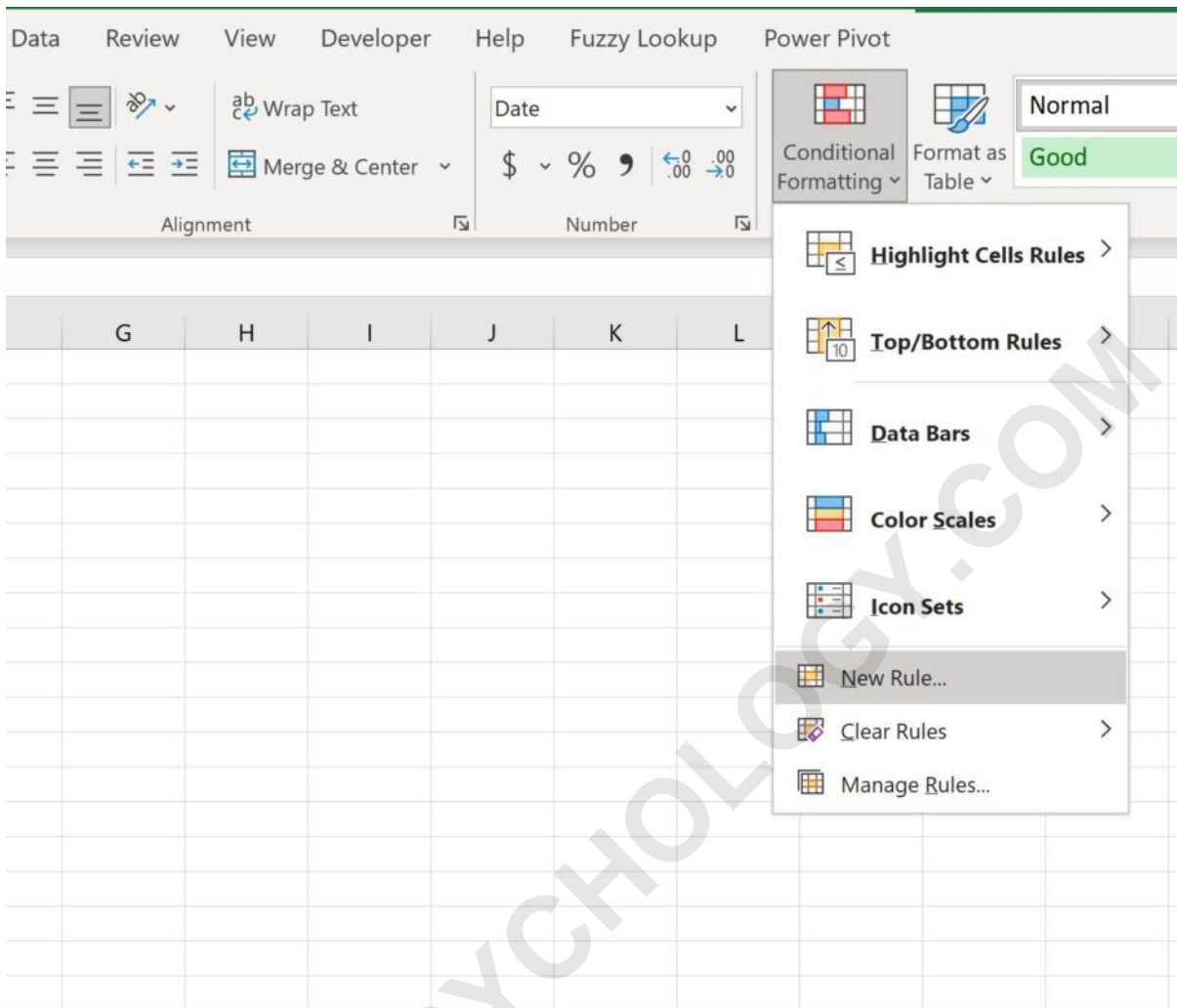
RECOMMENDED CITATION

stats writer (2025). *How to Highlight Dates Within 90 Days Using Conditional Formatting*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=98987>

Mastering Dynamic Date Highlighting with Conditional Formatting

Conditional formatting (1/5) is an essential tool within Microsoft Excel (1/5) that allows users to quickly apply visual styling to cells based on defined criteria. One of the most powerful applications of this feature is creating dynamic rules based on dates, specifically highlighting deadlines or upcoming events that fall within a defined window, such as the next 90 days. This capability is vital for project managers, analysts, and anyone tracking timelines, ensuring that important dates requiring immediate attention are never overlooked amidst large datasets. We will detail the precise steps and the necessary logic utilizing specialized Excel formulas (1/5) to achieve this powerful visualization.

To effectively apply conditional formatting (2/5) to cells containing dates that are within 90 days of the current system date, you must navigate to the **Home** tab and utilize the **New Rule** option found within the **Conditional Formatting** dropdown menu. This method requires constructing a custom formula that dynamically evaluates the cell's date value against the current date, plus or minus the specified time boundary (90 days). This ensures that the formatting remains relevant regardless of when the spreadsheet is opened, providing an always up-to-date visualization of pending items.



The core challenge in setting up date-based rules lies in accurately calculating the 90-day window relative to the live date. We rely heavily on the built-in [TODAY\(\) function \(1/5\)](#), which returns the current date every time the worksheet is recalculated. By incorporating this dynamic function into a logical test, we can define a threshold--a date 90 days ago or 90 days in the future--and highlight all relevant entries. The subsequent sections will walk through a practical example demonstrating the exact formula syntax required for this high-impact analytical technique.

Understanding the Excel Date System and the TODAY() Function

Before diving into the rule creation process, it is essential to understand how [Microsoft Excel \(2/5\)](#) manages dates. Excel stores dates as serial numbers, where the number 1 represents January 1, 1900. Consequently, adding or subtracting days from a date is as simple as adding or subtracting standard numerical values. For instance, if today's date is represented by the number 45000, then the date 90 days from now is represented by 45090. This numerical system makes date arithmetic straightforward and highly reliable when used within [Excel formulas \(2/5\)](#).

The pivotal component of any time-sensitive conditional formatting rule is the TODAY() function (2/5). This function requires no arguments and continuously updates to reflect the current date on your system clock. When combined with arithmetic operators, it creates a flexible anchor point for all relative date comparisons. For example, the expression `TODAY() - 90` calculates the date exactly 90 days in the past, while `TODAY() + 90` calculates the date 90 days in the future.

Using these dynamic calculations allows us to define the boundaries of our required window. Whether we are highlighting past due items (dates older than 90 days) or upcoming deadlines (dates within the next 90 days), the dynamic nature of the TODAY() function (3/5) ensures that the visual alerts adjust automatically every time the spreadsheet is refreshed, eliminating the need for manual rule updates. This automation is the cornerstone of efficient data management and analysis in Microsoft Excel (3/5).

Example: Applying Conditional Formatting to Dates within 90 Days

Let us consider a practical scenario. Suppose we are tracking application dates for various candidates in an HR database. We want to quickly visualize which applications were submitted within the last 90 days to prioritize follow-up. We have the following sample dataset, where the dates are located in column B:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Name	Application Date				
2	Andy	1/1/2023				
3	Bob	12/14/2022				
4	Chad	10/1/2022				
5	Derrick	10/14/2022				
6	Erin	6/1/2022				
7	Frank	7/15/2022				
8	Greta	7/28/2022				
9	Harry	1/14/2023				
10	Isaac	1/10/2023				
11	John	4/15/2021				
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						

For the purpose of this illustration, assume that the article is being viewed today, **1/16/2023**. Our goal is to apply conditional formatting (3/5) to highlight every date in the dataset that falls within 90 days leading up to 1/16/2023. This means we are looking for dates that are greater than or equal to 90 days before the current date.

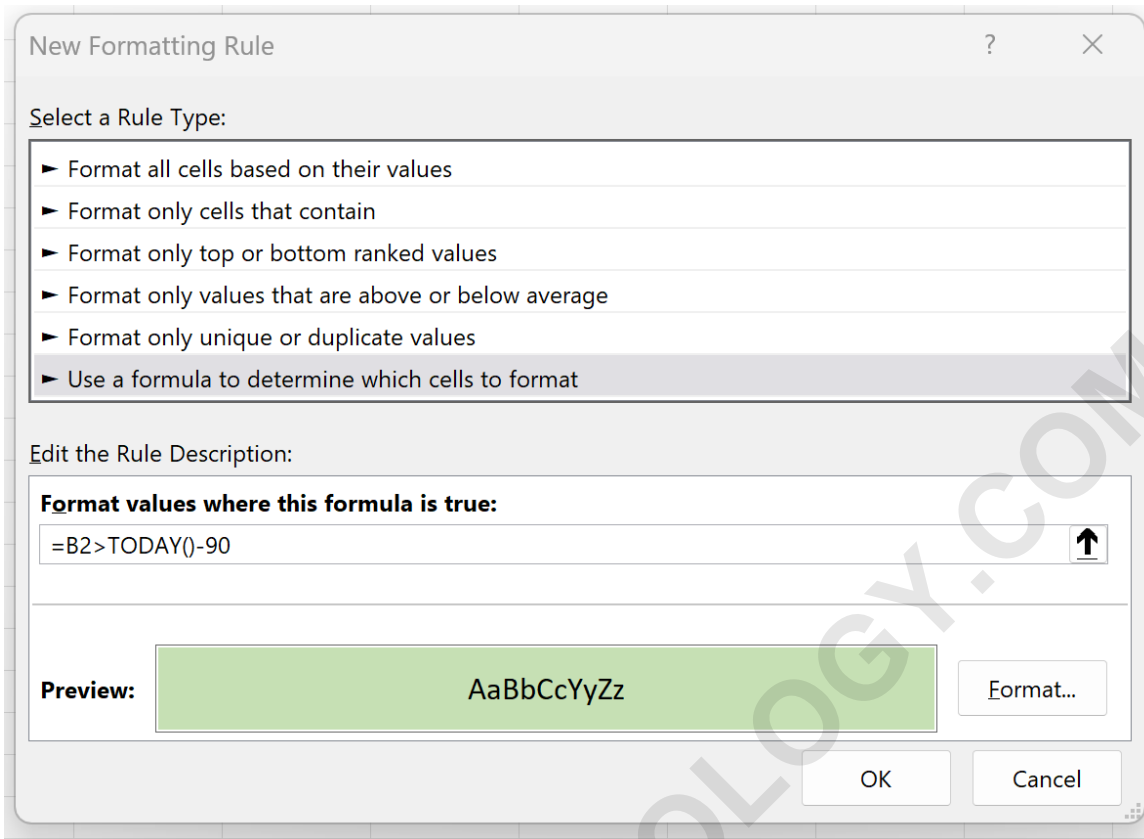
The process begins by selecting the target range. In this specific case, we highlight the cells containing the dates, which are in the range **B2:B11**. Once the range is selected, access the **Home** tab, click the **Conditional Formatting** dropdown menu, and then select **New Rule**. This action opens the dialog box where we define the customized rule based on a formula.

Step-by-Step Rule Creation and Formula Input

The configuration process for the conditional formatting rule involves several precise steps to ensure accuracy. When the **New Formatting Rule** dialog box appears, you must choose the rule type that allows for dynamic calculation. Select the option labeled **Use a formula to determine which cells to format**. This selection enables the input field necessary for writing our custom date comparison logic.

The objective is to highlight dates that are recent, meaning they are later than (or greater than) the date 90 days ago. If the date in cell B2 is being checked, the date 90 days ago is calculated using `TODAY()-90`. Therefore, the formula required to identify dates within the last 90 days is: `=B2>TODAY()-90`. Note that we reference the first cell in the selected range (B2), and the rule automatically applies this logic relative to every other cell in the range B3:B11.

After entering the formula `=B2>TODAY()-90` into the formula box, the next critical step is defining the visual outcome. Click the **Format** button to open the formatting options, allowing you to select a specific fill color, font style, or border to apply to the cells that meet the criteria. Selecting a bright, contrasting color is recommended to ensure the highlighted dates stand out immediately, significantly enhancing the utility of the conditional formatting (4/5) rule.



Reviewing the Application and Results

Once the formula is input and the desired formatting (e.g., a light green fill) is chosen, clicking **OK** applies the rule across the entire selected range (**B2:B11**). The spreadsheet will immediately update, highlighting all cells whose date value is numerically greater than the date 90 days prior to the current system date (1/16/2023). Any date that falls before that 90-day threshold will remain unformatted, providing a clear visual distinction between recent and older applications.

The resulting visualization offers a powerful snapshot of the data, instantly filtering the list visually based on the 90-day criterion. For our example date of 1/16/2023, the 90-day lookback date would be 10/18/2022. Any application date on or after 10/18/2022 will be highlighted, fulfilling the requirement of identifying recent entries.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Name	Application Date			
2	Andy	1/1/2023			
3	Bob	12/14/2022			
4	Chad	10/1/2022			
5	Derrick	10/14/2022			
6	Erin	6/1/2022			
7	Frank	7/15/2022			
8	Greta	7/28/2022			
9	Harry	1/14/2023			
10	Isaac	1/10/2023			
11	John	4/15/2021			
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This dynamic highlighting capability is instrumental in workflows where timely action is required. By leveraging the power of [Excel formulas \(3/5\)](#) combined with [TODAY\(\) function \(4/5\)](#), users can automate routine checks and focus their attention only on the items flagged by the [conditional formatting \(5/5\)](#) rule. This drastically improves efficiency in large datasets within [Microsoft Excel \(4/5\)](#).

Advanced Bounding: Highlighting Dates in a Future 90-Day Window

While the previous example focused on dates within the last 90 days, conditional formatting often needs to target a future window. For instance, highlighting events that are scheduled to occur sometime in the next 90 days. Achieving this requires a slightly more complex logical construction, often utilizing the **AND** function to define both an upper and a lower boundary for the date range.

To highlight dates that are both greater than or equal to the current date ($\geq \text{TODAY}()$) AND less than or equal to 90 days from now ($\leq \text{TODAY}() + 90$), we must combine these two conditions using the **AND** function in our custom formula. If we assume the date is in cell A1, the formula looks like this: $=\text{AND}(A1 \geq \text{TODAY}())$. This structure ensures that only dates that fall strictly within the 90-day future range, starting today, are formatted.

This dual-condition formula is particularly useful when managing tasks or expiration dates, where you only want visibility into items that are upcoming but not yet past due. Implementing the **AND** function ensures precision, preventing formatting from being applied to historical dates or items that are still too far in the future (beyond 90 days). This level of control demonstrates the power inherent in customized [Excel formulas \(4/5\)](#) for complex time-based comparisons.

Modifying the Rule for Different Timeframes

One of the greatest advantages of using custom formulas in [Microsoft Excel \(5/5\)](#) is their inherent flexibility. If your business needs change and you need to highlight dates within a 30-day window instead of 90 days, or perhaps a 180-day window, modifying the existing rule is straightforward. You simply need to adjust the numerical value added to or subtracted from the [TODAY\(\) function \(5/5\)](#) within the formatting rule box.

To change the rule from 90 days to 30 days (for past dates), you would edit the rule by navigating back to **Conditional Formatting > Manage Rules**, selecting the existing rule, and changing the formula from `=B2>TODAY()-90` to `=B2>TODAY()-30`. This quick adjustment immediately updates the entire range, recalculating based on the new, tighter timeframe.

Similarly, for future dates using the **AND** function, changing the rule to look for dates within the next two weeks (14 days) involves updating the numerical arguments: `=AND(A1=TO`[TODAY\(\)](#)). Always remember to maintain the proper mathematical structure, ensuring that the date cell reference (e.g., A1 or B2) is correctly locked or unlocked based on whether the formula needs to apply relatively across a column or absolutely across the entire sheet.

Summary and Best Practices for Date Formatting

Applying conditional formatting to dates within a specific timeframe, such as 90 days, transforms static spreadsheets into highly interactive and informative dashboards. This technique relies entirely on constructing precise [Excel formulas \(5/5\)](#) that utilize the dynamic power of the `TODAY()` function.

Key Takeaways for Successful Implementation:

Dynamic Functionality: Always use the `TODAY()` function to ensure the rule automatically updates every day.

Relative Referencing: When writing the custom formula, ensure you reference the first cell of the range (e.g., B2) without dollar signs (\$), allowing the rule to apply relatively to all other cells in the selection.

Use AND for Bounded Ranges: When defining a strict window (e.g., not older than 90 days and not newer than today), use the `AND` function to enforce both the upper and lower limits simultaneously.

Visual Clarity: While we chose a light green fill in our example, selecting colors and styles (font, borders) that are high contrast and adhere to organizational branding standards ensures maximum readability and impact.

Note: We chose to use a light green fill for the conditional formatting in this example, but you can choose any color and style you'd like for the conditional formatting. Consistent application of these rules significantly enhances data analysis efficiency and reduces manual oversight.

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