

How to Easily Count Cells Containing Specific Text in Excel

Authored by
stats writer

November 30, 2025

RECOMMENDED CITATION

stats writer (2025). *How to Easily Count Cells Containing Specific Text in Excel*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=102293>

In the powerful spreadsheet environment of Excel, the ability to analyze and summarize large datasets is paramount. One of the most common analytical needs is conditional counting: determining how many cells within a specified range meet a specific condition, such as containing a particular text string. The foundational tool for this task is the COUNTIF function. This function provides a robust mechanism for selective counting, evaluating each cell against user-defined criteria. Understanding its structure and application is essential for mastering conditional data analysis in any spreadsheet application.

The core structure of the COUNTIF function requires two mandatory arguments: first, the range of cells that you intend to inspect, and second, the criteria that dictates which cells should be included in the final count. When dealing with textual data, particularly when seeking partial matches--where the target text is embedded within a larger string--the criteria argument must be carefully constructed using specialized symbols known as wildcard characters. The criteria can be provided either as a literal text string enclosed in quotation marks, a numerical value, or a direct cell reference containing the desired content. Upon execution, the COUNTIF function yields a single numerical result, representing the precise tally of cells that satisfy the defined condition, making it invaluable for reporting and complex computations.

Methods for Conditional Text Counting

To efficiently count cells in Excel that contain specific text strings, you can employ two primary methods, each tailored to different complexity levels. The choice between these methods depends on whether you are searching for a single text phrase or if you need to aggregate counts based on multiple, varying conditions. Both methods rely fundamentally on the strategic use of wildcard characters to define the search criteria, ensuring that the function recognizes partial matches embedded anywhere within the cell content.

The first method, which is the simplest, involves a direct application of the COUNTIF function to search for a singular keyword or phrase within the specified data range. This is appropriate when the analysis requires focusing solely on the existence of one particular identifier across the dataset. The second, more advanced method, necessitates combining COUNTIF with the SUM function and an array constant, allowing the formula to simultaneously evaluate multiple criteria and then consolidate the results into a single, comprehensive total.

Technique 1: Counting Cells That Contain One Specific Text String

When your goal is to determine the count of cells that include one specific keyword, the basic COUNTIF function syntax is the most straightforward and efficient solution. This method requires a complete understanding of how wildcard characters interact with the text criteria to facilitate partial matching. Specifically, the asterisk (*) wildcard is used to represent any sequence of characters, of

any length, positioned either before or after the target text. This ensures that the function searches for the specified text string anywhere within the cell, regardless of surrounding content.

The structure below illustrates the implementation of this technique. In this example, `A2:A13` defines the data range under inspection. The criteria, `"*text*"`, is enclosed in double quotes and framed by asterisks, instructing Excel to count every cell in that range that contains the substring "text." It is imperative that the criteria string, including the wildcards, is correctly formatted within quotation marks for COUNTIF to process it as a valid search pattern.

Formula for Single Criteria Match:

```
=COUNTIF(A2:A13, "*text*")
```

This formula will precisely count the number of cells within the specified range **A2:A13** that contain the substring "text" anywhere within their content. The inclusion of the wildcard asterisk both before and after the search term is what enables the function to perform a partial, rather than an exact, match against the cell contents.

Technique 2: Counting Cells That Contain One of Several Text Strings

A more complex scenario arises when you need to count cells that contain any one of several defined text strings (an OR logic operation). The standard COUNTIF function is fundamentally designed to handle only one criteria argument at a time. To overcome this limitation and apply multiple criteria simultaneously, we must integrate the power of array constants and encapsulate the result within the SUM function. This approach calculates the count for each criterion individually and then sums these counts together to provide the final, consolidated total.

When you supply a list of criteria contained within curly braces (e.g., `{"*text1*"; "*text2*"}`), this structure is recognized by Excel as an array constant. The COUNTIF function then executes its operation multiple times--once for each item in the array--returning a result array consisting of the individual counts for each text string. For instance, if three text strings are provided, COUNTIF returns an array of three numbers, such as `{4, 2, 1}`, representing the matches for text1, text2, and text3, respectively.

To obtain the desired final count, which is the total number of cells matching any of these criteria, the resulting array of counts must be summed. This is achieved by wrapping the entire COUNTIF formula within the SUM function. Note that in modern versions of Excel (Excel 365 or 2021), this combination typically executes seamlessly without needing the traditional Ctrl+Shift+Enter array entry method, due to dynamic array functionality.

Formula for Multiple Criteria Match (OR logic):

```
=SUM(COUNTIF(A2:A13,{"*text1","*text2","*text3*"}))
```

This formula effectively combines the results of three separate counting operations. It will count the total number of cells in the range **A2:A13** that contain either "text1", "text2", or "text3" within the cell. The use of the array constant allows for an efficient single-formula solution to this common reporting requirement.

Setting Up the Practical Demonstration Dataset

To illustrate these two powerful techniques in a tangible context, we will utilize a sample dataset that simulates real-world team names. This dataset is structured in a single column, which we will refer to as the **Team** column (Range A2:A13). Analyzing this data will demonstrate how the strategic placement of wildcard characters ensures that partial matches are accurately identified and counted, fulfilling the requirement of counting cells that "contain" specific text, rather than simply matching the entire cell content.

The dataset contains various team names, some of which share common substrings. Our objective will be to extract meaningful counts based on these substrings. For example, we might want to know how many teams belong to a certain fictional league identifier or contain a particular nickname component. This practical application underscores the flexibility of using COUNTIF for categorical analysis within text fields.

The following visual representation shows the exact dataset used throughout the subsequent examples. Familiarizing yourself with the cell contents in column A is crucial for understanding the results derived from the formulas.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Team	Points			
2	Mavs	12			
3	Rockets	8			
4	Cavs	29			
5	Spurs	20			
6	Mavs	22			
7	Nets	23			
8	Thunder	25			
9	Heat	19			
10	Rockets	11			
11	Magic	30			
12	Cavs	24			
13	Hornets	28			
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					

Example 1: Implementing Single Text String Matching

In this first scenario, we focus on identifying and counting the number of teams that specifically include the letters "avs" within their name. This requires the application of Technique 1, utilizing the COUNTIF function with the criteria framed by wildcards. By using `"*avs*"` as the criteria, we instruct Excel to look for any team name that has "avs" embedded anywhere, whether at the beginning, end, or middle of the string.

We define the range for our count as **A2:A13**, corresponding to the data shown in the **Team** column of the demonstration dataset. The full formula entered into a separate summary cell (e.g., C2) is structured as follows. Notice the careful construction of the criteria to ensure accurate partial matching.

Formula used for Example 1:

=COUNTIF(A2:A13, "*avs*")

The subsequent screenshot confirms the result of applying this formula in practice. The function successfully scanned the **Team** column and identified all instances where "avs" was present as a substring, regardless of case (though COUNTIF is generally case-insensitive for text matching).

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Team	Points				
2	Mavs	12		4		
3	Rockets	8				
4	Cavs	29				
5	Spurs	20				
6	Mavs	22				
7	Nets	23				
8	Thunder	25				
9	Heat	19				
10	Rockets	11				
11	Magic	30				
12	Cavs	24				
13	Hornets	28				
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						

Based on the execution of the formula, we can confirm that a total of **4** cells in the **Team** column contain the substring "avs" in the name. This method provides a rapid, accurate summary of occurrences for a single, critical text component across a large range of data.

Example 2: Implementing Multiple Text String Matching

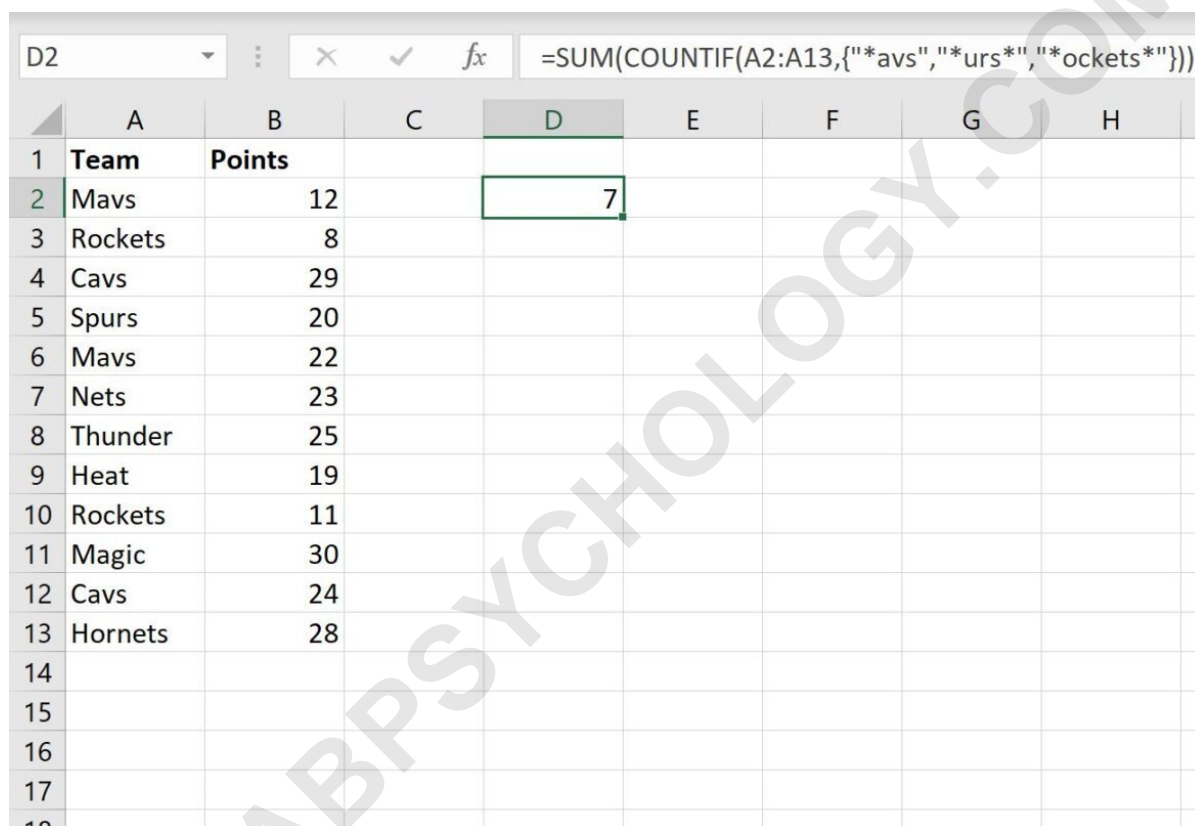
Our second example demonstrates the more advanced requirement of counting cells that contain one of several distinct text strings. We aim to count the teams that include "avs", "urs", or "ockets" in their names. This demands the use of Technique 2, leveraging the SUM function combined with the COUNTIF function and an array constant. The key to this solution is encapsulating the three criteria ("*avs*", "*urs*", "*ockets*") within curly braces.

When Excel processes this formula, COUNTIF generates an array of three separate counts corresponding to each criterion. The outer SUM function then takes this array of results and aggregates them into a single, cohesive total. This effectively executes the logical OR condition: count a cell if it contains criterion A OR criterion B OR criterion C. This is a crucial technique for summarizing data based on grouped textual categories.

The following formula applies this structure to the **A2:A13** range, enabling the count of all teams that match any one of the specified substrings:

Formula used for Example 2:**=SUM(COUNTIF(A2:A13,{"*avs","*urs","*ockets*"}))**

The subsequent screenshot confirms the implementation of this advanced counting logic in the spreadsheet environment. It vividly demonstrates the aggregated result derived from the multiple criteria search, providing an immediate summary of all matching entries across the specified text range.



The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the following data:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Team	Points						
2	Mavs	12		7				
3	Rockets	8						
4	Cavs	29						
5	Spurs	20						
6	Mavs	22						
7	Nets	23						
8	Thunder	25						
9	Heat	19						
10	Rockets	11						
11	Magic	30						
12	Cavs	24						
13	Hornets	28						
14								
15								
16								
17								
18								

The formula bar shows the formula: `=SUM(COUNTIF(A2:A13,{"*avs","*urs","*ockets*"}))`. The result '7' is displayed in cell D2.

Upon successful execution, we observe that a total of **7** cells in the **Team** column contain either "avs", "urs", or "ockets" in the name. This result confirms the ability of the `SUM(COUNTIF(Range, Array Criteria))` structure to handle complex OR logic queries efficiently within Excel.

Conclusion: Mastering Conditional Text Counting

Mastering the use of the COUNTIF function, particularly in conjunction with wildcard characters, is a fundamental skill for advanced data manipulation in Excel. Whether counting for a single embedded text string using the simple `COUNTIF(Range, "*Text*")` structure or aggregating counts for multiple conditions using the `SUM(COUNTIF())` array formula, these techniques provide precise tools for text-based data summaries. Employing these methods ensures that your analyses

are both rigorous and highly adaptable to complex data structures where exact matches are rare, but partial content matching is essential for categorization and reporting.

By consistently applying these techniques, users can transform raw textual data into actionable metrics, greatly enhancing the utility of their spreadsheets for business intelligence and data visualization purposes.

ARABPSYCHOLOGY.COM