

MICROSOFT EXCEL FILE FORMAT

Microsoft Excel is a popular spreadsheet. It uses a file format called BIFF (Binary File Format). There are many types of BIFF records. Each has a 4 byte header. The first two bytes are an opcode that specifies the record type. The second two bytes specify record length. Header values are stored in byte-reversed form (less significant byte first). The rest of the record is the data itself (Figure 2-1).
Figure 2-1. BIFF record header.

Byte Number	Record Header				Record Body		
	0	1	2	3	0	1	...
Record Contents	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	...
	opcode		length		data		

Each X represents a hexadecimal digit
Two X's form a byte. The least significant (low) byte of the opcode is byte 0 and the most significant (high) byte is byte 1. Similarly, the low byte of the record length field is byte 2 and the high byte is byte 3.

BOF (Beginning of File)

The first record in every spreadsheet is always of the BOF type (Figure 2-2).

Figure 2-2. BOF record.

Byte	Record Header				Record Body			
	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
Contents	09	00	04	00	02	00	10	00
	opcode		length		version number		file type	

The first two bytes, arranged with the low byte first, show that the opcode for BOF is

09h. The second two bytes indicate that the record body is 4 bytes long.

The first two

bytes of the body are the version number (2 for the initial version of Excel). The last

two bytes are the file type. Type 10h is a worksheet file.

Relating Spreadsheet Cells to Record Data Bytes

A spreadsheet appears on a screen or printout as a matrix of rectangular cells. Each

column is identified by a letter at its top, and each row is identified by a number.

Thus cell A1 is in the first column and the first row. Cell C240 is in the third column

and the 240th row. This scheme identifies cells in a way easily understood

by people.

However, it is not particularly convenient for computers, as they do not handle letters

efficiently. They are best at dealing with binary numbers. Thus, Excel stores cell

identifiers as binary numbers, that people can read as hexadecimal. The first number in

the system is 0 rather than 1.

Figure 2-3, which shows the form of an INTEGER record, illustrates the storage of column

and row information.

Figure 2-3. INTEGER record.

Byte	Record Header				Record Body								
	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Value	02	00	09	00	00	00	02	00	00	00	00	39	00

 | opcode | length | row | column | rgbAttr | w |

Opcode 2 indicates an integer record. The length bytes show that the record body is 9

bytes long. Row 0 in the body corresponds to spreadsheet row 1. Row 1 corresponds to

spreadsheet row 2, and so on. Column 2 corresponds to spreadsheet column C. Thus,

Figure 2-3 deals with cell C1. The next three bytes, labeled "rgbAttr," specify cell

attributes (Table 2-3). The final pair of bytes, (labeled "w") holds the integer's

value. Here it is 39H or 57 decimal. Thus the record specifies that cell C1 of the

spreadsheet contains an integer with the value 57.

Standard File Record Order

Excel worksheet files have each record type in a predetermined position. A file need

not have all types, but the ones that are present are always be in the same order.

Table 2-1 lists the record types for Excel document (spreadsheet) files, in the order

they would appear in a BIFF file. Table 2-2 lists the types in opcode order.

Several record types in a BIFF file, namely, ROW, BLANK, INTEGER, NUMBER, LABEL,

BOOLERR, FORMULA, and COLUMN DEFAULT, describe the contents of a cell.

These records

contain a 3 byte attribute field labeled "rgbAttr". The following table describes how

the bits in the field correspond to cell attributes.

Table 2-1. Cell Attributes

Byte Offset	Bit	Description	Contents
0	7	Cell is not hidden	0b
		Cell is hidden	1b
	6	Cell is not locked	0b

		Cell is locked	1b
	5-0	Reserved, must be 0	000000b
	7-6	Font number (4 possible)	
	5-0	Cell format code	
2	7	Cell is not shaded	0b
		Cell is shaded	1b
	6	Cell has no bottom border	0b
		Cell has a bottom border	1b
	5	Cell has no top border	0b
		Cell has a top border	1b
	4	Cell has no right border	0b
		Cell has a right border	1b
	3	Cell has no left border	0b
		Cell has a left border	1b
	2-0	Cell alignment code	
		general	000b
		left	001b
		center	010b
		right	011b
		fill	100b
		Multiplan default align.	111b

The font number field is a zero-based index into the document's table of fonts. the cell format code is a zero-based index into the document's table of picture formats.

There are 21 different standard formats. Additional custom formats may be defined by the user. See the FONT and FORMAT record descriptions form additonal details.

Table 2-2. Excel Record Type in Order of Appearance

Record Type	Opcode (Hexadecimal)
BOF	09
FILEPASS	2F
INDEX	0B
CALCCOUNT	0C
CALCMODE	0D
PRECISION	0E
REFMODE	0F
DELTA	10
ITERATION	11
1904	22
BACKUP	40
PRINT ROW HEADERS	2A
PRINT GRIDLINES	2B
HORIZONTAL PAGE BREAKS	1B
VERTICAL PAGE BREAKS	1A
DEFAULT ROW HEIGHT	25
FONT	31
FONT2	32
HEADER	14
FOOTER	15
LEFT MARGIN	26

RIGHT MARGIN	27
TOP MARGIN	28
BOTTOM MARGIN	29
COLWIDTH	24
EXTERNCOUNT	16
EXTERNSHEET	17
EXTERNNAME	23
FORMATCOUNT	1F
FORMAT	1E
NAME	18
DIMENSIONS	00
COLUMN DEFAULT	20
ROW	08
BLANK	01
INTEGER	02
NUMBER	03
LABEL	04
BOOLERR	05
FORMULA	06
ARRAY	21
CONTINUE	3C
STRING	07
TABLE	36
TABLE2	37
PROTECT	12
WINDOW PROTECT	19
PASSWORD	13
NOTE	1C
WINDOW1	3D
WINDOW2	3E
PANE	41
SELECTION	1D
EOF	0A

Table 2-3. Excel Record Types in Opcode Order

Record Type	Opcode (hexadecimal)
DIMENSIONS	00
BLANK	01
INTEGER	02
NUMBER	03
LABEL	04
BOOLERR	05
FORMULA	06
STRING	07
ROW	08
BOF	09
EOF	0A
INDEX	0B
CALCCOUNT	0C
CALCMODE	0D
PRECISION	0E
REFMODE	0F
DELTA	10

ITERATION	11
PROTECT	12
PASSWORD	13
HEADER	14
FOOTER	15
EXTERNCOUNT	16
EXTERNSHEET	17
NAME	18
WINDOW PROTECT	19
VERTICAL PAGE BREAKS	1A
HORIZONTAL PAGE BREAKS	1B
NOTE	1C
SELECTION	1D
FORMAT	1E
FORMATCOUNT	1F
COLUMN DEFAULT	20
ARRAY	21
1904	22
EXTERNNAME	23
COLWIDTH	24
DEFAULT ROW HEIGHT	25
LEFT MARGIN	26
RIGHT MARGIN	27
TOP MARGIN	28
BOTTOM MARGIN	29
PRINT ROW HEADERS	2A
PRINT GRIDLINES	2B
FILEPASS	2F
FONT	31
FONT2	32
TABLE	36
TABLE2	37
CONTINUE	3C
WINDOW1	3D
WINDOW2	3E
BACKUP	40
PANE	41

Worksheet Record Types in Opcode Order

The following section lists all record types in opcode order. It gives a specification

and byte-by-byte breakdown of each type. Note that Excel terminology refers to

spreadsheets or worksheets as "documents."

DIMENSIONS 00h 0d

Record Type: DIMENSIONS

Description: Entire dimensions or range of a spreadsheet

Record Body Length: 8 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	First row	

2-3 Last row plus 1
 4-5 First column
 6-7 Last column plus 1

Note: The last row and column in the record are both one greater than the highest numbered occupied ones.

BLANK 01h 1d

Record Type: BLANK
 Description: Cell with no formula or value
 Record Body Length: 7 bytes
 Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Row	
2-3	Column	
4-6	Cell attributes (rgbAttr) (Table 2-3)	

INTEGER 02h 2d

Record Type: INTEGER
 Description: Constant unsigned integer
 Record Body Length: 9 bytes
 Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Row	
2-3	Column	
4-6	Cell attributes (rgbAttr) (Table 2-3)	
7-8	Unsigned integer value (w)	

NUMBER 03h 3d

Record Type: NUMBER
 Description: Constant floating point number
 Record Body Length: 15 bytes
 Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Row	
2-3	Column	
4-6	Cell attributes (rgbAttr) (Table 2-3)	
7-14	Floating point number value (IEEE format, see Appendix A)	

LABEL 04h 4d

Record Type: LABEL
 Description: Constant string
 Record Body Length: 8 to 263 bytes
 Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Row	
2-3	Column	

	Not default attributes	0
11-12	Offset to cell records for this row	
13-15	Cell attributes (rgbAttr) (see Table 2-3)	

BOF	09h	9d
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Record Type: BOF

Description: Beginning of file

Record Body Length: 4 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Version number	
	Excel	2
	Multiplan	3
2-3	Document type	
	worksheet	10h
	chart	20h
	macro sheet	40h

If bit 8 of the version number byte pair is high (mask with 0100h to find out), the BIFF file is a Multiplan document.

EOF	0Ah	10d
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Record Type: EOF

Description: End of file

Record Body Length: 0 bytes

The EOF record is the last one in a BIFF file. It always takes the form 0A000000h.

INDEX	0Bh	11d
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Record Type: INDEX

Description: Contains pointers to other records in the BIFF file, and defines the range

of rows used by the document. It is used to simplify searching a file for a particular cell or name.

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-3	Absolute file position of first NAME record	
4-5	First row that exists	
6-7	Last row that exists plus 1	
8-on	Array of absolute file positions of the blocks of ROW records.	

The INDEX record is optional. If present, it must immediately follow the FILEPASS

record. IF there is no FILEPASS record, it must follow the BOF record.

CALCCOUNT	0Ch	12d
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Record Type: CALCCOUNT

Description: Specifies the iteration count

Record Body Length: 2

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Iteration Count	
CALCMODE	0Dh	13d

Record Type: CALCMODE

Description: Specifies the calculation mode

Record Body Length: 2

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Calculation mode	
	Manual	0
	Automatic	1
	Automatic, no tables	-1
PRECISION	0Eh	14d

Record Type: PRECISION

Description: Specifies precision of calculations for document

Record Body Length: 2

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Document precision	
	precision as displayed	0
	full precision	1
REFMODE	0Fh	15d

Record Type: REFMODE

Description: Specifies location reference mode

Record Body Length: 2

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Reference mode	
	R1C1 mode	0
	A1 mode	1
DELTA	10h	16d

Record Type: DELTA

Description: Maximum change for an iterative model

Record Body Length: 8

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-7	Maximum change (IEEE format, see Appendix A)	
ITERATION	11h	17d

Record Type: ITERATION

Description: Specifies whether iteration is on

Record Body Length: 2

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Iteration flag	
	Iteration off	0
	Iteration on	1

PROTECT 12h 18d

Record Type: PROTECT

Description: Specifies whether the document is protected with a document password

Record Body Length: 2

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Document protection	
	Not protected	0
	Protected	1

PASSWORD 13h 19d

Record Type: PASSWORD

Description: Contains encrypted document password

Record Body Length: 2

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Encrypted password	

HEADER 14h 20d

Record Type: HEADER

Description: Specifies header string that appears at the top of every page when the document is printed

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	Length of string (bytes)	
1-on	Header string (ASCII)	

FOOTER 15h 21d

Record Type: FOOTER

Description: Specifies footer string that appears at the bottom of every page when the document is printed

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	Length of string (bytes)	
1-on	Footer string (ASCII)	

EXTERNCOUNT 16h 22d

Record Type: EXTERNCOUNT

Description: Specifies the number of documents referenced externally by an Excel document

Record Body Length: 2

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Number of externally referenced documents	

EXTERNSHEET 17h 23d

Record Type: EXTERNSHEET

Description: Specifies a document that is referenced externally by the Excel file.

There must be an EXTERNSHEET record for every external file counted by the EXTERNCOUNT record.

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	Length of document name	
1-on	Document name	

The document name may be encoded. If so, its first character will be 0, 1 or 2.

0 indicates the document name is an external reference to an empty sheet.

1 indicates the document name has been translated to a less system-dependent name.

This feature is valuable for documents intended for a non-DOS environment.

2 indicates that the externally referenced document is, in fact, the current document.

NAME	18h	24d
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Record Type: NAME

Description: User-defined name on the document

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	Name attribute	

Only bits 1 and 2 are ever nonzero.

Bit 1 is 1 if the name is a function or command name on a macro sheet.

Bit 2 is 1 if the name definition includes:

- * A function that returns an array, such as TREND or MINVERSE
- * A ROW or COLUMN function
- * A user-defined function

Name attribute

Meaningful only if bit 1 of byte 0 is 1 (the name is a function or command name). Only bits 0 and 1 are ever nonzero.

Bit 0 is 1 if the name is a function.

Bit 1 is 1 if the name is a command.

2	Keyboard shortcut. Meaningful only if the name is a command.
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If no keyboard shortcut	0
If shortcut exists	ASCII value

3	Length of the name text
4	Length of the name's definition
5-?	Text of the name
?-?	Name's definition (parsed) in internal compressed format
?	Length of the name's definition (duplicate)

All NAME records should appear together in a BIFF file.

WINDOW PROTECT	19h	25d
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Record Type: WINDOW PROTECT

Description: Specifies whether a document's windows are protected

Record Body Length: 2 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Window protect flag	
	Not protected	0
	Protected	1

VERTICAL PAGE BREAKS	1Ah	26d
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Record Type: VERTICAL PAGE BREAKS

Description: Lists all column page breaks

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Number of page breaks	
2-on	Array containing a 2-byte integer for each column that immediately follows a column page break. Columns must be sorted in ascending order.	

HORIZONTAL PAGE BREAKS	1Bh	27d
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Record Type: HORIZONTAL PAGE BREAKS

Description: Lists all row page breaks

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Number of page breaks	
2-on	Array containing a 2-byte integer for each row that immediately follows a row page break. Rows must be sorted in ascending order.	

NOTE	1Ch	28d
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Record Type: NOTE

Description: Note associated with a cell

Record Body Length: Variable, maximum of 254

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Row of the note	

2-3	Column of the note
4-5	Length of the note part of the record
6-on	Text of the note

Notes longer than 2048 characters must be split among multiple records. All except the last one will contain 2048 text characters. The last one will contain the overflow.

SELECTION	1Dh	29d
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Record Type: SELECTION

Description: Specifies which cells are selected in a pane of a split window. It can also specify selected cells in a window that is not split.

Record Body Length: Variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	Number of pane	
	bottom right	0
	top right	1
	bottom left	2
	top left	3
	no splits	3
1-2	Row number of the active cell	
3-4	Column number of the active cell	
5-6	Reference number of the active cell	
7-8	Number of references in the selection	
9-on	Array of references	

Each reference in the array consists of 6 bytes arranged as follows:

Byte Number	Byte Description
0-1	First row in the reference
2-3	Last row in the reference
4	First column in the reference
5	Last column in the reference

FORMAT	1Eh	30d
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Record Type: FORMAT

Description: Describes a picture format in a document. All FORMAT records must appear together in a BIFF file.

Record Body Length: Variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	Length of format string	
1-on	Picture format string	

FORMATCOUNT	1Fh	31d
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Record Type: FORMATCOUNT

Description: The number of standard FORMAT records in the file. There are 21 different format records.

Record Body Length: 2 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Number of built in format records.	
COLUMN DEFAULT	20h	32d

Record Type: COLUMN DEFAULT

Description: Specifies default cell attributes for cells in a particular column. The default value is overridden for individual cells by a subsequent explicit definition.

Record Body Length: Variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Column number of first column for which a default cell is being defined	
2-3	Column number of last column for which a default cell is being defined, plus 1.	
4-on	Array of cell attributes	
ARRAY	21h	33d

Record Type: ARRAY

Description: Describes a formula entered into a range of cells as an array. Occurs immediately after the FORMULA record for the upper left corner of the array.

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	First row of the array	
2-3	Last row of the array	
4	First column of the array	
5	Last column of the array	
6	Recalculation flag	
	Array is calculated	0
	Needs to be calculated	nonzero
7	Length of parsed expression	
8-on	Parsed expression (array formula)	
1904	22h	34d

Record Type: 1904

Description: Specifies date system used on this spreadsheet

Record Body Length: 2 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Specifies date system used	
	1904 date system	1
	anything else	0
EXTERNNAME	23h	35d

Record Type: EXTERNNAME

Description: An externally referenced name, referring to a work-sheet or macro sheet or to a DDE topic. All EXTERNNAME records associated with a supporting

document must
directly follow its EXTERNSHEET record.

Record Body Length: Variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	Length of the name	
1-on	The name	

When EXTERNNAME references a DDE topic, Excel may append its most recent values to the EXTERNNAME record. If the record becomes too long to be contained in a single record, it is split into multiple records, with CONTINUE records holding the excess.

COLWIDTH	24h	36d
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Record Type: COLWIDTH

Description: Sets column width for a range of columns

Record Body Length: 3 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	First column in the range	
1	Last column in the range	
2-3	Column width in units of 1/256th of a character	

DEFAULT ROW HEIGHT	25h	37d
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Record Type: DEFAULT ROW HEIGHT

Description: Specifies the height of all rows that are not defined explicitly

Record Body Length: 2 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Default row height in units of 1/20th of a point	

LEFT MARGIN	26h	38d
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Record Type: LEFT MARGIN

Description: Specifies the left margin in inches when the document is printed

Record Body Length: 8 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-7	Left margin (IEEE format, see Appendix A)	

RIGHT MARGIN	27h	39d
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Record Type: RIGHT MARGIN

Description: Specifies the right margin in inches when the document is printed

Record Body Length: 8 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-7	Right margin (IEEE format, see Appendix A)	

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-on	?	
FONT	31h	49d

Record Type: FONT

Description: Describes an entry in the document's font table. A document may have up to 4 different fonts, numbered 0 to 3. Font records are written in the font table in the order in which they are encountered in the file.

Record Body Length: variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (binary)
0-1	Height of the font (in 1/20ths of a point)	
2-3	Font Attributes	
	First byte (reserved)	00000000b
	Second byte	
	Bit 0 - bold	1b
	Bit 1 - italic	1b
	Bit 2 - underline	1b
	Bit 2 - strikeout	1b
	Bits 4-7 (reserved)	0000b
4	Length of font name	
5-?	Font name	
FONT2	32h	50d

Record Type: FONT2

Description: System specific information about the font defined in the previous FONT record. The FONT2 record is optional.

Record Body Length: Variable

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-on	?	
TABLE	36h	54d

Record Type: TABLE

Description: Describes a one-input row or column table created through the Data Table command

Record Body Length: 12 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	First row of the table	
2-3	Last row of the table	
4	First column of the table	
5	Last column of the table	
6	Recalculation flag	
	Table is recalculated	0
	Not recalculated	nonzero
7	Row or column input table flag	

Record Body Length: 9 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Horizontal position of the window	
2-3	Vertical position of the window	
4-5	Width of the window	
6-7	Height of the window	
8	Hidden attribute	
	Window is not hidden	0
	Window is hidden	1

If you do not include a WINDOW1 record in your BIFF file, Excel will create a default window in your document.

WINDOW2 3Eh 62d

Record Type: WINDOW2

Description: Advanced window information. The WINDOW2 record is optional.

If present, it must immediately follow the WINDOW1 record.

Record Body Length: 14 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0	Display Formulas	
	Display values	0
	Display formulas	1
1	Display Grid	
	Do not display gridlines	0
	Display gridlines	1
2	Display Row and Column Headers	
	Do not display headers	0
	Display headers	
3	Freeze window panes	
	Do not freeze panes	0
	Freeze panes	1
4	Display zero values	
	Suppress display	0
	Display zero values	1
5-6	Top row visible in the window	
7-8	Leftmost column visible in the window	
9	Row/column header and gridline color	
	Specified in next four bytes	0
	Use window's default foreground color.	1
10-13	Row/column headers and gridline color (RGB)	

BACKUP 40h 64d

Record Type: BACKUP

Description: Specifies whether a BIFF file should be backed up

Record Body Length: 2 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Backup flag	

	Do not back up	0
	Back up	1
PANE	41h	65d

Record Type: PANE

Description: Describes the number and position of unfrozen panes in a window. Panes are created by horizontal and vertical splits, which are measured in units of 1/20th of a point.

Record Body Length: 9 bytes

Record Body Byte Structure:

Byte Number	Byte Description	Contents (hex)
0-1	Horizontal position of the split, zero if none	
2-3	Vertical position of the split, zero if none	
4-5	Top row visible in the bottom pane	
6-7	Leftmost column visible in the right pane	
8	Pane number of the active pane	