

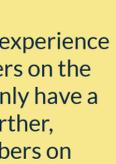
# Lessons Learned Teaching Microsoft Excel to Students

20 observations and thoughts from David H. Ringstrom, CPA



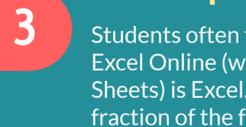
## 1 Employers are Frustrated

Business majors, and especially accounting students often make their way through college with inadequate spreadsheet training. Colleges and universities often assume students learn these skills in high school.



## 2 Google Sheets

Most students' past spreadsheet experience involves Google Sheets or Numbers on the Mac. Both Sheets and Numbers only have a subset of Excel's functionality. Further, students will often calculate numbers on their phone's calculator and then type the results in to Excel, rather than writing formulas.



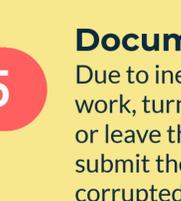
## 3 Desktop Excel vs. Excel Online

Students often think that the browser-based Excel Online (which competes with Google Sheets) is Excel. Excel Online has only a fraction of the functionality available in the desktop versions of Excel. Employers often expect new hires to be adept at Excel.



## 4 Mac versus Windows

About half of students are using Macs. Excel for Mac has about 90% of the functionality offered in Excel for Windows. Instructions written for Excel for Windows mostly, but not always translate to Excel for Mac.



## 5 Document Handling

Due to inexperience students lose their work, turn in the original blank workbook, or leave their files open in Excel when they submit their work, which often results in a corrupted upload. Or they turn in the wrong version of their work and get a poor score due to incomplete work.



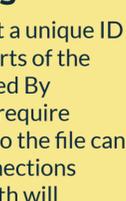
## 6 XLTX versus XLSX workbooks

One way to ensure that students don't turn the original blank assignment spreadsheet back in is to give them an Excel Template file (.XLTX format) to start with that they must save as an Excel Workbook (.XLSX format)



## 7 Cheating

Cheating is more prevalent in the introductory level courses. Upper level courses have far less cheating. Some students are willing to pay other students to do their work for them.



## 8 Anti-Cheating Mechanisms

Approaches can include giving each student a unique ID number that is incorporated into several parts of the assignment. You can check the Last Authored By property. A more advanced technique is to require students to import a text file, as the path to the file can be checked by way of the Queries and Connections command on Excel's Data menu. The file path will generally be unique.



## 9 Spelling

Students get indignant and think "Excel is broken" when formulas and features don't due to misspelled words. Students have particular challenges spelling the word February. Misspelled worksheet names can cause formulas not to work. Students also bump the space bar and add trailing spaces which are hard to detect.



## 10 Discontinued Handouts

We found that if we provided a PDF handout with numbered steps that students would work exclusively from the handout and by-pass the training videos that offer background on Excel that offer much of the learning and demonstrations.



## 11 Student Support

Asking students to take a picture of their screen with their cell phone makes answering questions much easier, and avoids having to teach the students how to create screen shots. Getting a glimpse of their screen streamlines support.



## 12 Students Don't Check Email

Students much prefer to be contacted by text, and often won't see emails asking them to turn their work in again because they submitted the wrong file or a corrupted file.



## 13 Procrastination

No matter how much time you give students to complete an assignment, the vast majority won't start the work until a day or two before the due date.



## 14 Perfecting an Assignment

Early on it can take three or four semesters to get an assignment perfected based upon student feedback. With experience this drops to one or two revisions. There's an art to determining how much in an assignment helps the students grow versus just creating drudgery.



## 15 Pathway to Certification

Kennesaw State University uses four assignments in their curriculum over four semesters that cover almost everything included in the Microsoft Office Specialist certification exam to offer students an additional credential.



## 16 How We Can Help

StudentsExcel.com provides video-based Excel training courses that reinforce in-class learning. Assignments can be tailored to your specific needs at no cost to your school.



## 17 Students Purchase from Us

Assignments are generally \$9.95 each, and students purchase the assignment like a text book. Licensing is also available, but typically there's no cost to the school. Fees are kept low to avoid concerns from oversight boards.



## 18 We Handle All Support

You can refer all student questions to us. Our assignments are hands-off for the instructors so you can focus on in-class learning while still imparting Excel knowledge. All questions get logged into a help desk software for better responsiveness and to track recurring issues.



## 19 We Do All of the Grading

Our detailed grading tool enables you and students to see what was missed in the assignment. We provide three scores: completion, accuracy, and a combined average. You decide which score to use for determining credit.



## 20 Available Assignments

- Horizontal Financial Statements
- Cash Flow Budget
- Aging Schedules
- Accounting Information Systems
- Excel Competency Test
- Internal Control
- Payroll Calculations
- Custom assignments can be developed



## Questions?

Contact David H. Ringstrom, CPA at david@studentsexcel.com or 404-784-0275

See the assignments at <http://video.studentsexcel.com>

