

note**If Flash Fill doesn't work for you, somebody has switched it off**

It's almost certain that Flash Fill will be enabled on any computer that you work on. It is such a useful feature that you wouldn't want to disable it.

If Flash Fill doesn't work, there are two possible explanations:

1. You are using an earlier version of Excel. Flash fill is a relatively new feature introduced in Excel 2013.
2. Somebody has switched Flash Fill off.

To switch it back on, click:
File→Options→Advanced

In the first section (*Editing Options*) make sure that the *Automatically Flash Fill* check box is checked.

note**Help Flash Fill to work correctly by formatting header rows differently**

You will notice that, in this lesson's sample file, I have bold-faced the header row:

	B	C
3	First Name	Last Name
4	Jessica	Sagan
5	Stephen	Bell
6	John	Jennings

When Flash Fill sees different formatting in the first row, it will treat this row (correctly) as a header row. Flash Fill then excludes the value in this row from its logic, providing more reliable results.

Employee Names-1

Lesson 2-19: Use automatic Flash Fill to split delimited text

When you place data in cells it is useful to observe an important rule:

“Keep data atomic”

If you strictly observe this rule you'll avoid an enormous number of potential problems.

The rule means that, in the same way that the atom is the smallest basic unit you can divide matter into, each worksheet cell should contain the smallest possible amount of data.

Here's a simple example to illustrate the concept:

	A	B
3	Name	
4	Jessica Sagan	
5	Stephen Bell	
6	John Jennings	

Imagine that you want to use the worksheet above to create a mail merge in Word. In this case you'd need the first names in a cell of their own. This would enable you to personalize the mail merge with an introduction such as: *Dear Jessica*.

If you had observed the *keep data atomic* rule, you would have split your data into multiple columns like this:

	B	C
3	First Name	Last Name
4	Jessica	Sagan
5	Stephen	Bell
6	John	Jennings

Excel 2013 added a wonderful new feature called *Flash Fill*. This feature enables you quickly and simply split delimited text (such as the above) into separate cells. The term *delimited text* means text that is split using a separator. In this case the separator is a space (see facing page sidebar).

Automatic Flash Fill will only work for very simple text splitting tasks such as the one described above. In the lessons that follow you'll learn more complex Flash Fill techniques that will enable you to perform some very advanced text splitting tasks.

- 1 Open *Employee Names-1* from your sample files folder.
- 2 Add column headings for *First Name* and *Last Name* in cells B3 and C3.
 6. Click in cell B3.
 7. Type: **First Name**
 8. Press the <Tab> key to move to cell C3.
 9. Type: **Last Name**
 10. Press the <Tab> key to save the value into the cell and move to cell D3.
- 3 Bold face the text in cells B3 and C3.

note

Limitations of automatic Flash Fill

Automatic Flash Fill always works perfectly when the source data column has the same type of *separators*.

In this lesson's example, space separators are used. The following example (using comma separators) would also work perfectly:

Sting, Musician
Kingdom Brunel, Engineer
Billie Jean King, Tennis Player

You can see that, without the commas, Flash Fill wouldn't know where the name ended and the occupation began.

Sometimes you will need to extract data that does not have separators.

You'll discover how to solve this type of problem later, in: *Lesson 2-20: Use manual Flash Fill to split text.*

note

Use automatic Flash Fill to extract initials

You can often save a lot of space by showing initials instead of full names.

Automatic Flash Fill is well suited to this task.

Try this (at the end of the lesson, after populating columns B and C with first and last names).

1. Type: **JS** (for Jessica Sagan) in cell D4.
2. Type **S** (Stephen Bell's first initial) into cell D5.
3. Press the <Enter> key to accept the Flash Fill.

	B	C	D
4	Jessica	Sagan	JS
5	Stephen	Bell	SB
6	John	Jennings	JJ

You learned how to do this in: *Lesson 1-15: Use the Mini Toolbar, Key Tips and keyboard shortcuts.*

	A	B	C
3	Name	First Name	Last Name

4 Use Flash Fill to extract the *First Name* values from column A into column B.

1. Type: **Jessica** into cell B4. Be careful to type it exactly as it is spelled in cell A4. Be careful not to leave any leading or trailing spaces.
2. Press the <Enter> key to move to cell B5.
3. Type: **S** (the first letter of *Stephen*) into cell B5.

Notice that something interesting has happened. *Flash Fill* has figured out that you possibly want to extract all the first names from column A and has displayed them all as grayed-out names in the cells below:

	A	B	C
3	Name	First Name	Last Name
4	Jessica Sagan	Jessica	
5	Stephen Bell	Stephen	
6	John Jennings	John	
7	Meryl Simpson	Meryl	
8	Alfred Hawking	Alfred	

4. Press the <Enter> key to instruct Flash Fill to enter all the remaining *First Name* values.

All the first names appear in column B.

	A	B	C
3	Name	First Name	Last Name
4	Jessica Sagan	Jessica	
5	Stephen Bell	Stephen	
6	John Jennings	John	
7	Meryl Simpson	Meryl	
8	Alfred Hawking	Alfred	

The status bar (at the bottom left of the screen) also confirms how many cells were changed:



5 Use Flash Fill to extract the *Last Name* values from column A into column C.

Follow the same procedure you used to extract the first names:

	A	B	C
3	Name	First Name	Last Name
4	Jessica Sagan	Jessica	Sagan
5	Stephen Bell	Stephen	Bell
6	John Jennings	John	Jennings
7	Meryl Simpson	Meryl	Simpson

6 Save your work as *Employee Names-2*.