

how to create a line chart in Excel

JUNE 22, 2022 BY AMY ESSELMAN

A [line chart](#) is a simple graph that is familiar to most audiences. Lines are great for showing continuous data, such as plotting how the value of something changes over time. In this post, we will cover how to create a line chart in Excel, using a sample dataset from a community exercise: [table takeaways](#). The information is about an annual corporate fundraiser to provide meals to those in need. You can download the file [here](#) to follow along as we build the line chart.

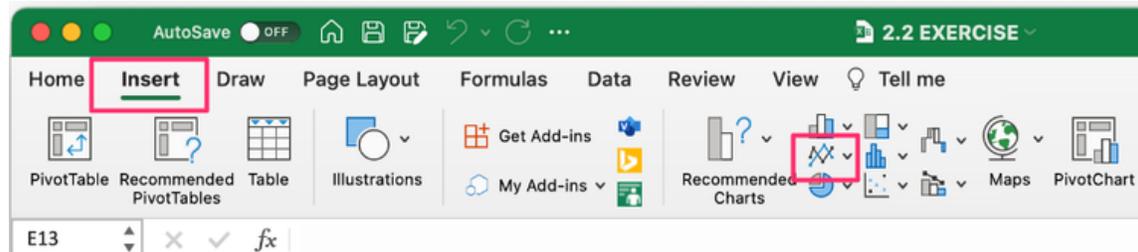
	A	B	C
1	EXERCISE 2.2		
2			
3	FIG 2.2a		
4			
5	Meals served over time		
6			
7		Campaign Year	Meals Served
8		2010	40,139
9		2011	127,020
10		2012	168,193
11		2013	153,115
12		2014	202,102
13		2015	232,897
14		2016	277,912
15		2017	205,350
16		2018	233,389
17		2019	232,797
18		2020	154,830

The dataset includes two columns—a column for the campaign year and a column for the number of meals served in a given year. Let's assume we want to make a line chart with the years going along the x-axis and the meals served along the y-axis.

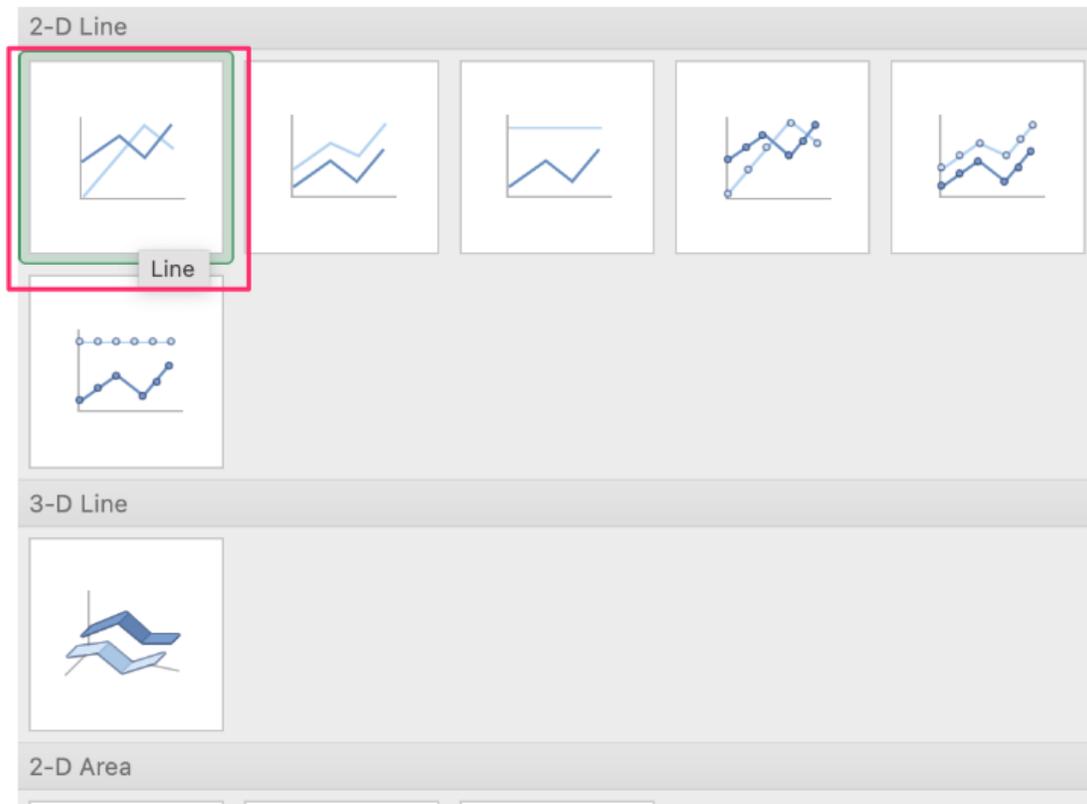
Creating a single line graph in Excel is a relatively straightforward process, as it is a default chart type.

Insert a line chart

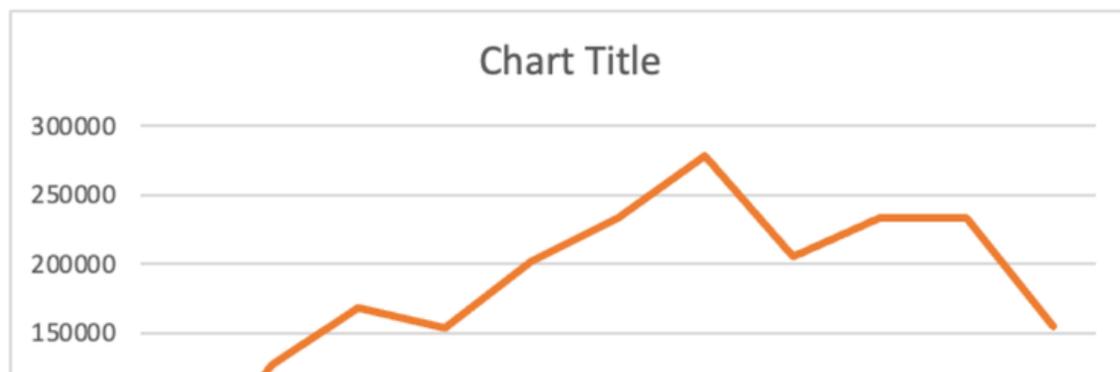
To begin, **highlight the data table**, including the column headers. To do this, click cell B7 and drag your cursor to C18. Next, navigate to the *Insert* ribbon and select the line chart icon. (Note that you can also use the *Insert* menu at the very top, then choose *Chart -> Line* to achieve a similar result.)

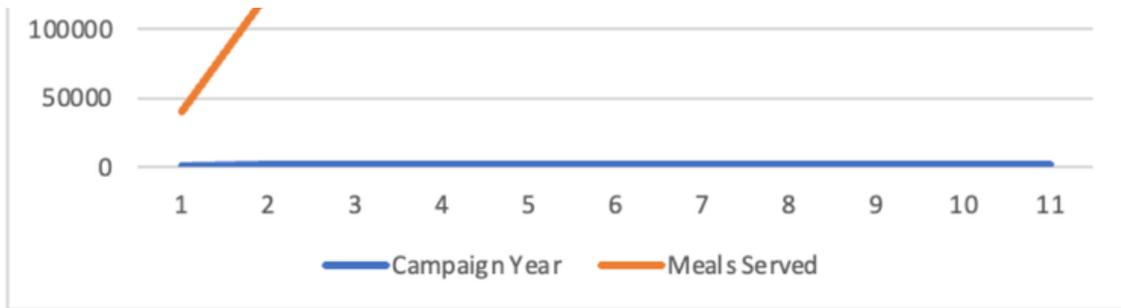


Excel offers several different variations of the line graph. For our purpose, we will go with the first option available—a **2-D line chart without markers**.



Now, we have a simple line chart, but it is not exactly what we had imagined. Excel made the Campaign Year data points a series instead of the x-axis labels that we wanted.





To adjust the x-axis to show the years, right-click on the chart and go to *Select Data...* in the pop-up menu. Campaign Year and Meals Served are in the list in the series box in the middle. Pick Campaign Year and then click the minus (-) sign box below the list to remove Campaign Year as a series.

Select Data Source

Range Details
 Chart data range:

Legend entries (Series):

Campaign Year	Name: <input type="text" value="='EXERCISE 2.2!\$B\$7"/>
Meals Served	Y values: <input type="text" value="='EXERCISE 2.2!\$B\$8:\$"/>

Horizontal (Category) axis labels:

Hidden and Empty Cells
 Show empty cells as:
 Show data in hidden rows and columns

Next, add the Campaign Year as the horizontal axis labels by clicking the cell selector icon to the right of the box and then highlighting the data cells with the Campaign Year (cells B8:B17). Finally, click the OK button.

Range Details

Chart data range:

Legend entries (Series):

Meals Served

Name:

Y values:

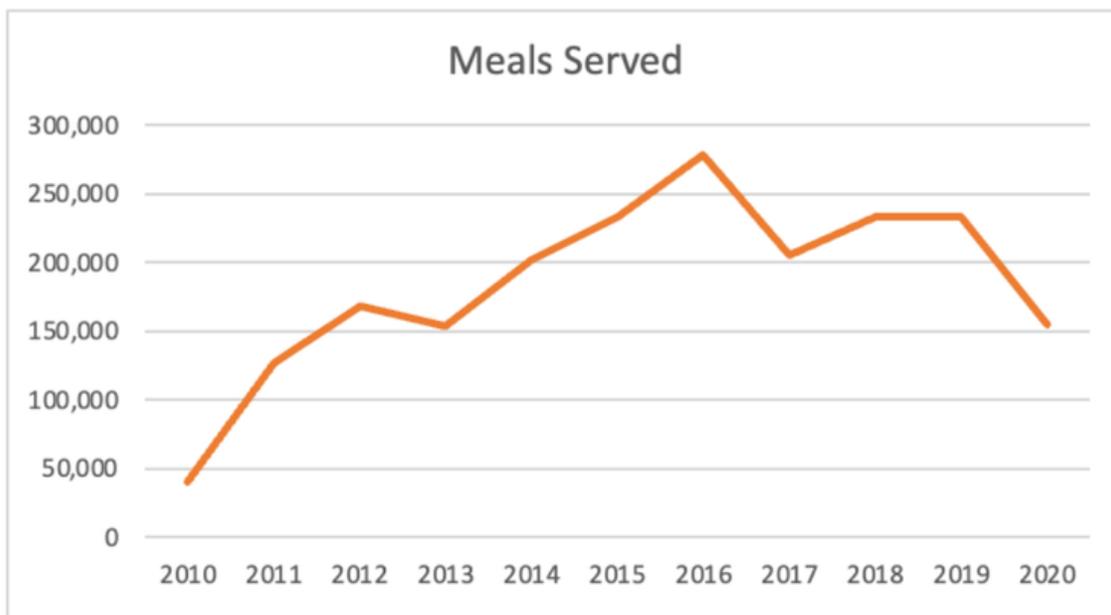
Horizontal (Category) axis labels:

Hidden and Empty Cells

Show empty cells as:

Show data in hidden rows and columns

With this adjustment, we have our desired line chart with the years going along the x-axis and the meals served along the y-axis. Excel has automatically provided a 'Meals Served' title for us. We can improve upon this title, and some of the other formatting decisions Excel has made for us. We'll cover these steps in detail in an upcoming post. In the meantime, check out other Excel how-to articles below.



More Excel how-to's

For more tactical Excel instructions, check out these other resources:

- To create a frame of reference, [embed a vertical line](#)
- To depict a range of values, [add a shaded band](#)
- To show a distribution of data, [create a dotplot](#)
- To fine-tune your formatting, [adjust bar width](#)
- To have cleaner alignment, [put graph elements directly in cells](#)
- To have more control over data label formatting, [embed labels into your graphs](#)

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