

RESEARCH & ANALYSE

Make sense of a spreadsheet

You have the data but not the answer. Can Copilot find the story in it?

You've been handed a spreadsheet and asked what it shows. Use Copilot in Excel or the Analyst agent to find the trends, outliers and what they mean.

1

Try it your way

Use a real conversation if you can. See what you naturally ask Copilot.

[Try in Copilot →](#)

2

Need a cue?

Start with the outcome you need:

[Trends](#)[Outliers](#)[So what?](#)

3

Still stuck? Reveal a sample prompt

Have a go first — the sample prompt is on the next page when you want it.

[Reveal sample prompt ↓](#)

4

Did you get something useful?

- ☐ I can see the main trends
- ☐ Outliers are explained, not just listed
- ☐ The 'so what' is clear
- ☐ I've checked the numbers make sense

5

Take it one step further

Ask Copilot: "What would explain the biggest change in this data?"

Need a little help?



[Watch a quick video](#)
(3 mins)



[See a worked example](#)



[Take the learning path on ASN](#)

Top tips

- ✓ Use your own work if you can.
- ✓ Be specific about the output you need.
- ✓ Iterate — your first prompt doesn't have to be perfect.
- ✓ Check the result — would you actually use it?

Your notes — what worked, what you'd change

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Sample prompt

Make sense of a spreadsheet

“Analyse this sales data. Show me the main trends over the last four quarters, any outliers and what might explain them, and the three things I should pay attention to.”

Select the text above and copy it into Copilot.

Why this works

- ✓ It sets a time window, so the analysis compares like with like.
- ✓ It asks why outliers happen, not just where they are.
- ✓ It limits the answer to three priorities — enough to act on.

[Try it in Copilot →](#)[← Back to the challenge](#)

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Worked example

Illustrative example — names and details are fictional

The situation

You've inherited a regional sales spreadsheet for Litware with four quarters of data and 18 columns. Your manager wants to know 'what's going on in the north'.

What Copilot returned

 Copilot

Here's what the regional sales data shows.

MAIN TRENDS

- Total sales grew 9% year on year.
- The north region fell 6% in the last two quarters.

OUTLIERS

- One northern store's sales dropped 40% in Q3 — it closed for refurbishment.
- Online orders in the north rose 30%, partly offsetting the fall.

PAY ATTENTION TO

- Excluding the refurbished store, the north is roughly flat.
- Online growth suggests customers are shifting channel, not leaving.

What to check

- ✓ Numbers: spot-check one or two figures directly in the spreadsheet.
- ✓ Explanations: Copilot suggests causes — confirm them with someone who knows the region.
- ✓ Story: is the headline 'the north is declining' or 'the north is changing channel'?

[← Back to the challenge](#)