

Learning to Calculate Averages in Google Sheets: Excluding Zeros and Blanks

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When performing quantitative data analysis in [Google Sheets](#), practitioners frequently encounter the need to calculate the true [arithmetic mean](#) of a dataset while systematically excluding entries that do not represent active contributions. This necessity often arises when dealing with sparse data where cells are either completely blank or contain a numerical value of zero. By intelligently ignoring these specific non-contributing entries, we ensure that the calculated [average](#) accurately reflects the mean performance, effort, or measurement of only the relevant data points, thereby preventing the overall result from being inaccurately skewed downward by instances of inactivity or missing data.

Standard averaging functions, common across all spreadsheet software, such as the basic [AVERAGE](#) function, are designed to automatically disregard blank cells. However, a significant analytical challenge emerges because these functions treat a numerical value of zero (**0**) as a valid, contributing data point. If those zeros signify inactivity or an absence of measurement, their inclusion can dramatically distort the overall mean, leading to erroneous conclusions. To achieve statistical precision and a meaningful result, it is imperative to employ a conditional function capable of simultaneously filtering out both zeros and blanks.

The optimal solution involves leveraging the highly versatile **AVERAGEIF** function. This powerful tool allows the user to define a precise criterion that must be satisfied for a value to be incorporated into the final calculation. This specific conditional technique grants superior control over statistical analysis, guaranteeing that the resulting [average](#) is statistically sound and directly relevant to the specific business objective or research question being investigated.

The Essential Technique: Harnessing the AVERAGEIF Function

The most effective and clean method for calculating the [average](#) in [Google Sheets](#) while selectively excluding both blank cells and zero values relies entirely on the built-in **AVERAGEIF** function. This function is purpose-built to compute the mean of a designated range based exclusively on cells that meet a specified condition. Since the standard averaging process inherently ignores empty cells, our only remaining requirement is to specify the condition that the included cells must explicitly **not be equal to zero**.

The fundamental formula structure required to execute this precise calculation is concise and highly readable:

```
=AVERAGEIF(B2:B11, "<>0")
```

This command instructs [Google Sheets](#) to rigorously evaluate every cell within the specified data range, **B2:B11**, and only incorporate those values into the final mean calculation if they successfully meet the criterion "**<>0**". Crucially, the condition "**<>0**" serves as the [logical operator](#)

for "not equal to zero." By deploying the [AVERAGEIF](#) function, we ensure that any cell containing the numerical value 0 is systematically excluded from the calculation, while blank cells are automatically disregarded by the function's inherent design. This dual filtering results in a statistically accurate reflection of the average contribution of non-zero entries.

Deconstructing the AVERAGEIF Syntax and Criteria

To utilize the [AVERAGEIF](#) function optimally, a clear understanding of its formal syntax is necessary. The structure is typically defined as **AVERAGEIF(range, criterion,)**. In the specific case where we are both evaluating and averaging the same set of cells, only the first two arguments are required. The **range** specifies the group of cells to be tested against the criterion (e.g., **B2:B14**), and the **criterion** dictates the specific rule governing inclusion.

The specific criterion employed, "**<>0**", is the most vital element of this solution. The angle brackets **<>** represent the standard "not equal to" comparison operator used universally in spreadsheet formulas. This entire criterion must be enclosed within double quotation marks because all comparisons involving [logical operators](#) (such as **>**, **<**, or **<>**) must be interpreted as text strings within the function's argument structure. This instruction selects all numerical values within the range that are strictly greater than or strictly less than zero, thereby achieving the desired exclusion of zero values. Furthermore, because the [AVERAGEIF](#) function inherently processes only numerical data and ignores non-numerical entries (including truly blank cells), this single, elegant criterion efficiently satisfies both requirements--ignoring zeros and blanks simultaneously.

To illustrate flexibility, consider calculating the mean across a slightly expanded range, **B2:B14**. This formula precisely calculates the mean value across the specified range while ensuring that any cell containing a zero or being left blank is ignored during the final aggregation, thereby delivering a reliable, filtered mean value that is contextually sound.

=AVERAGEIF(B2:B14, "<>0")

Practical Application: Calculating Filtered Sales Average

To demonstrate the function's utility, let us analyze a common business scenario involving a dataset tracking the total sales figures achieved by various employees over a period. In this hypothetical data structure, some employees may have recorded **0** sales (indicating inactivity or a lack of productivity), while others may have a blank entry (suggesting they are new, on leave, or their data has not yet been logged). The objective is to calculate the average sales strictly among those employees who generated a positive contribution.

Suppose we analyze the following dataset in [Google Sheets](#), which displays sales results across a group of employees:

	A	B	C	D
1	Employee	Sales		
2	A	10		
3	B			
4	C	4		
5	D	14		
6	E	6		
7	F			
8	G	3		
9	H	0		
10	I	12		
11	J	0		
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				

If we were to rely solely on the standard [AVERAGE](#) function across the range **B2:B14**, the calculation would include the zero values but correctly exclude the blank cells. For example, using the formula **=AVERAGE(B2:B14)** would sum the values (10 + 0 + 4 + 0 + 14 + 6 + 3 + 12 + 0) and divide by the total count of non-blank entries (8). The resulting average sales per employee who had a non-blank value would be **6.125**, as shown in the illustration below. While mathematically accurate for the data points included, this result is often misleading if the analytical goal is to assess the mean performance exclusively of employees who actively generated sales revenue.

D2 ∇ | fx =AVERAGE(B2:B11)

	A	B	C	D
1	Employee	Sales		Avg. Sales
2	A	10		6.125
3	B			
4	C	4		
5	D	14		
6	E	6		
7	F			
8	G	3		
9	H	0		
10	I	12		
11	J	0		
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				

To isolate the average sales exclusively for employees who had a non-blank sales value **and** a value not equal to zero, we must rigorously apply the conditional logic established earlier. We simply input the necessary [AVERAGEIF](#) formula into an accessible cell, such as **D2**, ensuring the calculation range encompasses all necessary data points from B2 to B14:

=AVERAGEIF(B2:B14, "<>0")

Verifying Precision Through Manual Calculation

Upon successful application of the conditional [AVERAGEIF](#) formula, the result clearly isolates and displays the average calculated only from entries strictly greater than zero. The following screenshot confirms the outcome of applying the conditional average formula, which yields a precise value of **8.167**. This final result is substantially higher than the 6.125 derived from the standard [AVERAGE](#) function, effectively confirming the successful exclusion of all non-contributing zero values and blank cells.

D2 fx =AVERAGEIF(B2:B11, "<>0")

	A	B	C	D
1	Employee	Sales		Avg. If Not Zero and Not Blank
2	A	10		8.166666667
3	B			
4	C	4		
5	D	14		
6	E	6		
7	F			
8	G	3		
9	H	0		
10	I	12		
11	J	0		
12				
13				
14				
15				

The success of this formula lies in its ability to calculate the average based only on values that satisfy two criteria: they are not blank, and they are not equal to zero. To independently confirm the accuracy and reliability of this powerful conditional function, we can perform a rapid manual verification process. By reviewing the original data, we identify the values that are strictly greater than zero: 10, 4, 14, 6, 3, and 12. This confirms that exactly six entries contributed positively to the sales figures.

The manual verification procedure requires two simple steps: summing these positive values and then dividing the sum by the count of positive values:

Sum of Values Greater than Zero: $(10 + 4 + 14 + 6 + 3 + 12) = 49$

Count of Contributing Values: **6**

Calculated Average: $49 / 6 = 8.1666\dots$ (which rounds to **8.167**)

This manual calculation perfectly corroborates the result obtained from the conditional **AVERAGEIF** function, providing conclusive proof that the methodology successfully filters out both blank cells and zero values, delivering the precise and contextually relevant statistical mean of active sales contributions.

Alternative Approach: Utilizing the AVERAGEIFS Function

While **AVERAGEIF** is perfectly suited and optimal for managing a single filtering condition (in this case, excluding zero), the related **AVERAGEIFS** function provides extended utility and flexibility whenever multiple, complex criteria must be satisfied simultaneously. Although using **AVERAGEIFS** is technically redundant for the sole purpose of ignoring zeros and blanks (since **AVERAGEIF** handles this elegantly), it becomes indispensable if additional filters are introduced--for instance, if we needed to calculate the non-zero average sales only for employees located in the 'East' region. Note that the syntax for **AVERAGEIFS** differs from its singular counterpart, requiring the **average range** to be specified as the very first argument.

To achieve the identical result (ignoring zeros and blanks) using **AVERAGEIFS** across the range **B2:B14**, the following structure is implemented:

The designated range to average: **B2:B14** (The first argument)

Criterion 1 Range (and Criterion): **B2:B14**, "**<>0**" (The condition "Not equal to zero")

The resultant formula, while slightly longer, achieves the same highly accurate conditional average:

=AVERAGEIFS(B2:B14, B2:B14, "<>0")

It is possible, though unnecessary in this numerical context, to explicitly ensure non-blanks are selected by adding a second criterion: **B2:B14**, "**<>**" (Not equal to a blank string). However, for purely numerical data where the goal is simply the exclusion of zeros and blanks, the concise **AVERAGEIF** solution is strongly recommended due to its efficiency and readability. **AVERAGEIFS** should be reserved for those situations where the data analysis requires the application of two or more distinct filtering rules.

Exploring Related Averaging Functions in Google Sheets

While **AVERAGEIF** provides the optimal balance of simplicity and effectiveness for this specific conditional calculation, [Google Sheets](#) furnishes analysts with a comprehensive suite of functions tailored for various averaging requirements:

AVERAGE: This is the fundamental function that calculates the arithmetic mean of a range of numerical values. It automatically ignores cells containing text and blank cells, but critically, it includes zero values in the calculation, which is why conditional averaging is often necessary.

AVERAGEA: This function is similar to **AVERAGE** but extends its processing to include text and logical values. Text entries are uniformly treated as the numerical value 0, while the logical values

TRUE and **FALSE** are treated as 1 and 0, respectively. Due to this behavior, **AVERAGEA** is seldom used for standard, purely numerical statistical analysis.

DAVERAGE: Representing a powerful database function, **DAVERAGE** calculates the average of a designated column within a structured array or data range based upon user-defined criteria applied via a separate criteria range. It is exceptionally efficient for performing complex, multi-criteria filtering operations across large, organized data tables.

A thorough understanding of the subtle differences and appropriate use cases for these diverse functions empowers data analysts to select the most efficient and statistically accurate method for their analytical goals. For the scenario requiring the exclusion of both zeros and blanks--the most common conditional averaging need--the conditional power of the **AVERAGEIF** function remains the recommended standard solution.

Resources for Advanced Spreadsheet Techniques

The following tutorials offer guidance on performing other common data operations in Google Sheets, building upon the foundational skills utilized in conditional averaging:

[How to Use SUMIF in Google Sheets](#)

[How to Calculate the Median If in Google Sheets](#)

[How to Use COUNTIF with Multiple Criteria in Google Sheets](#)