

Learning to Count with Multiple OR Criteria in Excel Using COUNTIF

Authored by
Mohammed looti

October 31, 2025

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Mohammed looti (2025). *Learning to Count with Multiple OR Criteria in Excel Using COUNTIF*. PSYCHOLOGICAL STATISTICS. Retrieved from <https://statistics.arabpsychology.com/?p=6987>

In the realm of quantitative data analysis using [Excel](#), a common requirement is efficiently counting cells within a designated [range](#) that satisfy one of several possible conditions. While the built-in [COUNTIF function](#) excels at applying a single criterion, it lacks native support for complex, multiple "OR" conditions. Fortunately, data experts have developed a robust and highly efficient workaround that achieves this goal: combining the [COUNTIF](#) function with the [SUM](#) function and leveraging an [array constant](#).

This powerful technique allows analysts to simultaneously evaluate a single range against multiple criteria. If a cell meets any of the specified conditions, it contributes to the final tally. This approach is invaluable when tallying occurrences of specific text strings, distinct numerical values, or even values that fall within different, non-contiguous numerical thresholds, all integrated into a single, concise formula. The fundamental syntax that drives this "OR" counting operation is demonstrated below:

```
=SUM(COUNTIF(A:A,{"Value1", "Value2", "Value3"}))
```

The resulting formula calculates the total number of cells in column A that match "Value1" **OR** "Value2" **OR** "Value3". By effectively executing separate count operations for each item in the array and subsequently aggregating these individual results, this method seamlessly emulates the necessary logical "OR" operation. The following sections will provide practical, step-by-step examples illustrating how to implement this flexible syntax effectively across various data types.

Deconstructing the SUM(COUNTIF) Array Logic

To fully grasp the sophistication and efficiency of this methodology, it is essential to understand the internal mechanisms by which [COUNTIF](#) processes an [array constant](#) and how the [SUM function](#) then synthesizes the output. When a user supplies [COUNTIF](#) with an array of criteria (e.g., {"Value1", "Value2", "Value3"}) instead of a singular criterion, [Excel](#) internally initiates a distinct [COUNTIF](#) calculation for every element contained within that array.

Considering the structure `COUNTIF(A:A, {"Value1", "Value2", "Value3"})`, [Excel](#) first tallies the cells in column A that exactly match "Value1." It then performs a separate count for cells matching "Value2," and finally, a third count for cells matching "Value3." The defining characteristic of this intermediate step is that [COUNTIF](#) does not return a single numerical result; instead, it returns an array of numbers (e.g., {Count1, Count2, Count3}), where each number corresponds to the total count for its respective criterion in the input [array constant](#).

This resulting array of counts is subsequently fed into the [SUM function](#), which then adds all these individual counts together. This additive process is the core mechanism that establishes the "OR" logic: if a cell satisfies **any** of the specified [criteria](#), its tally is registered in one of the array positions

and is ultimately incorporated into the final **SUM**. Consequently, the `SUM(COUNTIF(...))` construction is recognized as an exceptionally versatile approach for conditional counting, offering far greater flexibility than relying on a single **COUNTIF** call.

Example 1: Counting Cells Based on Multiple Text Values

A frequent task in data management is counting records based on multiple categorical text criteria. Suppose you are analyzing a large organizational [dataset](#), such as the basketball team information provided below, and you need to determine the total number of teams belonging to either the "East" region or the "South" region. This requires a count based on an OR condition applied to the textual data in column A.

Examine the following sample [dataset](#), where the regions are listed in column A:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Division	Team	Points			
2	West	Mavericks	99			
3	South	Hawks	95			
4	West	Suns	98			
5	West	Spurs	105			
6	West	Rockets	103			
7	West	Lakers	114			
8	East	Celtics	109			
9	East	Hornets	85			
10	West	Blazers	91			
11	North	Knicks	95			
12	North	Bulls	99			
13	South	Magic	104			
14	South	Heat	103			
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						

To obtain a count of cells in column A that contain either "East" or "South", we implement the `SUM(COUNTIF(...))` formula. The strategy involves summing the individual counts derived from each desired region. The required formula is structured to include both text criteria within the curly braces of the array constant:

=SUM(COUNTIF(A:A,{"East", "South"}))

Upon evaluation, [Excel](#) processes the criteria: [COUNTIF](#) first calculates the count for "East" (which is 3) and then the count for "South" (which is 2). This yields the array {3, 2}. The external [SUM function](#) then aggregates these values, resulting in a final total of 5. The following screenshot confirms the correct application and output of this technique:

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the following data:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Division	Team	Points		Count of "East" or "South"	
2	West	Mavericks	99		5	
3	South	Hawks	95			
4	West	Suns	98			
5	West	Spurs	105			
6	West	Rockets	103			
7	West	Lakers	114			
8	East	Celtics	109			
9	East	Hornets	85			
10	West	Blazers	91			
11	North	Knicks	95			
12	North	Bulls	99			
13	South	Magic	104			
14	South	Heat	103			
15						
16						
17						
18						

The formula bar for cell E2 shows: `=SUM(COUNTIF(A:A,{"East","South"}))`

As clearly demonstrated, the formula successfully identifies that a total of **5** cells in column **A** possess a value of "East" or "South," confirming the method's effectiveness for categorical text data.

Example 2: Counting Cells Based on Specific Numeric Values

The utility of the `SUM(COUNTIF)` methodology extends seamlessly from text criteria to counting cells that match one of several specific numeric values. Consider a scenario where you are analyzing scores or measurements and need to tally records that meet particular numerical benchmarks. For instance, using our existing basketball team [dataset](#), suppose we need to count how many teams achieved a score of exactly 95, 99, or 103 in column C.

The core principle remains identical to the text example: we supply an [array constant](#) containing the target numeric values to the [COUNTIF function](#). Importantly, when working with exact numeric values, the array elements (95, 99, 103) should not be enclosed in quotation marks. The formula

required for this task is:

=SUM(COUNTIF(C:C,{95, 99, 103}))

In this application, [COUNTIF](#) separately tallies the occurrences of 95, 99, and 103 within column C, returning an array of three counts. The outer [SUM function](#) then aggregates these results to deliver the final cumulative count. The calculated result is visible in the following illustration:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Division	Team	Points		Count of 95, 99, or 103	
2	West	Mavericks	99		6	
3	South	Hawks	95			
4	West	Suns	98			
5	West	Spurs	105			
6	West	Rockets	103			
7	West	Lakers	114			
8	East	Celtics	109			
9	East	Hornets	85			
10	West	Blazers	91			
11	North	Knicks	95			
12	North	Bulls	99			
13	South	Magic	104			
14	South	Heat	103			
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						

The screenshot confirms that a total of **6** cells in column C meet one of the specified exact numeric [criteria](#). This illustrates the method's robust capability to handle both textual and exact numeric matching requirements effectively.

Example 3: Counting Cells Based on Comparative Numeric Ranges

The versatility of the `SUM(COUNTIF)` technique extends far beyond simple exact matches; it is also highly effective for counting cells that satisfy multiple comparative numeric conditions, thereby establishing an "OR" logic for ranges. This capacity is essential when analyzing data to identify values that, for instance, fall above a specific maximum threshold **OR** below a defined minimum

threshold. Using column **C** from our previous example, let's count the number of cells that contain a value greater than 100 **OR** a value less than 90.

A crucial technical detail when applying comparison operators (such as **>**, **<**, **>=**, **<=**, or **<>**) within the [array constant](#) for **COUNTIF** is that the entire criterion--operator and value--must be enclosed in double quotation marks. This formatting instructs [Excel](#) to treat the expression as a text string representing the required criteria. The formula for this conditional range count is structured as follows:

=SUM(COUNTIF(C:C,{">100", "<90"}))

In execution, **COUNTIF** calculates the total count of values greater than 100 in column C, and then, separately, the count of values less than 90. These two distinct counts are subsequently aggregated by the outer **SUM function**. The result of this calculation is depicted below:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Division	Team	Points		Points < 90 or Points > 100	
2	West	Mavericks	99		7	
3	South	Hawks	95			
4	West	Suns	98			
5	West	Spurs	105			
6	West	Rockets	103			
7	West	Lakers	114			
8	East	Celtics	109			
9	East	Hornets	85			
10	West	Blazers	91			
11	North	Knicks	95			
12	North	Bulls	99			
13	South	Magic	104			
14	South	Heat	103			
15						
16						
17						
18						

The final result, **7**, confirms that seven cells within column C satisfy the condition of being either greater than 100 or less than 90. This powerful example underscores the adaptability of the `'SUM(COUNTIF)'` technique for handling complex, conditional counting requirements across numerical data.

Advanced Considerations and Alternative Functions

While the `SUM(COUNTIF)` method provides an elegant solution for "OR" logic on a single range, it is important to be aware of a few advanced factors and limitations. One key aspect to remember, particularly when working with text [criteria](#), is that [COUNTIF](#) is inherently not case-sensitive. This means that criteria like "EAST" and "East" will be treated identically and counted together. If strict case sensitivity is a requirement for your analysis, more sophisticated array formulas involving functions like [SUMPRODUCT](#) combined with `EXACT` or `FIND` will be necessary.

For scenarios that demand highly complex multi-criteria logic--especially those involving a mixture of "AND" conditions alongside "OR" logic, or when criteria must be applied across multiple distinct [ranges](#)--alternative functions may offer greater flexibility. The [SUMPRODUCT](#) function is often the default expert solution for these complex array operations. Furthermore, in newer versions of [Excel](#), the dynamic array functionality provided by the [FILTER function](#), when combined with subsequent counting functions like [ROWS](#) or [COUNTA](#), can provide a more readable syntax for advanced multi-condition counting. Nevertheless, for simple and efficient "OR" conditions against a single [range](#), the `SUM(COUNTIF)` method remains the most streamlined and easiest to maintain.

A best practice when implementing this formula is to always ensure that the data types within your [array constant](#) match the cell contents, particularly observing the difference between quoted text criteria (including comparison operators) and unquoted exact numeric criteria. Mismatched data types or incorrect syntax in the criteria array will lead to zero counts or unexpected results. By adhering to these nuances, you can confidently apply the `SUM(COUNTIF)` technique across a vast spectrum of data analysis challenges.

Conclusion and Resources for Further Learning

The combination of [COUNTIF](#) and [SUM](#), powered by an [array constant](#), is an indispensable technique for [Excel](#) users who need to perform conditional counting based on multiple "OR" requirements. Its elegant structure, coupled with its robust ability to handle diverse data types--including specific text strings, exact numbers, and logical comparative ranges--establishes it as a highly efficient solution for complex counting tasks.

By mastering this method, you gain significant flexibility in your analytical workflow, allowing you to quickly extract meaningful and accurate insights from large [datasets](#). This streamlined approach simplifies processes that would otherwise necessitate multiple complex formulas or auxiliary columns. The `SUM(COUNTIF)` pattern is a fundamental skill that significantly enhances any analyst's [Excel](#) toolkit.

For those interested in expanding their proficiency with [COUNTIF](#) and related functions, consider exploring additional tutorials covering common operations in data analysis: