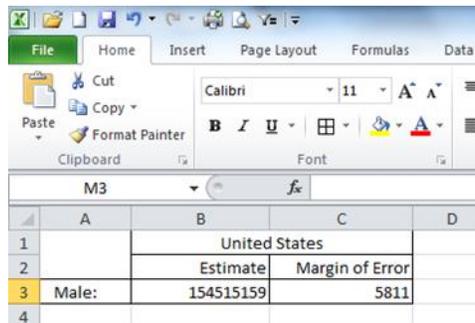


Tech Tip: Formatting Margins of Error in Excel – from the March 2016 CSDC Network News

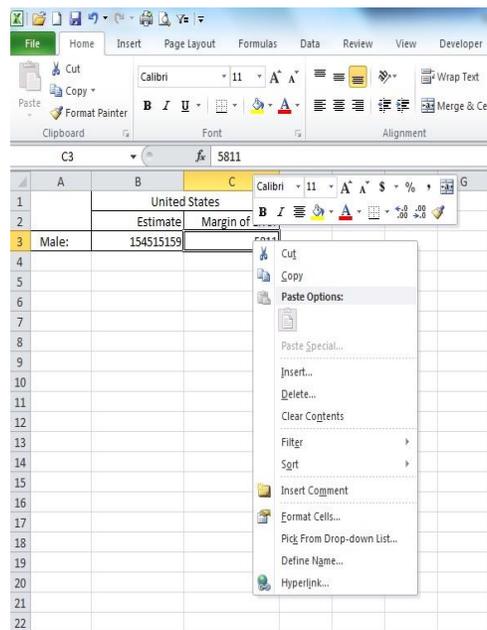
The Census Bureau reports the margins of error at a 90 percent confidence level for all published American Community Survey (ACS) estimates. The margins of error are preceded with a “+/-” symbol to differentiate them from estimates. When presenting numeric ACS data tabulated from a Public Use Microdata Samples file or downloaded directly from American FactFinder in a comma separated values file (.csv), it may be desirable to replicate the Census Bureau’s style of presenting the margins of error with a “+/-” while maintaining its numeric format. A solution to include the “+/-” symbol and still use the number in calculations is to create a custom number format in Excel. The custom formatting feature changes only the appearance of the number and does not alter the number itself.



	A	B	C	D
1		United States		
2		Estimate	Margin of Error	
3	Male:	154515159	5811	
4				

Figure 1a

Figure 1a (above) shows an estimate and margin of error for the number of males in the United States derived from the 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. To create a custom number format, highlight the number to be formatted, right click, and select “Format Cells” (Figure 1b, below).



	A	B	C	D
1		United States		
2		Estimate	Margin of Error	
3	Male:	154515159	5811	
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				
22				

Figure 1b

Alternatively, in the “Home” tab on the ribbon, choose “More Number Formats” at the bottom of the drop down menu from the “Number” box on the ribbon (Figure 1c, below).

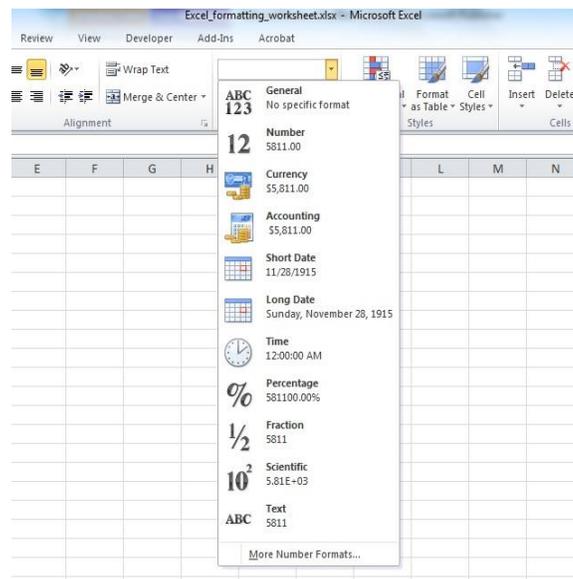


Figure 1c

Choose “Custom” in the “Number” tab, then clear out the box under “Type” and type in “+/-#,##0” (Figure 2).

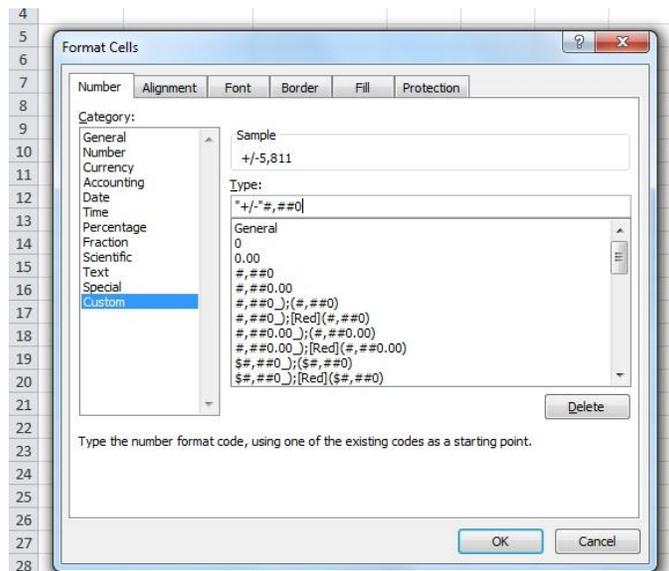
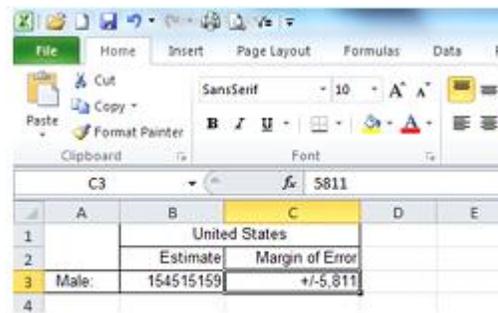


Figure 2

In Figure 2 above, the “Sample” box shows what the formatting will look like in the spreadsheet. Click ok to apply the formatting to the cell. This results in the margin of error displaying with the “+/-” symbol without changing its formatting as shown in Figure 3 below.



The screenshot shows the Microsoft Excel interface. The ribbon is set to 'Home' with the 'Font' group selected. The font is 'SansSerif' and the size is '10'. The active cell is C3, which contains the value '5811'. The spreadsheet data is as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E
1		United States			
2		Estimate	Margin of Error		
3	Male:	154515159	+/-5,811		
4					

Figure 3

This formatting can further be extended to work with margins of error for percentages by adding a decimal and as many zeros as needed to be displayed as follows: “+/-”#,###0.0 or “+/-”#,###0.00, for example.