A pivot table is a summary of your data, packaged in a chart that lets you report on and explore trends based on your information. Pivot tables are particularly useful if you have long rows or columns that hold values you need to track the sums of and easily compare to one another.

In other words, pivot tables extract meaning from that seemingly endless jumble of numbers on your screen. And more specifically, it lets you group your data in different ways so you can draw helpful conclusions more easily. The "pivot" part of a pivot table stems from the fact that you can rotate (or pivot) the data in the table to view it from a different perspective. To be clear, you're not adding to, subtracting from, or otherwise changing your data when you make a pivot. Instead, you're simply reorganizing the data so you can reveal useful information from it.

**What are pivot tables used for?**

If you're still feeling a bit confused about what pivot tables actually do, don't worry. This is one of those technologies that are much easier to understand once you've seen it in action.

The purpose of pivot tables is to offer user-friendly ways to quickly summarize large amounts of data. They can be used to better understand, display, and analyze numerical data in detail — and can help identify and answer unanticipated questions surrounding it.

Here are seven hypothetical scenarios where a pivot table could be a solution:

1. Comparing sales totals of different products.
2. Showing product sales as percentages of total sales.
3. Combining duplicate data.
4. Getting an employee headcount for separate departments.
5. Adding default values to empty cells.

**How to Create a Pivot Table**

1. Enter your data into a range of rows and columns.
2. Sort your data by a specific attribute.
3. Highlight your cells to create your pivot table.
4. Drag and drop a field into the "Row Labels" area.
5. Drag and drop a field into the "Values" area.
6. Fine-tune your calculations.