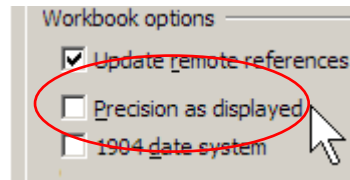


CATEGORY: 2 Input, Skill set: 2.1 Set-up

### 2.1.4 Understand the “precision as displayed (shown)” setting.

*Precision* refers to the total number of significant digits to which numbers are stored, whether these digits are before or after the decimal place. Applying the **Precision as displayed** setting can lose precision in existing data.

Be aware that this setting truncates data. It can be used to fix the decimal places in data entry. It is in the **Tools > Options > Calculation** tab, under **Workbook options**.



It is a workbook setting, so when you truncate (cut down) data to only what the display format shows, you lose the decimal places not shown. This also means that when you enter data, it ignores any figures you type beyond that. On the other hand, if you use **Edit > Copy** (Ctrl+C) to copy data and **Edit > Paste** (Ctrl+V) to paste it into a cell, this copies formats as well as values. So even if the target cell was formatted with a lower precision, the result is that the formatting of the pasted values takes effect first, then the data entry, so the precision is pasted along with the format.

A user may intend to enter data with a larger precision than displayed but they may not notice that decimal places have been truncated.

While this option is in effect, using the *Decrease Decimal* button on the Formatting toolbar will truncate data after the last decimal place displayed.

<http://panko.cba.hawaii.edu/ssr/Cases.htm>

Business Week 'How Personal Computers Can Trip Up Executives,' (2861) September 24, 1984, pp. 94-102, cited by Ray Panko, illustrates the problem of using *Precision as displayed* in Excel: Two 15,000-cell spreadsheets were used for a market projection. Numbers were rounded off to whole dollars, but an error during inputting caused the inflation multiplier of 1.06 to also be rounded off, becoming 1. Without inflation the market was underestimated by \$36million, having serious consequences for the business.