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Implementing Time Lines in Microsoft Excel Templates

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Implementing Time Lines in Microsoft Excel Templates

Description

Microsoft Excel is extremely useful for many different types of digital scholarship projects. This one looks at the ability of Excel to create time lines for historical projects using an Excel template developed for project time lines. Before starting I will warn the reader that because of the way Excel stores and handles dates, these time lines only work for dates after Jan. 1, 1900. There are some potential fixes for this that I hope to address in the future.

The timeline which was developed for this project can be found at http://chuckkann.com/timelines/excel/Mandela.xlsx. You can download this and see the finished product.

Attached is a pdf files with step-by-step instructions on how to implement this project. Additional material may be available at http://chuckkann.com.

The Microsoft site https://templates.office.com/en-us/Timelines has timeline templates in other formats, but they generally work in a similar fashion to the timeline I am using. So once you have done a time line following these steps, you should be able to handle any Excel formatted time line.

If you do timelines using this document, let me know what you think...

Have fun!

Disciplines

Adult and Continuing Education and Teaching | Curriculum and Instruction | Instructional Media Design | Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching | Online and Distance Education | Public History

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How to Create a Time Line in Excel

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1. Download a project time line. Go to https://templates.office.com/en-us/Timelines, and retrieve the circled template. The other templates at this site also create nice time lines, and they all work on the same basic principles. Once you have done a timeline using this format, you might want to try others and see how they work.
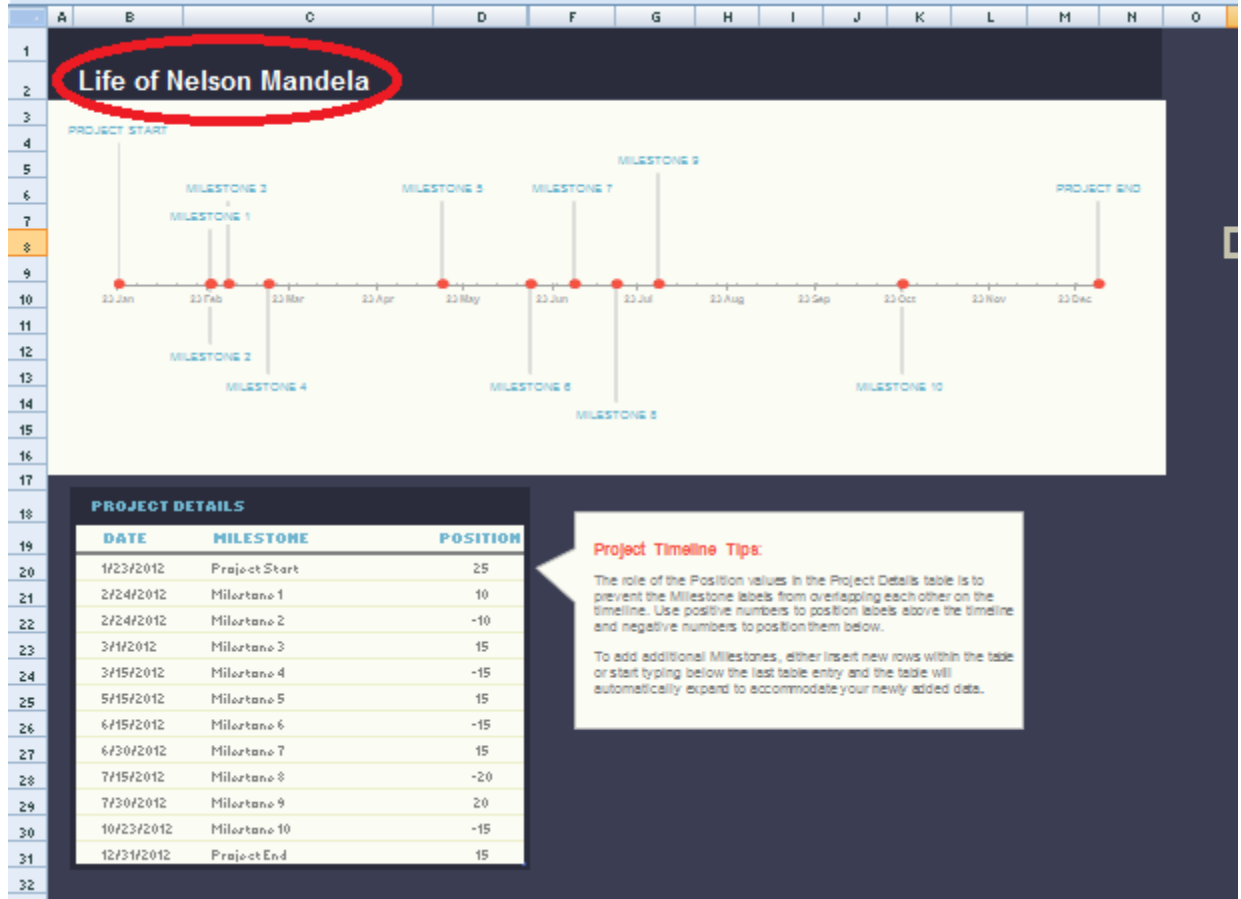
2. Your blank timeline should look *something* like the following. These templates change from time to time, but how the templates function changes very little. Realize that small changes in the format will not affect how these instructions.
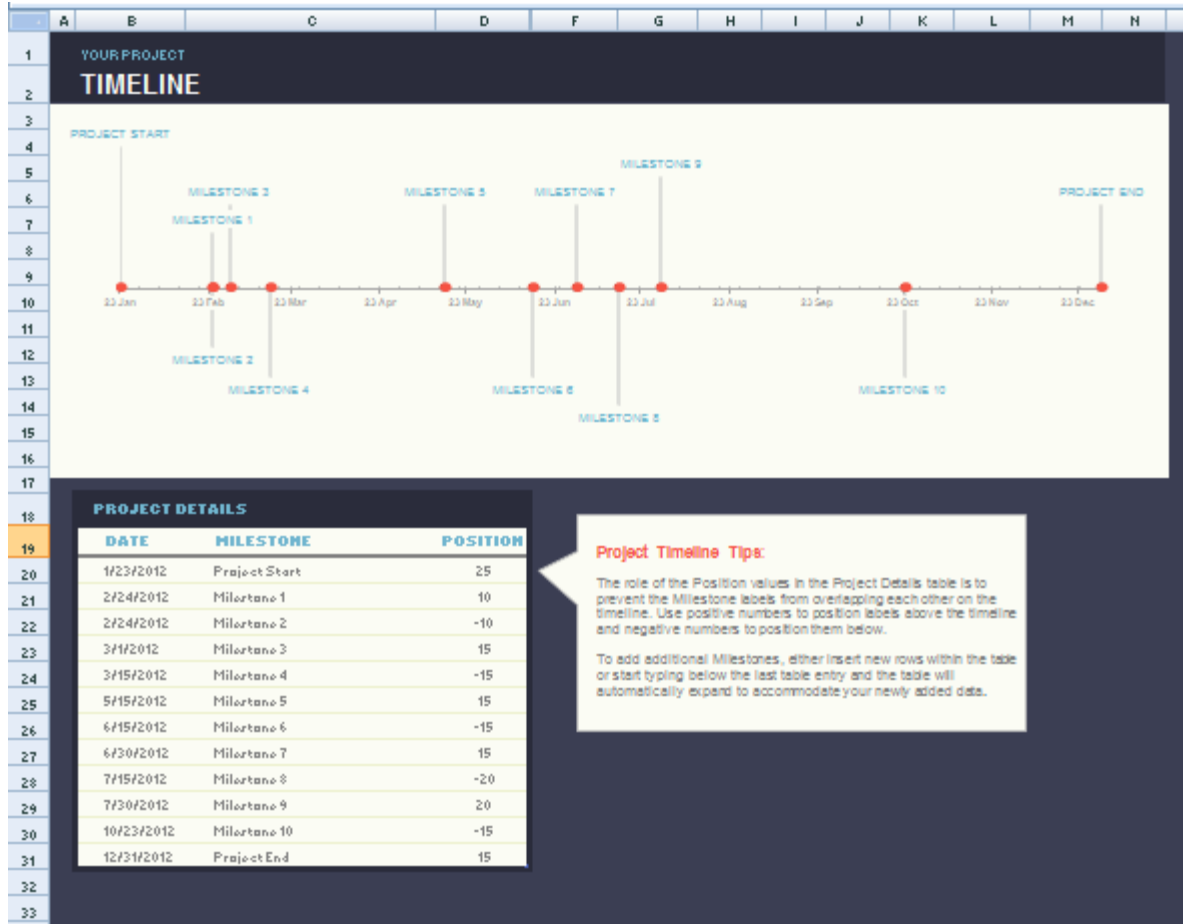
3. Change the title to something more appropriate to your project. To do this, simply type over the existing text.

4. Change the first date to be the beginning of your timeline, and the last date to the end of your time line. Delete all the other rows from the table. This will help as you format your time line. Note that dates before 1/1/1900 are not handled in Excel. You can use them, but the timeline will not have the correct spacing between dates.
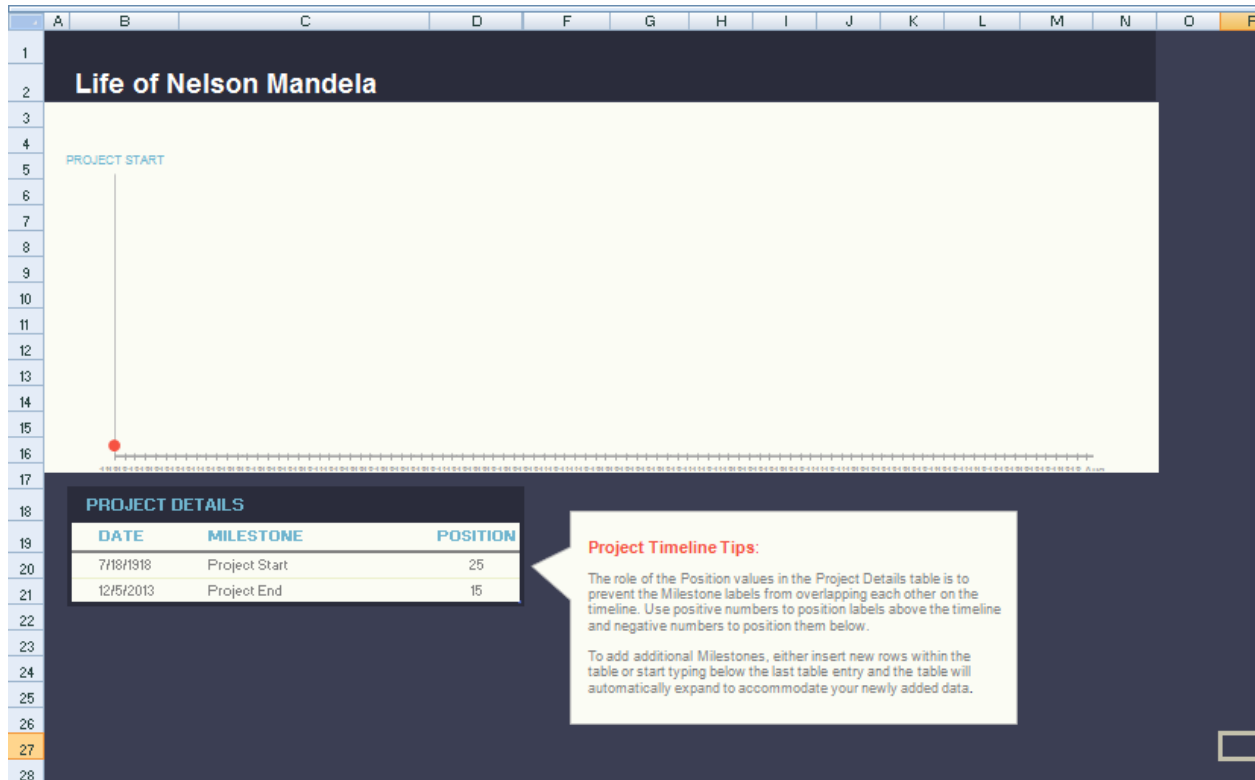
5. Right click on the X axis (be sure you are on the axis, and not in the space above or below the axis or the menu will not be correct. Select the Format Axis option.
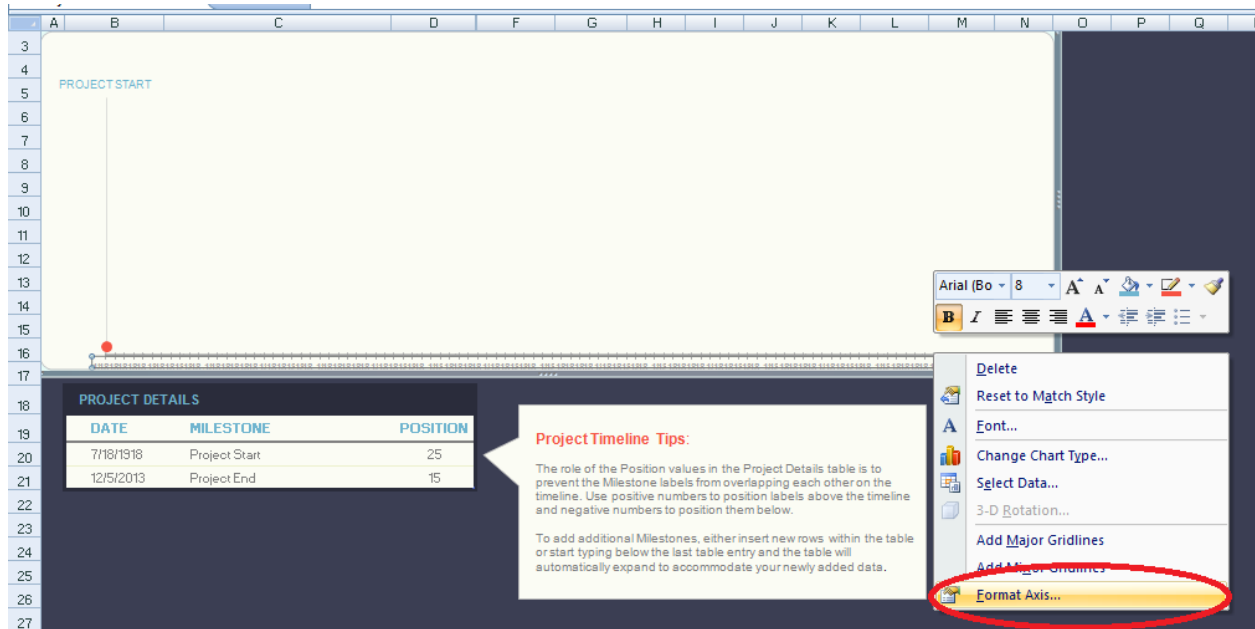
6. Format the data in the axis. The Major unit for the chart is the one that gets a value (in our case a date) below it. The Minor unit is the one that gets tick marks. For this chart, we choose 10 years for the Major unit (as Mandela's life was over 90 years), and 1 year as the minor unit. The Base unit is the same as the minor unit.
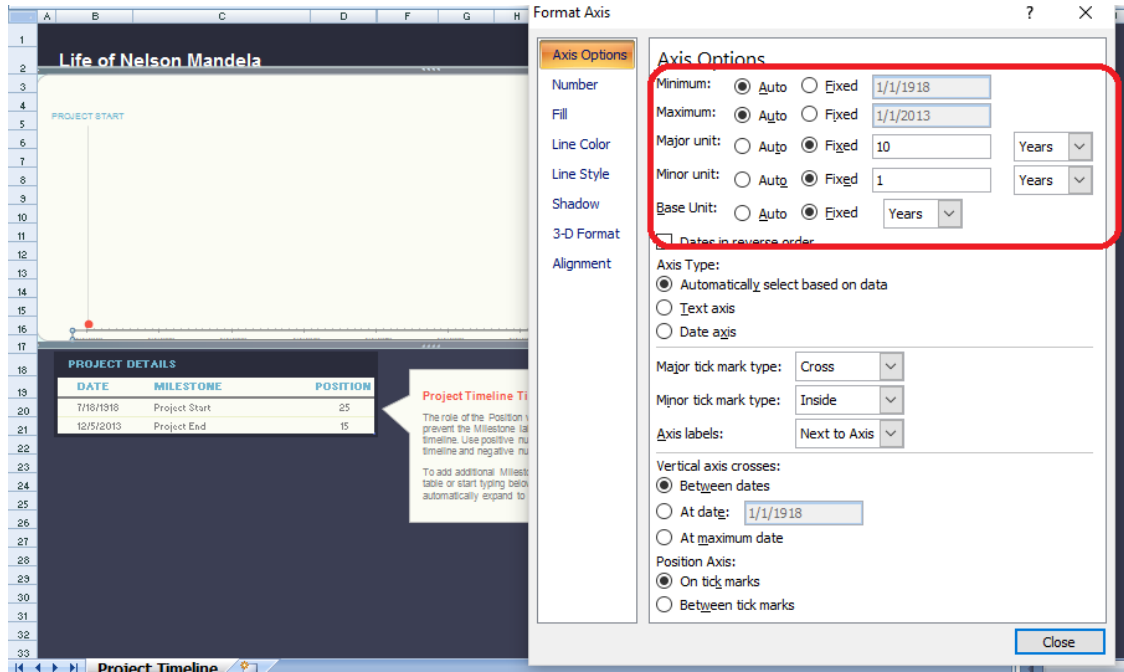
7. Choose the format for the values in the Axis, and select the date type. You should now be showing the timeline with nice dates in the X axis.

8. Fill in the rest of the dates for your project. When you enter points, make the position of some of the points in positive, and some in negative. This makes the axis easier to see. Positive points are shown above the axis, and negative points are shown below the axis. Note that the magnitude of the number determines how high or low the points will be.

Life of Nelson Mandela

BORN - MVEZO, SA   INCARCERATED   DIED - JOHANNESBURG, SA

MARRIED EVELYN MASW   INAUGURATED

PROJECT DETAILS

DATE	MILESTONE	POSITION
7/18/1918	Born - Mvezo, SA	25
01/04/1944	Married Evelyn Masw	-25
05/08/1962	Incarcerated	25
10/05/1994	Inaugurated	-25
12/5/2013	Died - Johannesburg, SA	25

Project Timeline Tips:

The role of the Position values in the Project Details table is to prevent the Milestone labels from overlapping each other on the timeline. Use positive numbers to position labels above the timeline and negative numbers to position them below.

To add additional Milestones, either insert new rows within the table or start typing below the last table entry and the table will automatically expand to accommodate your newly added data.

9. Find some nice pictures about the events you want to show, and insert them into the spreadsheet. You can drag them around to place them in appropriate positions, and you can resize them by dragging on a corner to make them bigger or smaller.
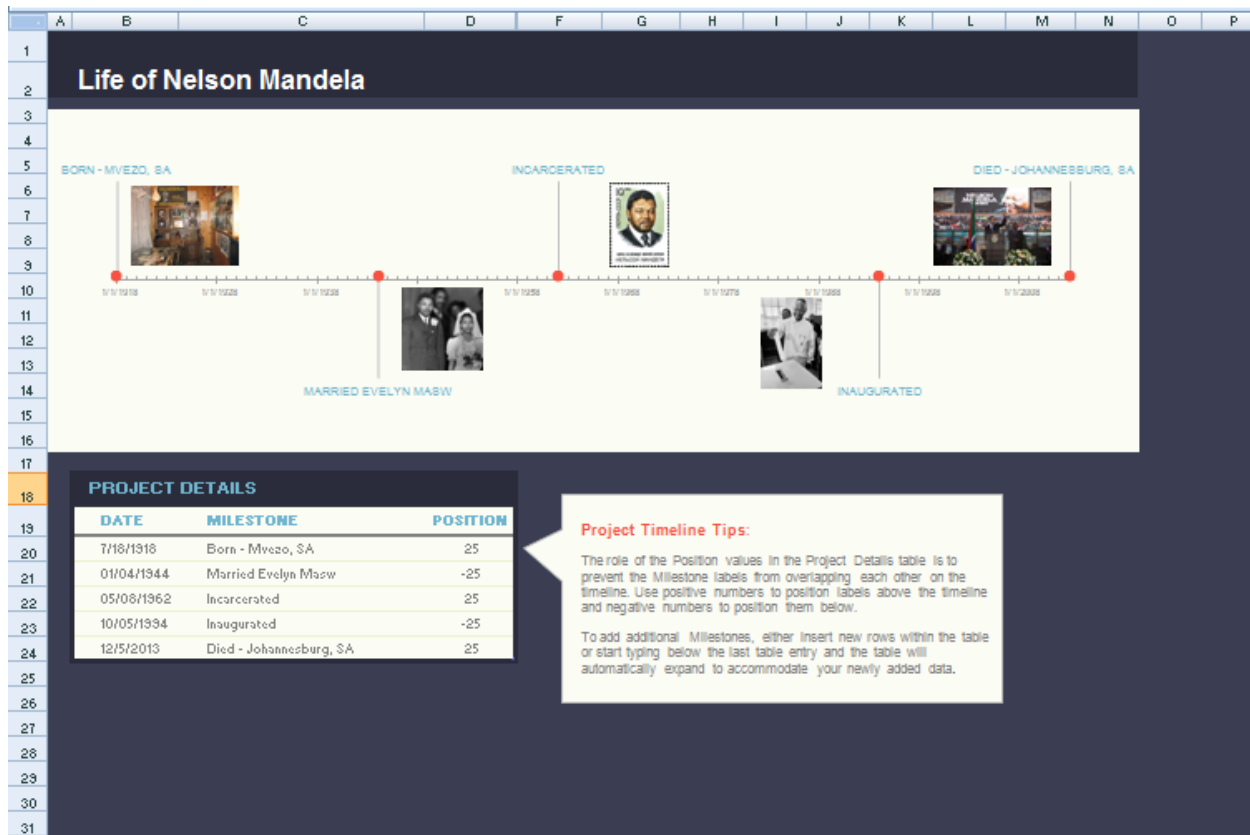
10. This is a nice spreadsheet project for middle school students. To make it better, the events can be hyperlinked to text or other information either in the document or online in the web. I hope to look at doing this in follow on articles.