

## Re: Random Number Generation Dialog Box

**Source:** <http://www.tech-archive.net/Archive/Mac/microsoft.public.mac.office.excel/2004-04/0170.html>

---

**From:** Bob Harris ([plasticnition\\_at\\_wrappermindspring.com](mailto:plasticnition_at_wrappermindspring.com))

**Date:** 04/19/04

Date: Mon, 19 Apr 2004 11:26:44 -0400

I wrote:

>> *Am using Excel 2001 and want to generate some random numbers from a normal  
>> distribution. A help search tells me about what looks like a wonder dialog  
>> box that will do what I want. But it does not tell me how to get to that  
>> dialog box. I've hunted through menu after menu trying to locate it.  
>> Anyone know where it is?  
>>  
>> What's the use of having the function in help if they don't tell you how to  
>> get to it?*

and JE McGimpsey replied:

> *Well, XL2001's Help, while miles ahead of XL5's and somewhat better than  
> XL98, was still very much a work in progress. Later versions of XL let  
> you know that the Random Number Generator Dialog Box is part of the  
> Analysis Toolpak Add-in (Tools/Add-ins..., check the appropriate  
> checkbox). Once the ATP is loaded, you can access the RNGDB using  
> Tools/Data Analysis/Random Number Generation.  
>  
> Be aware, however, that the ATP's pseudorandom number generator is not  
> really up to speed statistically. It's probably good enough for casual  
> use, but for truly serious work, it just plain sucks. XL01's RAND()  
> function is a bit better, and if you search the Excel archives:  
>  
> [http://groups.google.com/advanced\\_group\\_search?q=group:\\*excel\\*](http://groups.google.com/advanced_group_search?q=group:*excel*)  
>  
> you can find posts by David Braden, among others that describe how to  
> retrieve normally distributed random numbers from RAND(). RAND() is  
> still not great for XL versions prior to WinXL03 (as patched - the  
> unpatched version returns negative numbers after a while), including  
> MacXLv.X. I have high hopes, however, for XL2004, which will be released  
> shortly.*

Thanks, JE, for the very complete answer.

In my case, I was interested in generating some test data for a clustering program I'm writing for school. I just wanted to create a quick data set with about 100 samples taken from a mix of 4 gaussians in six dimensions. Unable to do that \*quickly\*, I just gave up on excel and wrote my own c

program to do it.

So while the "iron is hot" moment has passed, I'll save your message so that next time I need to do that I will know how. Thanks again.

"Help" seems to be something that microsoft completely fails to understand. Every product they make seems to have oodles and oodles of help capability, but very little of it is of any use. It's just not helpful. For example, this morning I have had the same experience trying to figure out how to make histograms. What I find, using the assistant, is that yes indeed there is a histogram dialog box, and if I could ever find my way to it then that help would be meaningful. Such help seems to be from the perspective of giving me some help in understanding how to use something \*once I have stumbled across it\*.

*>From what you say in the message above, I had no hope of finding the random number generation dialog box anyway, because it's not installed. I spent about 20 minutes this morning hunting for the histogram dialog box. I'm not exaggerating the time— is it a chart function, is it a table function— the only way to tell is just to hunt down every menu and dialog path you see. Now I suspect that it's the same deal— don't bother looking because it isn't installed.*

Bob H