

The lookup wars, settled in one page.

D8A.ACADEMY/RESOURCES/VLOOKUP-INDEX-MATCH

VLOOKUP

<code>VLOOKUP(id,A:D,3,0)</code>	col 3 of range
last arg 0	exact match. always
looks right only	key must be col 1

XLOOKUP

<code>XLOOKUP(id,A:A,C:C)</code>	one clean call
4th arg	"not found" text
exact by default	finally

PRO MOVES

<code>IFERROR(lookup,"")</code>	no #N/A walls
lock ranges: <code>\$A:\$D</code>	survives copy
two keys? <code>A2&" "&B2</code>	helper column

INDEX / MATCH

<code>MATCH(id,A:A,0)</code>	find the row
<code>INDEX(C:C,row)</code>	read any column
looks any direction	key anywhere

CHOOSE

modern Excel/Sheets	XLOOKUP
old workbooks	INDEX/MATCH
quick, key in col 1	VLOOKUP is fine

GOTCHAS

<code>VLOOKUP(...,3,TRUE)</code>	← default: wrong rows
insert a column	col 3 is now col 4
"42" vs 42	text never finds number

WORTH MEMORIZING

01 Same lookup, three ways

Find the price for an order id. The shape of each answer tells you when to use it.

VLOOKUP

- `=VLOOKUP(A2,Data!A:D,4,0)`
- counts to column 4 by hand
- breaks if a column is inserted

XLOOKUP

- `=XLOOKUP(A2,Data!A:A,Data!D:D,"?")`
- points at the column itself
- survives inserts, has a fallback

→ INDEX/MATCH is XLOOKUP for workbooks older than 2020: same idea, two calls.

02 Trap: the TRUE default

Forget the last argument and VLOOKUP does not fail. It guesses.

YOU WROTE	WHAT HAPPENS	WRITE INSTEAD
<code>VLOOKUP(id, A:D, 3)</code>	nearest match below: wrong row	<code>VLOOKUP(id, A:D, 3, 0)</code>
lookup on unsorted data	TRUE mode needs sorted keys	exact match, always
#N/A in a SUM column	the whole SUM turns #N/A	<code>IFERROR(lookup, 0)</code>

→ Approximate match exists for tax brackets and grade bands. For ids it is a silent data bug.