Highlight duplicates in Google Sheets: conditional formatting vs add-on

ablebits.com/office-addins-blog/google-sheets-highlight-duplicates

By Natalia Sharashova

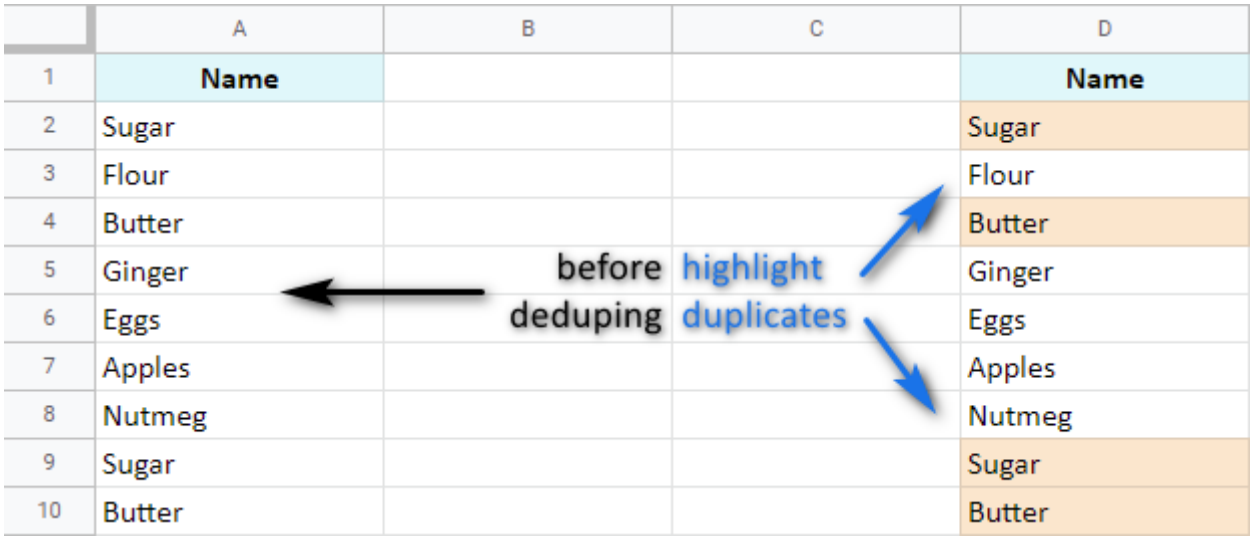
How to highlight duplicates in Google Sheets

In my previous blog post, I described different means to find and process duplicates in your spreadsheet. But in order to spot them instantly, it would be best to highlight them with color.

And today I will try to cover the most popular cases for you. You will highlight duplicates in Google Sheets using not only conditional formatting (there are different formulas based on the spread of duplicates in your table) but also a special add-on.

Highlight duplicate cells in a single Google Sheets column

Let's start with the basic example. It is when you have just one column with repeated values:



Tip. I'm going to use conditional formatting in every but the last case today. If you're not familiar with it, get to know it in this blog post.

To highlight duplicate cells in one Google Sheets column, open conditional formatting and set the following options:

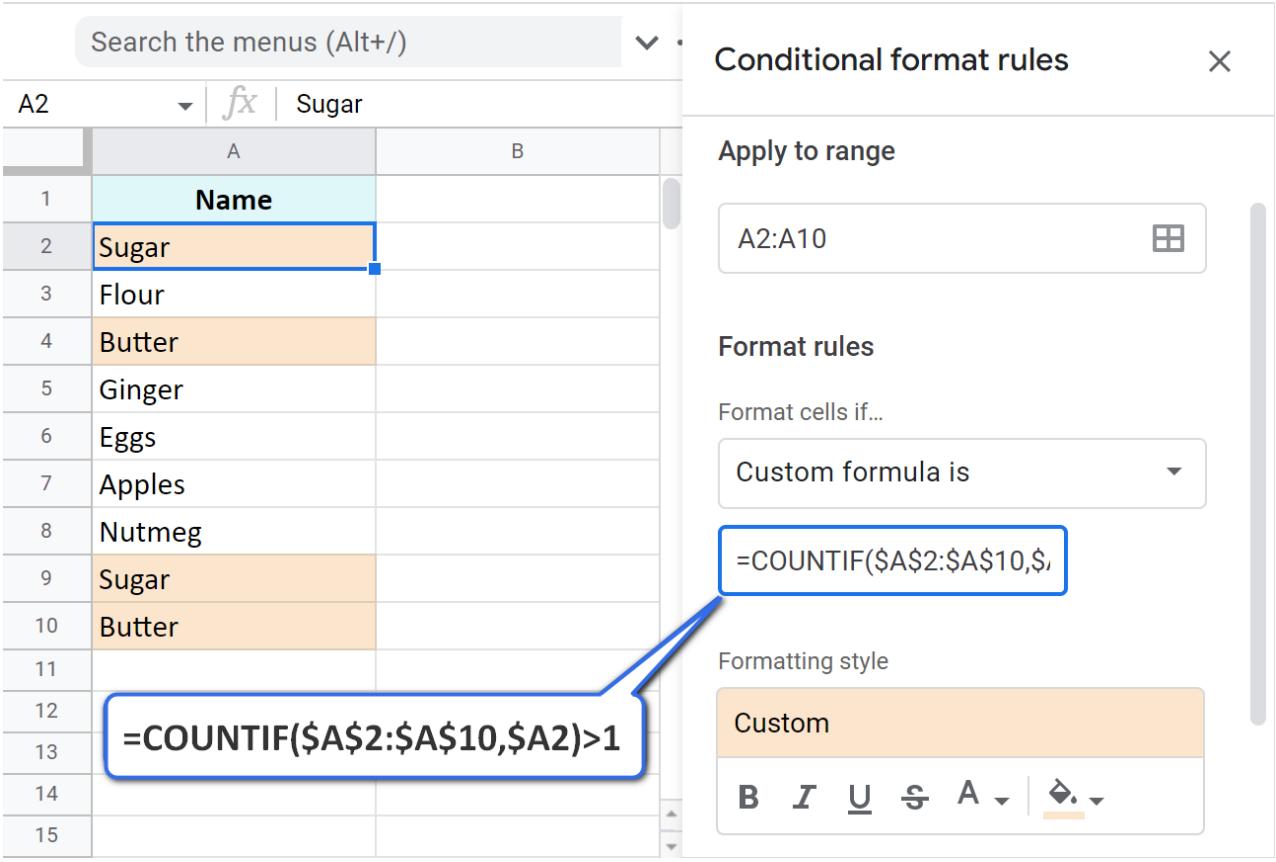
1. apply the rule to your range of cells — *A2:A10* in my example

2. pick *Custom formula* from the drop-down with the condition and enter the following formula:
   `=COUNTIF($A$2:$A$10,$A2)>1`

   Note. There's a dollar sign next to the letter for *A2*. It is intentional so the formula could count each cell from column A. You will learn more about cell references in this article.

3. select any color from the *Formatting style* to highlight those duplicates
4. click **Done**

That COUNTIF formula will scan your column A and tell the rule which records appear more than once. All these duplicate cells will be colored according to your settings:



Tip. See how to count cells by color in Google Sheets in this article.

Highlight duplicates in multiple Google Sheets columns

It may happen that repeated values will be in more than one column:

	A	B	C	D	E
1	**Luna's list**	**Remus's list**	**Sybill's list**		
2	Sugar A	Dry yeast	Spaghetti		
3	Flour B	Feta	Pesto D		
4	Butter	Tomato sauce	Lemon juice C		
5	Ginger	Mushrooms	Pine nuts	let's highligh	
6	Eggs	Sugar A	Olive oil	duplicates	
7	Apples	Mozzarella	Sea salt	in all 3 columns	
8	Nutmeg	Pesto D	Parmesan		
9	Lemon juice C	Flour B	Arugula		
10	Cinnamon	Onions	Red pepper		
11					

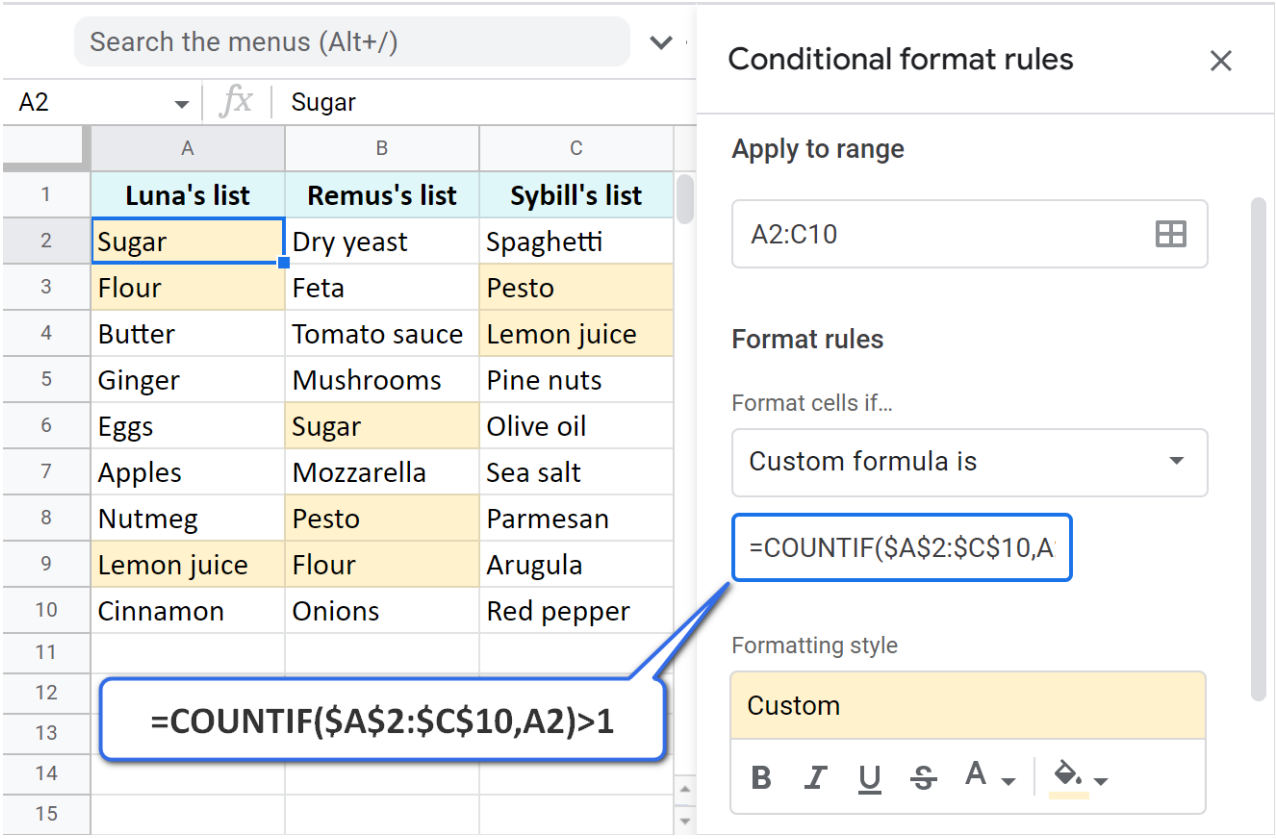
How do you scan and highlight duplicates in all 3 Google Sheets columns then? Using the conditional formatting as well. The drill is the same as above with a few slight adjustments:

1. select *A2:C10* as a range to color repeated cells within
2. change the range for *Custom formula* as well:
   `=COUNTIF($A$2:$C$10,A2)>1`

   Note. This time, remove the dollar sign from A2. This will let the formula count all occurrences of each cell from the table, not just from column A.

   Tip. Read this article to learn more about relative, absolute, & mixed cell references.

3. pick a color in the *Formatting style* section and hit **Done**



Unlike the aforementioned COUNTIF, this one scans all 3 columns and counts how many times each value from the table appears in all columns. If more than once, conditional formatting will highlight these duplicate cells in your Google Sheets table.

Highlight the entire row if duplicates are in one column

Next up is the case when your table contains different records in each column. But the entire row in this table is considered as a single entry, a single piece of information:

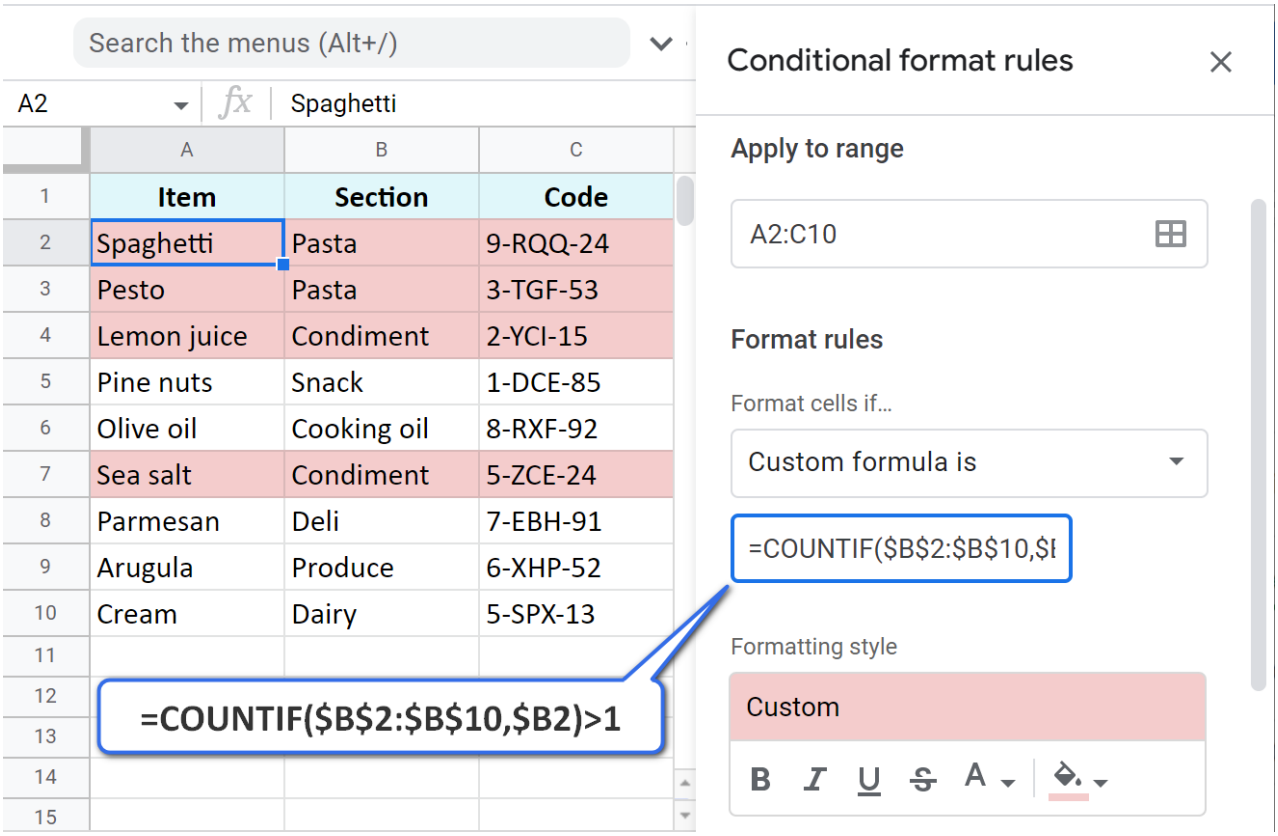
	A	B	C	D	E
1	**Item**	**Section**	**Code**		
2	Spaghetti	Pasta	9-RQQ-24		
3	Pesto	Pasta	3-TGF-53		
4	Lemon juice	Condiment	2-YCI-15		
5	Pine nuts	Snack	1-DCE-85		
6	Olive oil	Cooking oil	8-RXF-92		
7	Sea salt	Condiment	5-ZCE-24		
8	Parmesan	Deli	7-EBH-91		
9	Arugula	Produce	6-XHP-52		
10	Cream	Dairy	5-SPX-13		
11					

As you can see, there are duplicates in column B: *pasta* & *condiment* sections occur twice each.

In cases like this, you may want to treat these entire rows as duplicates. And you may need to highlight these duplicate rows in your Google spreadsheet altogether.

If that's exactly what you're here for, make sure to set these for your conditional formatting:

1. Apply the rule to the range *A2:C10*
2. And here's the formula:
   `=COUNTIF($B$2:$B$10,$B2)>1`



This COUNTIF counts records from column B, well, in column B :) And then the conditional formatting rule highlights not just duplicates in column B, but the related records in other columns as well.

Highlight complete row duplicates in spreadsheets

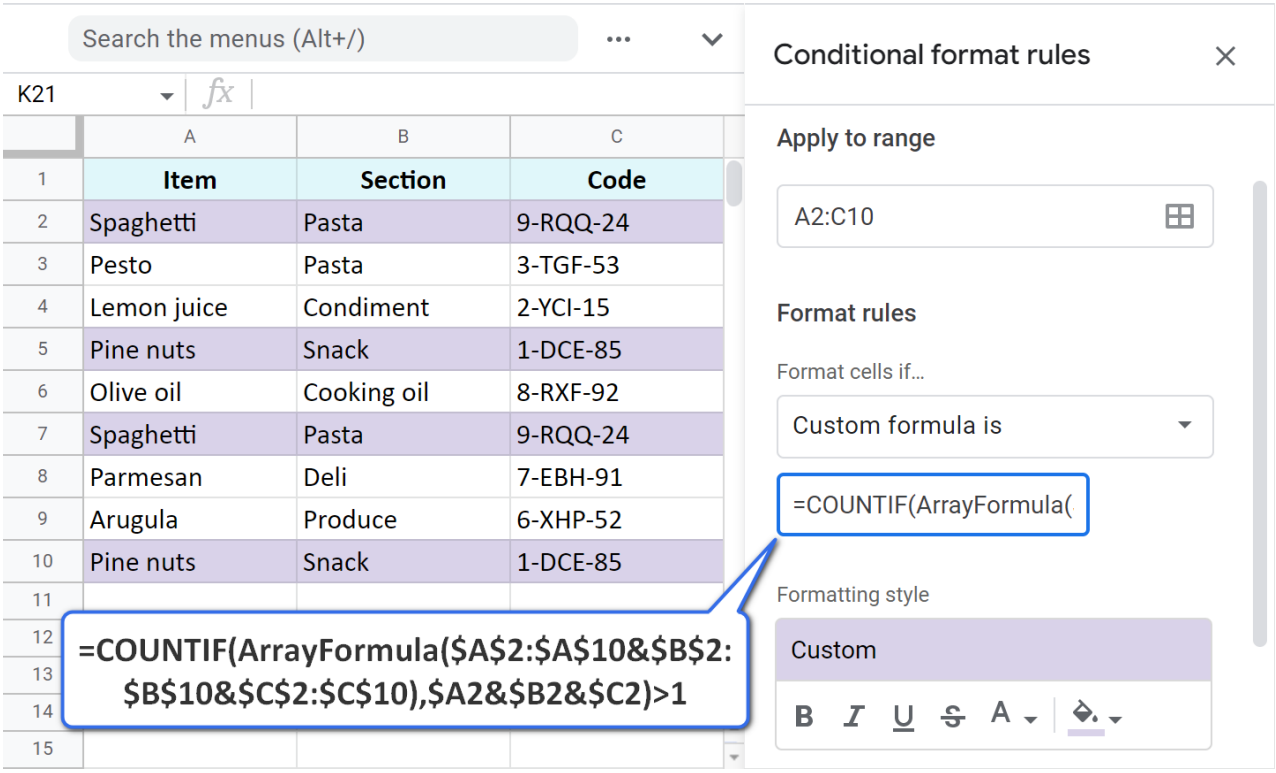
Now, what if the entire row with records in all columns appears several times in your table?

	A	B	C	D	E
1	**Item**	**Section**	**Code**		
2	Spaghetti	Pasta	9-RQQ-24		
3	Pesto	Pasta	3-TGF-53		
4	Lemon juice	Condiment	2-YCI-15		
5	Pine nuts	Snack	1-DCE-85		
6	Olive oil	Cooking oil	8-RXF-92		
7	Spaghetti	Pasta	9-RQQ-24		
8	Parmesan	Deli	7-EBH-91		
9	Arugula	Produce	6-XHP-52		
10	Pine nuts	Snack	1-DCE-85		
11					

How do you check all 3 columns through the table and highlight absolute duplicate rows in your Google sheet?

Using this formula in conditional formatting:

```
=COUNTIF(ArrayFormula($A$2:$A$10&$B$2:$B$10&$C$2:$C$10),$A2&$B2&$C2)>1
```



Let's break it down into pieces to understand how it works:

1. *ArrayFormula($A$2:$A$10&$B$2:$B$10&$C$2:$C$10)* concatenates every 3 cells from each row into one text string that looks like this: *SpaghettiPasta9-RQQ-24* Thus, in my example, there are 9 such strings — one per row.

2. Then COUNTIFS takes each string (starting from the first one: *$A2&$B2&$C2*) and looks for it among those 9 strings.

3. If there's more than one string (*>1*), these duplicates get highlighted.

Tip. You may learn more about COUNTIF and the concatenation in Google Sheets in the related articles.

Highlight actual duplicates — 2n, 3d, etc instances

Let's suppose you'd like to keep the 1st entries of duplicate rows intact and see all other occurrences if there are any.

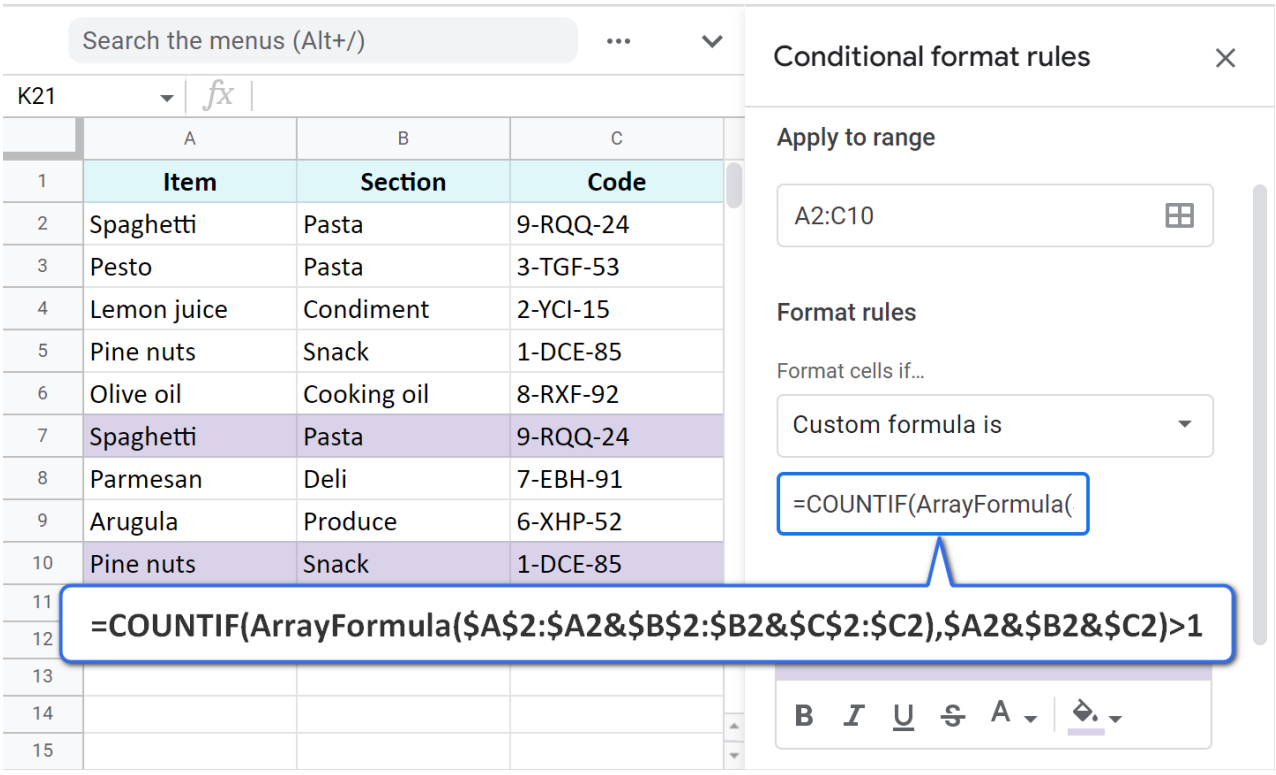
With just one change in the formula, you'll be able to highlight these 'real' duplicate rows — not the first entries, but their 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc instances.

So here's the formula I suggested right above for all duplicate rows:

```
=COUNTIF(ArrayFormula($A$2:$A$10&$B$2:$B$10&$C$2:$C$10),$A2&$B2&$C2)>1
```

And this is the formula you need to highlight only duplicate instances in Google Sheets:

```
=COUNTIF(ArrayFormula($A$2:$A2&$B$2:$B2&$C$2:$C2),$A2&$B2&$C2)>1
```



Can you see the difference in the formula?

It's in the first COUNTIF argument:

```
$A$2:$A2&$B$2:$B2&$C$2:$C2
```

Instead of mentioning all rows like in the first formula, I use only the first cell of each column.

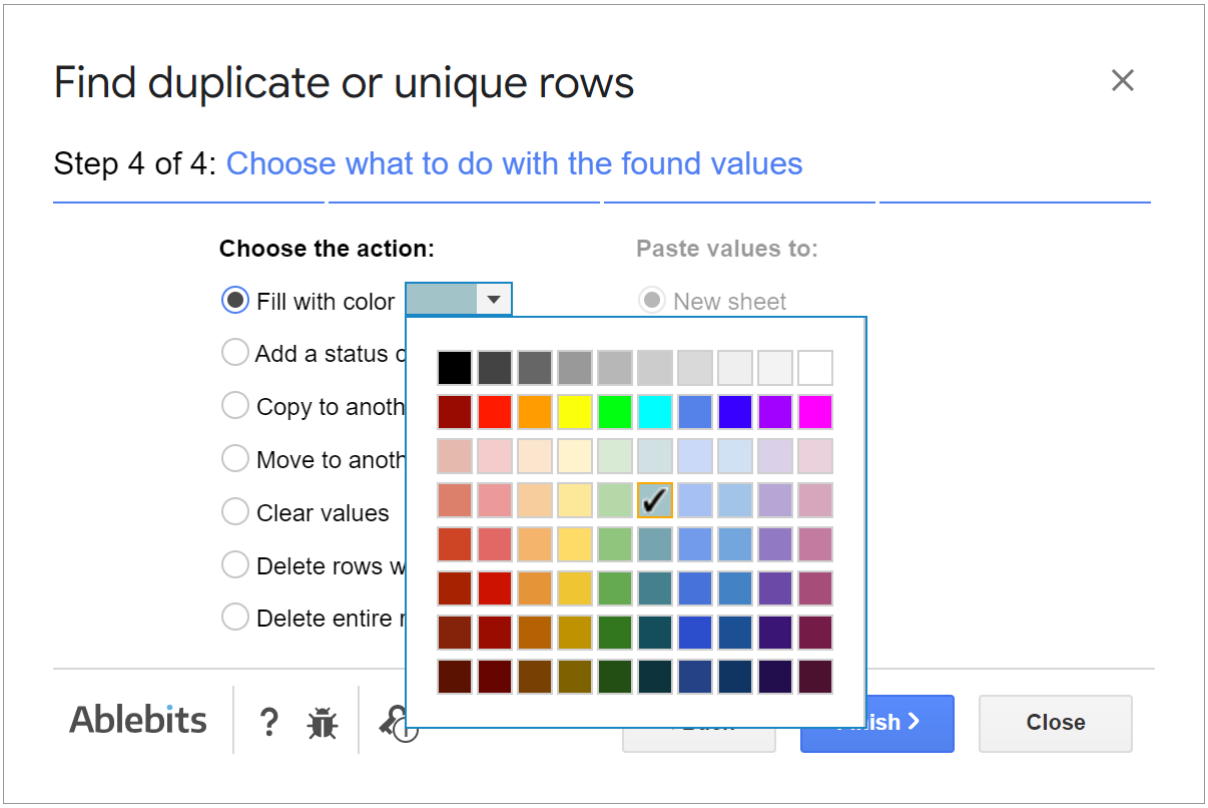
It lets each row to look only above to see if there are the same rows. If so, every current row will be treated as another instance or, in other words, as an actual duplicate that will be colored.

Formula-free way to highlight duplicates — Remove Duplicates add-on for Google Sheets

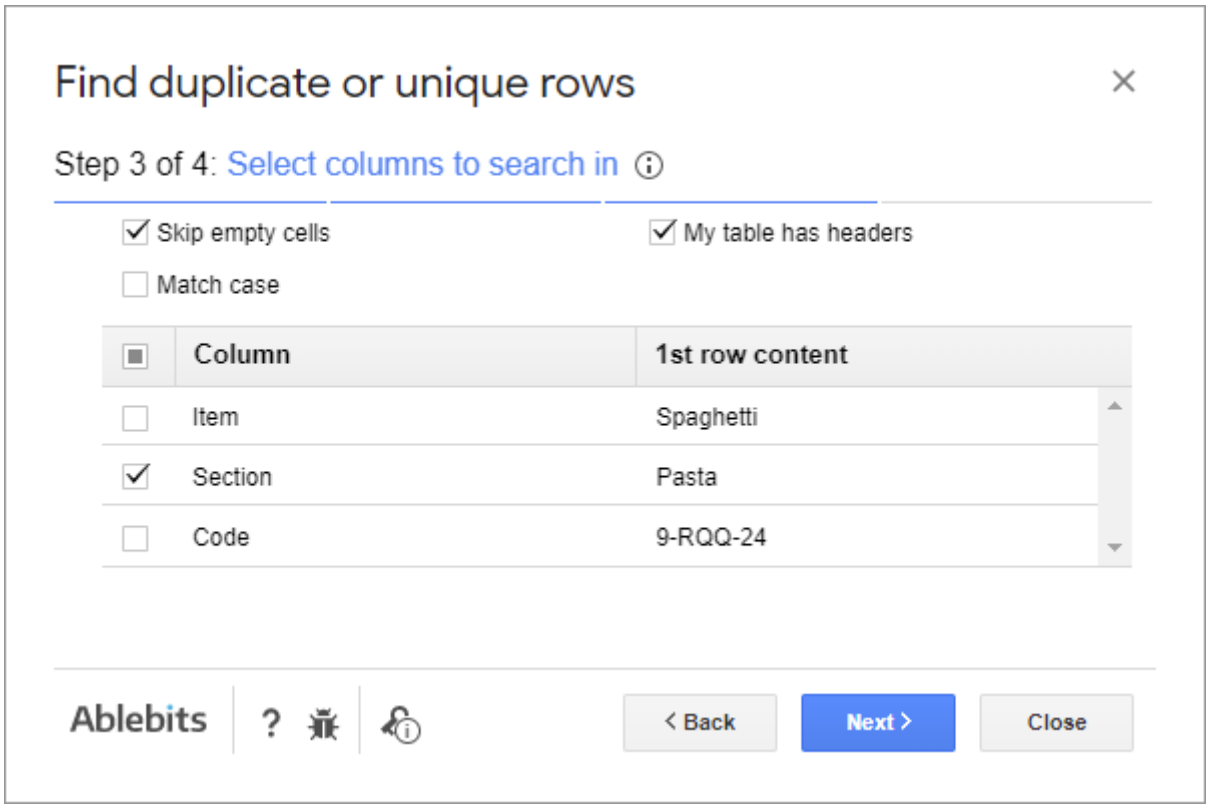
Of course, you may have some other use case that requires another formula. Nonetheless, any formula and conditional formatting require a learning curve. If you're not ready to devote your time to those, there's an easier solution.

Remove Duplicates add-on for Google Sheets will highlight duplicates for you.

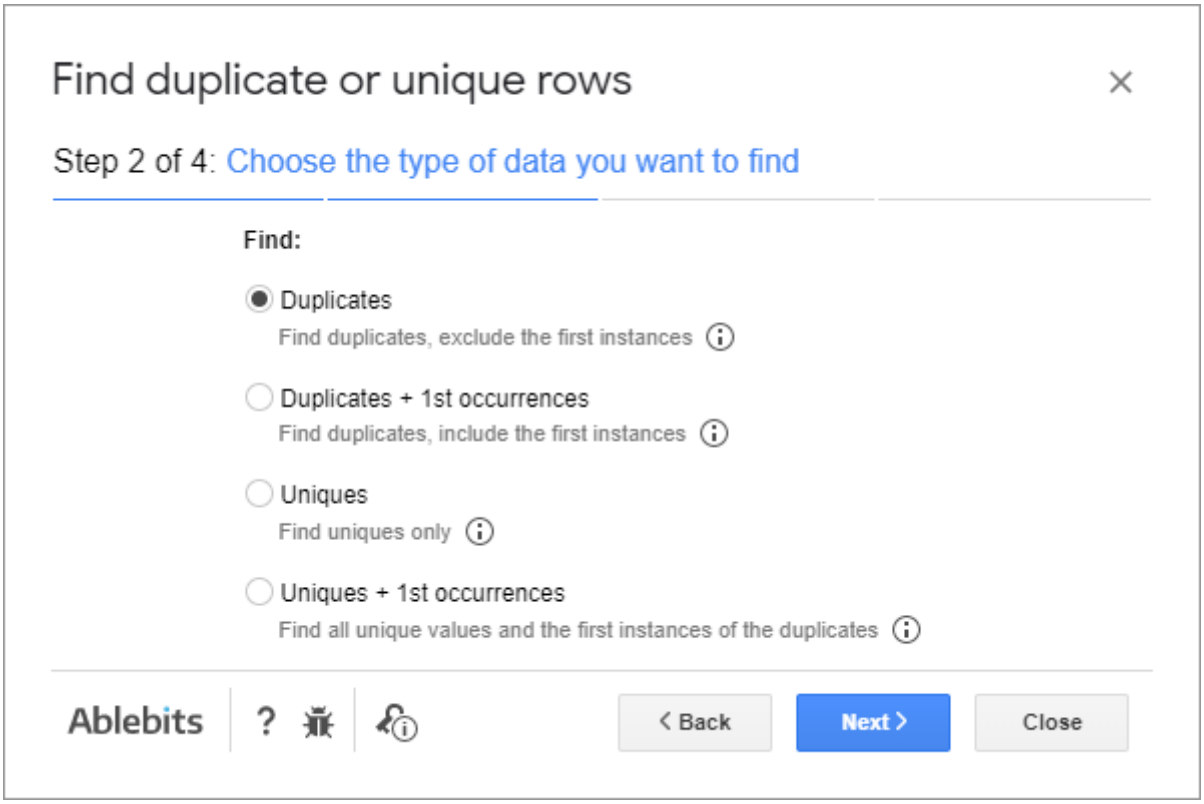
It takes just a few clicks on 4 steps, and the option to highlight found duplicates is just a radio button with a color palette:



The add-on offers an intuitive way to select your data and pick columns you'd like to check for duplicates. There's a separate step for each action so you won't get confused:



Besides, it knows how to highlight not only duplicates but also uniques. And there's an option to ignore 1st instances as well:



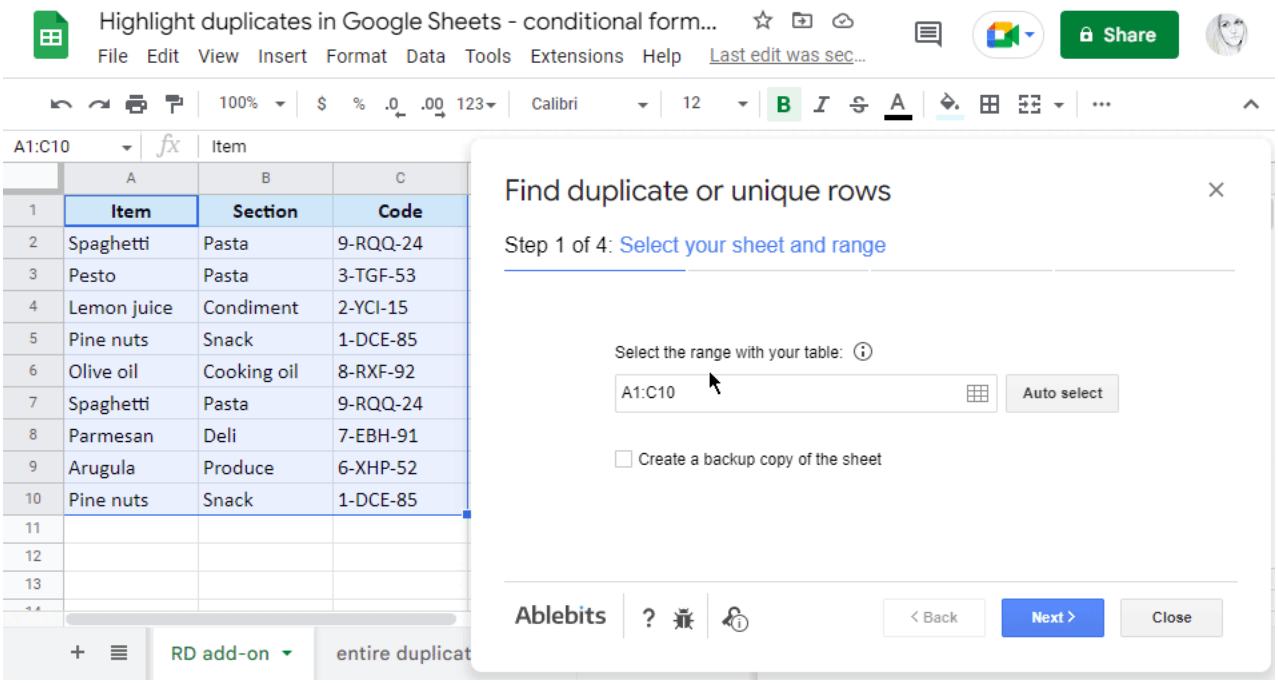
Tip. Here's a video that shows the add-on in action. It may be a bit old since at the moment the add-on has more to offer, but it's still the same add-on:

Highlight duplicates on schedule using the add-on

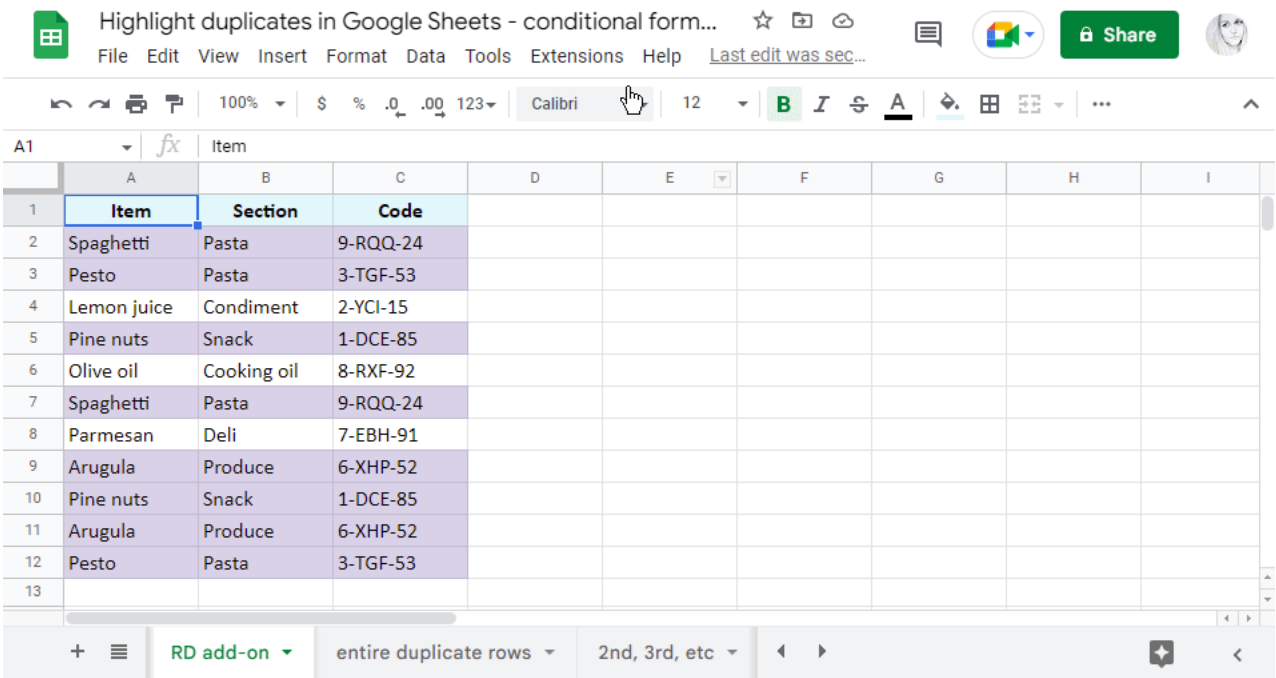
All the steps with their settings that you select in the add-on can be saved and reused in a click later or even scheduled to a certain time to autostart.

Here's a 2-minute demo video to back up my words (or see below for a couple animated images):

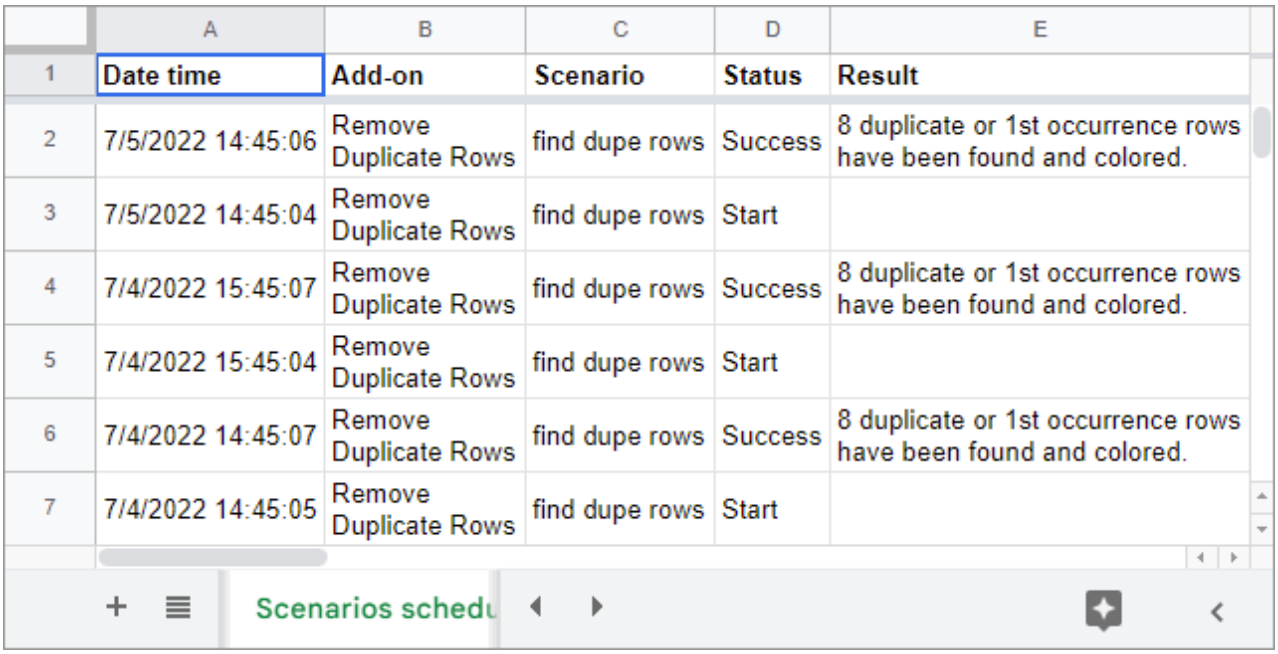
And here's a short animated image instead showing how to save and run scenarios once your data changes:



What's even better, you can schedule those scenarios to autostart a few times a day:



No worries, there's a special log sheet available for you to track all automatic runs & make sure they work correctly:



	A	B	C	D	E
1	Date time	Add-on	Scenario	Status	Result
2	7/5/2022 14:45:06	Remove Duplicate Rows	find dupe rows	Success	8 duplicate or 1st occurrence rows have been found and colored.
3	7/5/2022 14:45:04	Remove Duplicate Rows	find dupe rows	Start	
4	7/4/2022 15:45:07	Remove Duplicate Rows	find dupe rows	Success	8 duplicate or 1st occurrence rows have been found and colored.
5	7/4/2022 15:45:04	Remove Duplicate Rows	find dupe rows	Start	
6	7/4/2022 14:45:07	Remove Duplicate Rows	find dupe rows	Success	8 duplicate or 1st occurrence rows have been found and colored.
7	7/4/2022 14:45:05	Remove Duplicate Rows	find dupe rows	Start	

Scenarios schedu

Just install Remove Duplicates from the Google Sheets store, try it on your data, and you'll see how much time and nerves you will save on getting those records colored correctly. Yes, without any formulas and in just in a few clicks ;)

Video: How to highlight duplicates in Google Sheets

This 1,5-minute video shows 3 quickest ways (with and without formulas) to find & highlight duplicates in Google Sheets. You will see how to color 1 column or entire rows based on duplicates, even automatically.

Spreadsheet with formula examples

Highlight duplicates in Google Sheets - conditional formatting examples (make a copy of the file)

28 comments

1.

   Nadav says:
   February 2, 2023 at 2:08 pm

   Hey there!

   Thx for the awesome info!

   Is it possible to have the "find duplicates" keep going as I fill in the cells?

   Example:
   I've already ran the check and no duplicates were found, however, I now add another cell within the range that IS a duplicate, can it immediately fill in the cell with a certain color?

   Or the only way is to run the formula AFTER all the cells are filled?

   Thx a million! :)

   Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
   February 2, 2023 at 2:20 pm
   Hey Nadav,

   Thank you for your kind feedback :)

   As for your question, if you mean the Remove Duplicates add-on described at the end, you need to run it each time after entering more records because there is no technical possibility to keep it constantly running in the background. But there are scenarios available that speed up the process: you run the add-on with just one click or even schedule its auto-start every hour or so.

   If your question is about conditional formatting rules that you are to set up manually, you just need to indicate a bigger range in advance in the *Apply to range* field.

2.

Myers says:
January 19, 2023 at 6:13 pm

This worked for me (with a tiny bit of adjusting)...
But my Issue/question is:

Issue: Every duplicate is the same color... so if there is a string of duplicates in a row, it will highlight all of them (visually) as one group.
Question: is there a way to have alternating colors so that it's easier to tell when one group of duplicates stops, and another begins?

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
January 20, 2023 at 6:39 am
Hello Myers,

Sorry, it's impossible with one formula or setting. You'd need to create multiple conditional formatting rules and specify different colors for the exact values. Or use Google Apps Script to code something like this for your task.

3.

Durrah says:
January 5, 2023 at 12:35 am

Is it possible to exclude blanks for duplicates highlights in the same row? In other words, I no need the blank cells to be highlighted.

I have same issue with Raghavi .

i use this formula:
=COUNTIF(ArrayFormula($I$3:$I$165&$J$3:$J$165),$I3&$J3)>1
It's highlight all the duplicate including the blank cells.
Thanks

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
January 18, 2023 at 9:56 am
Hello Durrah,

The same solution as Raghavi found will help you:
=AND(COUNTIF(ArrayFormula($I$3:$I$165&$J$3:$J$165),$I3&$J3)>1,$I3<>"")

4.

ILIANA RODRIGUEZ says:
December 30, 2022 at 3:36 am

Hi,
I'm getting almost, but the formula I'm using is highlighting the FIRST value, the original one, but I need to highlight the second or more duplicated value.
This is the formula I'm using:
=CONTAR.SI($B4:$B$5500,B)>1
=COUNTIF($B4:$B$5500,B)>1

What I need is to highlight the second repeated value.
Thanks in avance.

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
January 17, 2023 at 3:04 pm
Hi ILIANA,

Please read this part to see how to highlight duplicate values keeping the original value intact.

5.

CHAITANYA says:
November 22, 2022 at 6:56 pm

Thanks, it worked for me. :-)

6.

Loren Robeck says:
October 23, 2022 at 7:11 am

I am using your conditional formatting formula in Google Sheets to "Highlight the entire row if duplicates are in one column": =COUNTIF($B$2:$B$10,$B2)>1

I have email addresses in column C, so I modified my formula to be: =COUNTIF($C$2:$C$100,$C2)>1

This highlights the incorrect rows, the first duplicate, and the row above it, but the second instance is below not above. Wish I could attach a screenshot but let's say I have a duplicate email in row 3 and 4. Conditional formatting highlights row 2 and 3. :(

Confusing! Any idea why this is?

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
October 25, 2022 at 1:52 pm
Hi Loren,

Could you please check what you have in the *Apply to range* field?

7.

Akshay Bengani says:
August 29, 2022 at 10:13 am

This dosent work

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
August 29, 2022 at 3:04 pm
Hello Akshay,

Which way didn't work for you exactly? Any details on what you tried and how your data is arranged would help me help you :)

8.

Sangram says:
August 14, 2022 at 9:16 am

Thank you

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
August 17, 2022 at 2:36 pm
You're most welcome, Sangram!

9.

Pam says:
July 24, 2022 at 11:53 am

Hello
Formula =COUNTIF($A$2:$A$10,$A2)>1 doesn’t seem to be working.. i put the correct range but it is not highlighting any cells what might be an issue?

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
July 26, 2022 at 2:23 pm
Hello Pam,

Make sure the *Apply to range* contains the correct range.

Also, your spreadsheet locale may require a semicolon instead of comma. Try entering your formula into any cell and Google Sheets will suggest the symbol to use.

If none of these help, please consider sharing an editable copy of your spreadsheet with us (support@apps4gs.com), I'll look into it.
Note. We keep that Google account for file sharing only and don't monitor its Inbox. Please do not email there. Once you share the file, reply to this comment and let me know what cells contain your conditional formatting rule.

10. albert says:
July 20, 2022 at 10:41 pm

Hello.

is it possible to highlight duplicate between multiple sheet ?

for example i want to highlight duplicate sheet1 column A & sheet2 column A

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
July 26, 2022 at 2:12 pm
Hello Albert,

You will find the info on how to compare data in 2 different sheets in this article.

11. Raghavi says:
July 6, 2022 at 4:46 pm

Hello,
Is it possible to exclude blanks for duplicates highlights in the same row? In other words, I no need the blank cells to be highlighted.

12. Namrata says:
July 3, 2022 at 6:25 am

=countif($D2:$D, $D2)>1, this formula is not working for exact value, its highlighting all the similar in a cell. please help

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
July 6, 2022 at 8:18 am
Hello Namrata,

This formula is used to highlight duplicate cells in one Google Sheets column. If this is not what you need, please describe your task in detail, I'll try to help.

13.
Ricardo Molina says:
May 8, 2022 at 6:12 pm

awesome, thank you!

14.
Cane says:
March 19, 2022 at 1:27 am

Hi! I've come across this great tutorial while searching for a way to higlight a row when there are at least two "x" in the row. Sadly, I'm already stuck. I've gone all the way to recreate the first example in order to test this out, but google says that the formula that's written here is wrong. In the formula "=COUNTIF($A$2:$A$10,$A2)>1" it doesn't let me put the ",$A2" after the "$A$10". In fact, it doesn't let me put a comma in there at all without showing an error. Does anybody know why that is the case?

Natalia Sharashova (Ablebits Team) says:
March 22, 2022 at 7:46 am
Hi Cane,

You can make a copy of the spreadsheet that contains all formula examples I used by clicking the link in the related section at the end of the blog post.

As for Google Sheets not understanding a comma in your formulas, this is dictated by your spreadsheet locale (*File* > *Spreadsheet settings* > *General* > *Locale*). When you start typing any formula, look at the Google Sheets hint about it. Perhaps, you need to use a semicolon instead.

Post a comment

Thank you for your comment!
When posting a question, please be very clear and concise. This will help us provide a quick and relevant solution to
your query. We cannot guarantee that we will answer every question, but we'll do our best :)

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