

H-1B Performance Reporting Instructional Sheet: Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS)

Invalid Column Error Caused by Blank Final Columns

This instructional sheet is to help you troubleshoot an Invalid Column Number error in WIPS that occurs due to blank columns at the end of your Excel data file.

What is an Invalid Column Error?

The Invalid Column Number error is a format error generated when WIPS detects that the data file has less than or more than the required number of columns. The number of columns must correspond with the number of data elements in the current H-1B PIRL.

The current 2021 H-1B PIRL (Version 1.1) **has 90 data elements and requires 90 columns to be in your data file.**

Why Do Blank Columns Result in an Invalid Column Error?

When one or more data elements at the end of the H-1B PIRL are left blank in your data file, the empty columns may not be recognized (i.e., counted) when you convert your Excel document to a .csv or .txt file. WIPS will conclude your upload does not have the required 90 columns.

Below are the final columns in the 2021 H-1B PIRL (Version 1.1):

2700	2901	2907	2908	2909	2911
Social Security Number	Pre-Apprenticeship Program Status	Apprenticeship Program Status	Date Started Apprenticeship	Expected Completion Date: Apprenticeship	Date Completed Apprenticeship
	[Leave Blank]	[Leave Blank]			
999999999					
999999999					
111111113					
111111114					
111111115					
111111116					
111111117					
111111118					
111111119					

Any or all of the data elements in the five columns after PIRL 2700 may not be applicable to your grant and are left blank in your data file.

WIPS requires that your data file contain no column headers. Without column headers, the file looks like this:

99999999					
99999999					
11111113					
11111114					
11111115					
11111116					
11111117					
11111118					
11111119					

Since there is nothing in the columns after PIRL 2700, this data element is the last column counted in your file by WIPS. Because those additional columns are not recognized, your upload file will only have 85 columns and you will receive an invalid column error.

These instructions are to help you convert an Excel spreadsheet into one of the required formats (.csv or .txt) and ensure blank columns are recognized. **If any row has an entry in the column, you do not need to follow these instructions. This only applies when you have one or more columns at the end of the PIRL file with NO data in any rows.**

How Do I Know If I'm Receiving the Error Due to this Issue?

One way to doublecheck if this issue is occurring, is to open your .csv or .txt file and review your data in Notepad. Open your file in Notepad by right clicking the file and selecting OPEN WITH and select Notepad.

Viewing the data in the example below, you can see that each row of data ends with the PIRL 2700 (SSN) and there are no commas after the SSN data element. In Notepad, the commas represent columns.

You need to see five additional commas after the SSN to represent those final blank columns.

```

,0,,,20171002,20170911,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111126
,0,,,20171002,20170912,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111127
,0,,,20171002,20170913,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111128
,0,,,20171002,20170914,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111129
,0,,,20171002,20170915,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111130
,0,,,20171002,20170916,20180513,1,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111131

```

Fixing the Error: How Do I Ensure WIPS Will Recognize 90 Columns and Accept My Data File?

There is more than one way to adjust your Excel spreadsheet so that when you convert it to .csv or .txt, WIPS will recognize the correct number of columns.

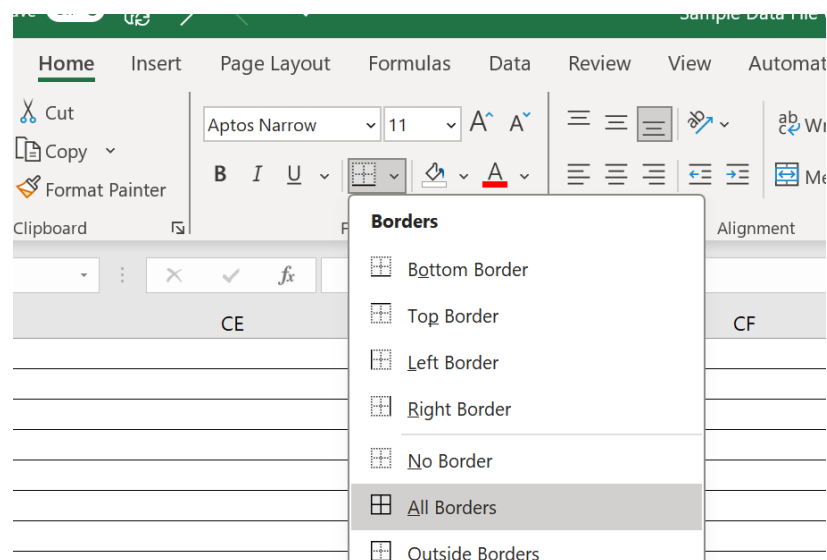
One quick and simple method to fix the issue is to add **borders** to your columns in your Excel sheet. The borders result in the recognition of blank columns when you convert your file.

Steps to Add Borders:

1. Select the columns to be included. In the image below, Column CL is the 90th column.

	CG	CH	CI	CJ	CK	CL
	999999999					
	999999999					
	111111113					
	111111114					
	111111115					
	111111116					
	111111117					
	111111118					
	111111119					
	111111120					
	111111121					
	111111122					
	111111123					
	111111124					
	111111125					
	111111126					
	111111127					
	111111128					
	111111129					
	111111130					
	111111131					
	111111132					
	111111133					
	111111134					
	111111135					

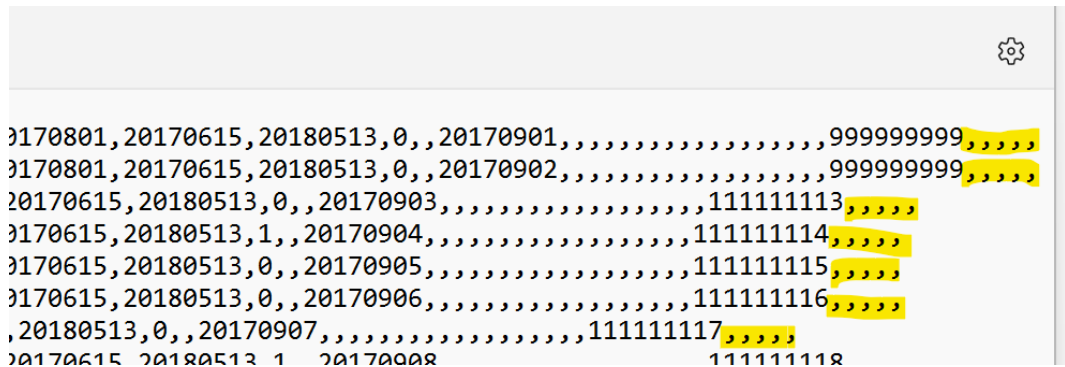
2. On your ribbon, select the Border tool and All Borders.



- Now there are borders around the relevant cells. **Do not add borders to extra rows or columns.**

	CG	CH	CI	CJ	CK	CL	CM
	99999999						
	99999999						
	11111113						
	11111114						
	11111115						
	11111116						
	11111117						
	11111118						
	11111119						
	11111120						
	11111121						
	11111122						
	11111123						
	11111124						
	11111125						
	11111126						
	11111127						
	11111128						
	11111129						
	11111130						
	11111131						
	11111132						
	11111133						
	11111134						
	11111135						

- Save the spreadsheet as a .csv file and then open it in Notepad.
- Now when you look at the **end** of each row of data, you can see the commas after PIRL 2700 (SSN) and know that the system is recognizing those final five columns.



```

3170801,20170615,20180513,0,,20170901,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,999999999,
3170801,20170615,20180513,0,,20170902,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,999999999,
20170615,20180513,0,,20170903,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,11111113,
3170615,20180513,1,,20170904,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,11111114,
3170615,20180513,0,,20170905,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,11111115,
3170615,20180513,0,,20170906,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,11111116,
,20180513,0,,20170907,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,11111117,
20170615 20180513 1 20170908 11111118

```

This file is ready to upload with the required 90 columns.

Remember, if you have a code value in the final column in your data file in any row, then the system will recognize the columns at the end of the PIRL and you will not need to complete these steps.

This step is only necessary when you have one or more columns at the end of your data file with no data in any of the rows.

Can I Just Add Dummy Data to the Final Column to Get WIPS to Accept the File?

No, you should not add data that you know is not correct just so the final column is not blank. When you certify your QPR, you are certifying that the data you submit is accurate and you have documentation of what you submit.

Adding miscellaneous data to a column may also result in logic errors if the data you entered does not align with the rest of the code values for that participant.

What Should I Do if I'm Still Getting an Invalid Column Error?

This error is generated when WIPS detects there are too many or too few columns, but there may be other reasons besides blank final columns why you are receiving the error. Please see additional [reporting technical assistance resources](#) for additional troubleshooting ideas. The [WIPS Tips Sheet](#) includes other tips to this error, as well as other common errors.