



Deadline Status: Traffic Light Indicators

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As discussed in class, I recommend using **Deadlines** versus **Finish No Later Than** Constraints. Why? Because Deadlines are flexible – they do not override Microsoft Project’s ability to schedule and calculate a finish date. Some constraints, the inflexible ones, override Projects ability to schedule and calculate new Start and Finish dates which can result in schedule inaccuracies.

Note: Deadlines are set up in the Task Information window on the Advanced Tab and are indicated by an Arrow on the Gantt Chart:

	Task Name	Duration	Start	Finish	Deadline	Predecessors
1						
2	Task A	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Fri 2/25/11	
3	Task B	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Wed 2/23/11	
4	Task C	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Mon 2/21/11	
5	Task D	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Thu 2/17/11	
6	Task E	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	NA	

Task Information

General | Predecessors | Resources | Advanced | Notes | Custom Fields

Name: Task A Duration: 5 days Estimated

Constrain task

Deadline:

Constraint type: As Soon As Possible Constraint date: NA

Task type: Fixed Units Effort driven

Calendar: None Scheduling ignores resource calendars

WBS code: 1

Earned value method: % Complete

Mark task as milestone

Help OK Cancel

So now that we know we want to use a Deadline for any task that must be completed by a certain date, there’s an issue that needs to be addressed. With Deadlines, we only get a warning once we’ve actually missed one - so that means we constantly have to be reviewing our deadlines to see if any are approaching (See the red warning symbol under the indicator column for Task D above).

One of the tools that I have found useful is to create a Deadline Traffic Light column which displays Green, Yellow, or Red indicators depending on the timing of a task’s finish date versus its Deadline date. Take a look at the **Deadline Status** column below, which makes it very easy to monitor approaching (or past) deadlines:

	Deadline Status	Task Name	Duration	Start	Finish	Deadline
1						
2	●	Task A	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Fri 2/25/11
3	●	Task B	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Wed 2/23/11
4	●	Task C	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Mon 2/21/11
5	●	Task D	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Fri 2/18/11
6		Task E	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	NA

Creating the Custom Column for Your Deadline Traffic Light Indicators:

Follow these steps to create your own Deadline Status column:

1. Open a project with Tasks that have deadlines, or just use my sample file.

2. Open the Custom Fields Window:

2003 / 2007 Users:

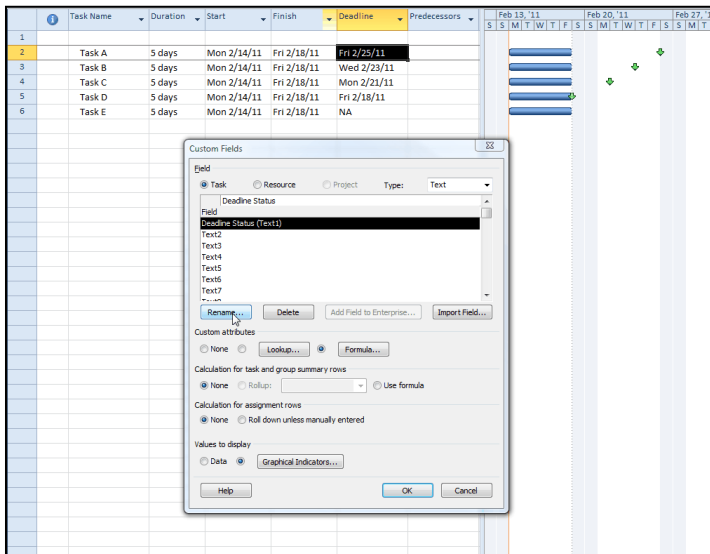
Tools > Customize > Fields

2010 Users:

Project > Properties > Custom Fields

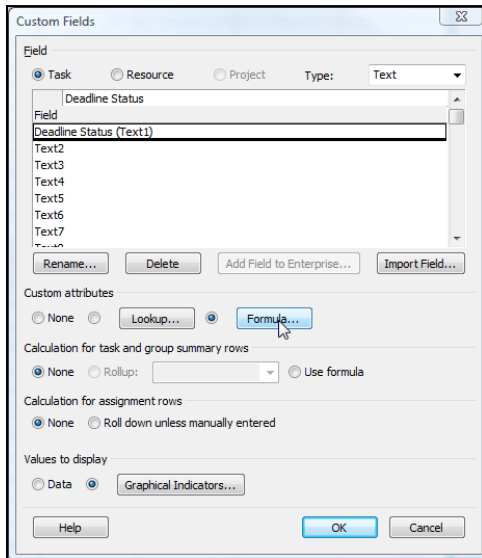
3. Rename the “Text1” custom field to “Deadline Status”.

Select Text1 and press Rename. Rename the field to “Deadline Status”.



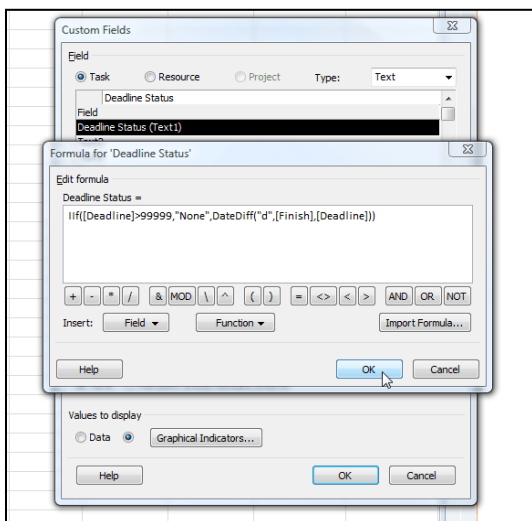
4. Next we need to add a formula which calculates the number of days between a Task's Finish Date and it's Deadline Date:

Make sure Deadline Status (Text1) is still selected and press the Formula button.



Now add the following formula and press OK:

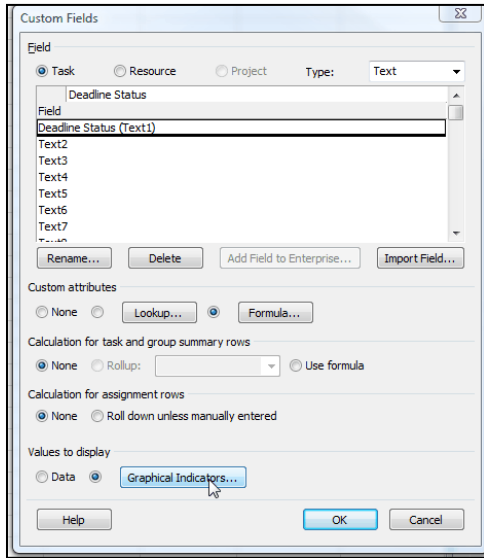
IIf([Deadline]>99999,"None",DateDiff("d",[Finish],[Deadline]))



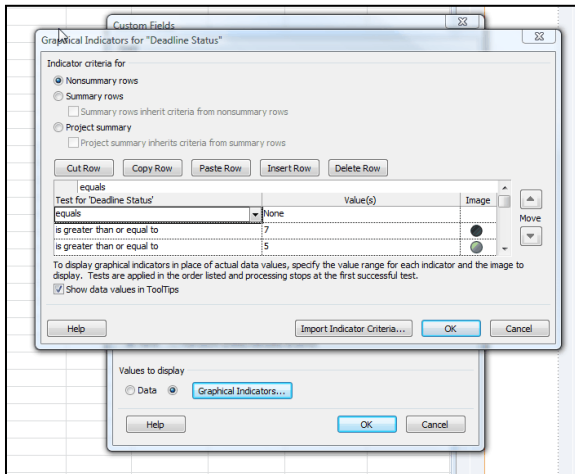
Note: The "iif" in the function above is not a typo, that is the correct spelling.

5. Next we need to update the Green-Yellow-Red Graphical Indicators for this column:

Make sure Deadline Status (Text1) is still selected and press the Graphical Indicators button.



Now update the field with the warning day values and select the desire image.

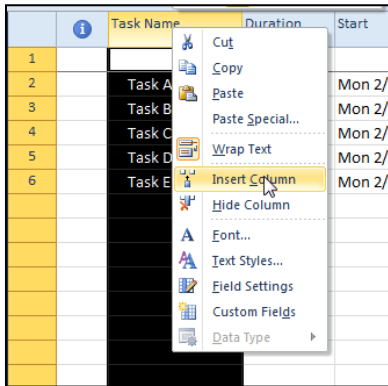


I used the following settings for my example:

Test for 'Deadline Status'	Value(s)	Image
equals	None	Leave Blank
is greater than or equal to	7	Dark Green Circle
is greater than or equal to	5	Light Green Circle
is greater than or equal to	2	Yellow Circle
is less than or equal to	1	Red Circle

6. The final step is to display your newly created custom column in your Gantt Chart view.

To Insert a column, just Right-Click on the Task Name column and select Insert Column, and choose the 'Deadline Status (Text1)' field from the list.



Your column will look like the one below. Now experiment with different Deadline dates to test your column.

	Deadline Status	Task Name	Duration	Start	Finish	Deadline
1						
2	●	Task A	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Fri 2/25/11
3	●	Task B	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Wed 2/23/11
4	●	Task C	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Mon 2/21/11
5	●	Task D	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	Fri 2/18/11
6		Task E	5 days	Mon 2/14/11	Fri 2/18/11	NA

*This Tip is provided by **Tom Baker**, Director of Consulting at Excel Solutions Team. Tom has over 10 years training and consulting experience, and has been a user of Microsoft Project since the 1998 version.*

Are you new to Microsoft Project or maybe just a casual user? Does working with Project just seem tougher than it should? If so, you or your team might be interested in learning more about Microsoft Project and its capabilities. Take a look at our Microsoft Project Course Outlines and contact us to discuss our training solutions.

- [Microsoft Project Level 1 - Fundamentals](#)
- [Microsoft Project Level 2 - Intermediate](#)

Excel Solutions Team is committed to helping you increase productivity by improving your knowledge of the tools you use everyday. Contact us at **713.589.2655** for pricing and registration information.

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