

Up and running with Xero: Easy step by step guide

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These notes tell you how to get started using Xero to classify your bank transactions so you can produce useful reports for your business including your GST return.

Visit our Xero FAQ at www.dowsemurray.co.nz and the Xero help centre at help.xero.com for detailed step by step answers to commonly asked questions.

Part I – Initial Setup

1. **Logon on to your new Xero organisation for the first time:** Click on the link in your invitation to Xero email. If this is the first time you have used Xero you will need to set a password, otherwise logon using your email address and Xero password.
2. **Watch the Getting Started video:** On the main screen click the link to watch the getting started video.

If you are one of our clients you can skip the rest of this section as we will do it for you.

3. **Add bank accounts:** You will see the dashboard in front of you and the name of your bank account about half way down the page. If you have turned off the "Getting started using Xero" notes the bank account details will be near the top of your screen. If your bank account number is not listed then you should set it up by clicking on "Add bank account" and enter the details of the name of the bank account and the bank account number. You can add extra bank accounts from the Settings/Chart of Accounts menu.
4. **Set conversion date and opening balances:** At this stage all you will want to do is enter the conversion date and the opening balance for the bank account(s). To do this note the opening balance of the bank account(s) at the date you choose to start using Xero from, this will usually be the start of a financial year – e.g. 1 April. Then go to "Settings/General Settings/Conversion Balances" and add in the conversion date and the bank account balance(s). If in overdraft or a negative balance put it in as a credit, if a positive amount, enter it as a debit balance. You do not need to enter the opening balances of the balance sheet items or any other accounts at this stage. This can be done when your financial statements have been prepared for the previous financial year.
5. **Add automatic bank feeds to your bank accounts:** To get the most out of Xero you should use automatic bank feeds. Fill in the bank feed form for your bank and send it to Xero – you can find the forms here help.xero.com/nz/#Payments_PartnerFeeds. It takes about a week for the form to be processed and the bank feeds to start and Xero will email you when this happens. Once the bank feed has started you may need to do a manual import to bring in

transactions from your conversion date to the day before your bank feeds start, how to manually import bank statements is covered in section II of this document.

6. **Optionally modify the standard ledger accounts:** Xero have set up a standard chart of accounts setting out the most common ledger account codes. To view the list go to the dashboard and select Settings/Chart of Accounts. The standard Chart of Accounts provided in Xero is adequate for almost every situation but you may prefer to make a few minor changes. To change the name of an account e.g. 200 from Sales to “Rental Income” click on the existing name of the account and then change the name on the screen that appears. Check that the GST status is correct – if a rental property then all transactions will say “No GST”. Click “save”.
7. **Optionally add extra ledger accounts:** To add an account click on “Add account” in Settings/Chart of Accounts and add the new account details. Make sure you choose a number that isn’t already being used and is in the same area as the account type e.g. expense of revenue.
8. **Optionally set up tracking;** Tracking enables you to keep track of costs by cost centre such as an individual property or a separate retail site. To start tracking go to Settings/General Settings/Tracking and add the names of the categories you want to use under the Categories Options section. These may be the addresses of your rental properties or the sites of your retail outlets. Click Save. For detailed help on how to use tracking check out the Xero Help Centre help.xero.com/nz/#Settings_Tracking.

Part II – Using Xero

Read our coding guidelines. The key using Xero effectively is to reconcile often and to the appropriate account codes. We have written a document www.dowsemurray.co.nz/resources/xero_coding_guidelines.pdf which explains what account codes to use. If there is a ledger code mentioned in the guidelines that you don’t have you can easily set it up as detailed in Part I above.

1. **Log on** to Xero using your email address and password at www.xero.com.
2. **Reconcile transactions:** If you are with a bank that has live feeds (all major banks) then you will see a note under the bank account number of the number of unreconciled transactions. Click on “Reconcile now” to start the reconciliation process. If you are with a bank that doesn’t provide live feeds yet then you will have to download the bank statement details. To do this log on to your own bank site and download the transactions in OFX or QIF format and then upload them into Xero. There is a detailed step by step guide on how to do this in the Xero Help Centre in the Banking in Xero User Guide help.xero.com/nz/#BankAccounts_Details_ImportTrans.

3. **Reconciling:** You will see a list of transactions to reconcile on the left and templates on the right for reconciliation. On the right hand side template click on “Create” for the first transaction and enter the name of the payee/payer, the ledger account code and a brief description. To allocate to cost centres such as individual rental properties first you need to set up “tracking” (see initial setup). Click “Save transaction” and click “reconcile”. This will take you to the next transaction.
4. **Memory:** You will notice that Xero recognises transactions. For example if you code a payment to Bank Fees then the next time a similar payment is found Xero will populate the fields on the right of the screen with the suggested breakdown. If correct you can just click reconcile.
5. **End reconciliation:** When you have finished it is worthwhile just comparing the closing balance as recorded on the dashboard against the actual bank account balance to ensure that the reconciliation is indeed complete.
6. **Recoding a transaction:** You can edit a reconciled transaction. Go to the dashboard and click on the bank account number (or Manage Account/Account Transactions) to display a list of all transactions. Find the transaction you want to change and click on it to display the transaction details. Click on the Options button and select Edit Transaction. If you have several transactions to recode it is often faster to Remove and Redo them as detailed below.
7. **Removing a reconciled transaction so you can recode it:** Go to the dashboard and click on the bank account number (or Manage Account/Account Transactions) to display a list of all transactions. Find the transaction you want to redo, tick it and click the Remove & Redo button. The transaction will be removed from Xero and appear back in the list of bank transactions still to be reconciled.
8. **Splitting a payment:** If you would like to split one payment across two ledger codes or two cost centres or rental properties, for example, you might have written one cheque for rates for two properties then when you click on the “Add details” screen while reconciling the item you can go to “Add new line” in the bottom left hand corner to enter the new details. You should also change the amount for each part of the transaction and make sure they add up to the total.
9. **Printing reports:** When you have finished reconciling transactions you may wish to print some reports. To do this go to the dashboard and select “Reports”. The “Report Centre” has the full list – just the favourites are listed there. One of the most useful reports is the Profit and Loss. You can customize this and we have found the following very useful: “Date: March 2011”, “Period: 1 month” and “Previous 11 periods” or lesser if fewer months, then select “print YTD (year to date)”. Select more options to produce reports by tracking category or “All”. This report quickly shows if something has been wrongly coded or something is missing for a month e.g. monthly interest payment. Click “Update” to change the options and click “Print” when you are ready to print.

10. **GST return:** You can print your GST return details from Reports/All Reports/GST Return. The first time you do this check that the GST details are correct under Settings/General Settings/Financial Settings. There are also several FAQs on our website relating to filing GST returns in Xero and with IRD.
11. **Manually importing bank statements: If you are missing bank statements, for example** there is a gap between when you started using Xero and when the automated bank statement feeds started, then manually download the statements from your banks web site and import them into Xero. There is a detailed step by step guide on how to do this in the Xero Help Centre in the Banking in Xero User Guide help.xero.com/nz/#BankAccounts_Details_ImportTrans. If for some reason you can't do this (some banks only go back 90 days) then use the Recreating missing bank statements procedure below.
12. **Recreating missing bank statements:** Where you can't download bank statements you can create transactions in Xero using Manage Account/Spend Money and Receive Money. Use your paper bank statements as reference to make sure you don't miss anything and if you have a lot of transactions you may want to add up all items in each category (bank fees, general expenses, interest, etc ;) and put those totals in rather than hundreds of individual transactions. Once you have entered the transactions that you don't have bank statement lines for use the Mark as Reconciled option in Manage Account/Account Transactions to reconcile them. If you don't see the Mark as Reconciled button next to the Remove & Redo button click the Help menu and select the option to Enable Mark as Reconciled.

Part III – Keeping Xero Running Smoothly

1. **Reconcile transactions regularly:** The great thing about Xero is that all you really need to do is to reconcile your transactions – Xero looks after the rest. It's best to reconcile often - that way you never have too many transactions to process and they are fresh in your mind so you don't have to go hunting for paper copies and cheque books to work out what they are for.
2. **Download statements regularly:** If you have a bank account in Xero that does not have an automatic statement feed then you need to manually import statements into Xero. At a minimum you should do this before your GST return. We recommend doing it each month to keep on top of it. To do this log on to your own bank site and download the transactions in OFX or QIF format and then upload them into Xero. There is a detailed step by step guide on how to do this in the Xero Help Centre in the Banking in Xero User Guide help.xero.com/nz/#BankAccounts_Details_ImportTrans.
3. **Check Bank Balances:** Xero works out what the balance in your bank account should be by taking the opening balance when Xero was set up and adding receipts and subtracting payments. It's a good idea when you first start using Xero to check the bank balance in Xero matches that in your online banking web site. The best time to do this is at the beginning of

a day after all transactions have been reconciled in Xero and before you have made any transactions that could affect your bank balance (e.g. eftpos transactions). If the balances don't match it could be there are duplicate transactions or missing bank statements.

4. **Support:** We provide free Xero support to our clients via email support@dowsemurray.co.nz or phone +64 4 971-1600. You can also email us directly from within Xero by clicking Help – Ask Your Accountant. Otherwise you can contact Xero support by clicking Help – Contact Support or emailing support@xero.com.
5. **FAQs and How-To guides:** Visit our Xero FAQ at www.dowsemurray.co.nz and the Xero help centre at help.xero.com for answers to commonly asked questions and how-to guides.