# LEFT Function

**Contents:**

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Matches the leftmost set of characters in a string, as specified by parameter. The string can be specified as a column reference or a string literal.

- Since the `LEFT` function matches based on fixed numeric values, changes to the length or structure of a data field can cause your recipe to fail to properly execute.
- The `LEFT` function requires an integer value for the number of characters to match. If you need to match strings using patterns, you should use the `STARTSWITH` transform instead. See *STARTSWITH Function*.

**Wrangle vs. SQL:** This function is part of Wrangle , a proprietary data transformation language. Wrangle is not SQL. For more information, see *Wrangle Language*.

## Basic Usage

**Column reference example:**

```
left(MyName,3)
```

**Output:** Returns the first three letters of the `MyName` column value.

**String literal example:**

```
left('Hello, World',5)
```

**Output:** Returns the string: `Hello`.

## Syntax and Arguments

```
left(column_string,char_count)
```

| Argument | Required? | Data Type | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| column_string | Y | string | Name of the column or string literal to be applied to the function |
| char_count | Y | integer (positive) | Count of characters from the start of the value to include in the match |

For more information on syntax standards, see *Language Documentation Syntax Notes*.

**column_string**

Name of the column or string constant to be searched.

- Missing string or column values generate missing string results.
- String constants must be quoted (`'Hello, World'`).
- Multiple columns and wildcards are not supported.

**Usage Notes:**

| Required? | Data Type | Example Value |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| Yes | String literal or column reference | `myColumn` |

**char_count**

Count of characters from the start of the string to include in the match.

- Value must a non-negative integer. If the value is `0`, then the match fails for all strings.
- If this value is greater than the length of the string, then the match is the entire string.
- References to columns of integer data type are not supported.

**Usage Notes:**

| Required? | Data Type | Example Value |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| Yes | Integer (non-negative) | 5 |

## Examples

> **Tip:** For additional examples, see *Common Tasks*.

**Example - Driver's License Type**

**Source:**

A California driver license number is one alphabetical character followed by seven digits (e.g., A1234567). The following is a set of California driver's license values:

| LastName | LicenseID |
|----------|-----------|
| Able | A1234567 |
| Baker | B5555555 |
| Charlie | C0123456 |

The `LicenseID` value contains the license class as the first character of the value. For example, Baker's license is a Commercial Class B license.

**Transformation:**

To extract the license type into a separate column, you can use the following transformation:

| Transformation Name | `New formula` |
|---------------------|---------------|
| **Parameter: Formula type** | `Single row formula` |
| **Parameter: Formula** | `left(LicenseID,1)` |

**Results:**

| LastName | LicenseID | left_LicenseID |
|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Able | A1234567 | A |
| Baker | B5555555 | B |
| Charlie | C0123456 | C |

You can rename the new column to `LicenseType`.