

# **XLConnect**

 $A \ platform\text{-}independent \ interface \ to \ Excel$ 



### The $\mathbf{XLConnect}$ Package

 $https://mirai-solutions.ch \\ https://cran.r-project.org/package=XLConnect$ 

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#### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Scope and purpose of this document

This document is a user manual for the **XLConnect** R package. It is meant to be a top-level introduction and some of the more advanced features of **XLConnect** are not presented here. For such details, please refer to the Reference Manual.

#### Examples

Any examples presented in this vignette can be found in the XLConnect.R script file, which you can find in the top level library directory. You can also open the document by using the following command:

edit(file = system.file("XLConnect.R", package = "XLConnect"))

#### 1.2 Introduction to XLConnect

**XLConnect** is a package that allows for reading, writing and manipulating Microsoft Excel files from within R. It uses the Apache POI  $API^1$  as the underlying interface.

**XLConnect** allows you to produce formatted Excel reports, including graphics, straight from within R. This enables automation of manual formatting and reporting processes. Reading and writing named ranges enables you to process complex inputs and outputs in an efficient way.

#### **XLConnect's Main Features**

- Reading & writing of Excel worksheets (via data.frames)
- Reading & writing of **named ranges** (via data.frames)
- Creating, removing, renaming and cloning worksheets
- Adding graphics
- Specifying **cellstyles**: data formats, borders, back- and foreground fill color, fill pattern, text wrapping
- Controlling sheet visibility
- Defining column width and row height
- Merging/unmerging cells
- Setting/getting cell formulas
- Defining **formula recalculation** behavior (when workbooks are opened)
- Setting auto-filters
- Style actions: controlling application of cell styles when writing (e.g. when using templates)
- Defining behavior when **error cells** are encountered

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>For more information on the Apache POI API, see the https://poi.apache.org/ webpage.

#### 2 Installation

#### 2.1 Software Requirements

**XLConnect** is completely cross-platform and as such runs under Windows, Unix/Linux and Mac (32- and 64-bit). It does **not** require an installation of Microsoft Excel, or any special drivers.

All you need to use **XLConnect** are the following:

- R, version 2.10.0 or higher
- Java Runtime Environment (JRE), version 6 or higher

#### 2.2 Package Installation

The **XLConnect** package is part of the Comprehensive R Archive Network (CRAN). It can be easily installed by using the install.packages() command in your R session:

```
install.packages("XLConnect")
```

#### 3 Basic Usage and Examples

#### 3.1 Getting Started

To load the package, use the library() or require() command in your R session:

```
library(XLConnect)
```

Now, you are ready to use **XLConnect!** 

The User Manual (this document) can be opened by entering the following command:

```
vignette("XLConnect")
```

The Reference Manual, containing help pages for each function within the package, can be opened by using the help() command.

```
help(XLConnect)
```

#### 3.2 loadWorkbook() - loading/creating an Excel workbook

The loadWorkbook() function loads a Microsoft Excel workbook, so that it can then be further manipulated. Setting the create argument to TRUE will ensure the file will be created, if it does not exist yet.

Both .xls and .xlsx file formats can be used.

```
Load an Excel workbook (create if not existing)

loadWorkbook(filename, create = TRUE)
```

#### 3.3 Writing Excel files: basic functions

#### 3.3.1 createSheet() - creating sheets within an Excel workbook

createSheet() creates a sheet of a chosen name in the workbook specified as the object argument.

```
Create a worksheet of a chosen name within a workbook
createSheet(object, name)
```

#### 3.3.2 writeWorksheet() - writing into sheets within an Excel workbook

writeWorksheet() writes data into a worksheet (name or index specified as the sheet argument) of an Excel workbook (object). The startRow and startCol are both 1 by default, meaning that if they are not explicitly specified, the data will start being filled into the A1 cell of the worksheet.

#### 3.3.3 createName() - creating names within an Excel workbook

createName() creates a name for a specified formula in a workbook. The overwrite argument lets you define behaviour if the name already exists. If set to TRUE, the existing name will be removed before creating a new one. If set to FALSE (default setting), an exception will be thrown.

```
Create a name for a specified formula within a workbook

createName(object, name, formula, overwrite)
```

#### 3.3.4 writeNamedRegion() - writing named regions into an Excel workbook

writeNamedRegion() writes a named range into a workbook. The data is assumed to be a data.frame (or list of data.frames, if multiple named regions are written with one call). The header argument allows you to specify whether column names should be written.

```
Write a named range into a workbook
writeNamedRegion(object, data, name, header)
```

#### 3.3.5 saveWorkbook() - saving a workbook to an Excel file

saveWorkbook() saves a workbook to the corresponding Excel file and writes the file to disk.

```
Save a workbook to a chosen Excel file
saveWorkbook (object)
```

#### 3.3.6 writeWorksheetToFile() - writing into sheets of an Excel file

writeWorksheetToFile() is a wrapper function, calling loadWorkbook(), createSheet() and saveWorkbook() functions subsequently. It therefore allows for writing data into worksheets of an Excel file in one call.

The file is the path name of the file to write to. The styleAction argument controls the application of cell styles when writing to Excel (type ?setStyleAction into the console to see the supported styles). Within the '...' argument, arguments for the writeWorksheet function can be passed.

```
Write data to an Excel worksheet

writeWorksheetToFile(file, styleAction = XLC$STYLE_ACTION.XLCONNECT, ...)
```

#### 3.3.7 writeNamedRegionToFile() - writing named regions into an Excel file

writeNamedRegionToFile() is a convenient wrapper function, calling loadWorkbook(), createSheet(), createName(), writeNamedRegion() and saveWorkbook() functions subsequently, therefore allowing for writing named regions to an Excel file in one call.

The file is the path name of the file to write to. The name of the named region is passed as the name argument and the data to write, as data. The header argument specifies if column names should be written. If you are writing data to a template in which the named region already exists, you don't need to specify the formula. Otherwise, if you are creating the file from scratch, supply the named region location as formula. The styleAction argument controls the application of cell styles when writing to Excel (type ?setStyleAction into the console to see the supported styles).

```
Write data into an Excel named region

writeNamedRegionToFile(file, data, name, formula = NA, header = TRUE,
styleAction = XLC$STYLE_ACTION.XLCONNECT)
```

#### 3.4 Example: writing a sheet

Let's see how the basic functions introduced in this section can be used to create and save an Excel file. We will use the **ChickWeight** dataset (built-in R dataset) for this simple example.

The code below first loads the "XLConnectExample1.xlsx" workbook, using loadWorkbook(). If the workbook does not exist yet, the function creates it (since the create argument is set to TRUE).

Then, via createSheet(), a sheet named "chickSheet" is created within the workbook. We then use writeWorksheet() to write the ChickWeight data frame into chickSheet.

At the end, we use saveWorkbook() to save the XLConnectExample1.xlsx file.

```
> require(XLConnect)
> wb <- loadWorkbook("XLConnectExample1.xlsx", create = TRUE)
> createSheet(wb, name = "chickSheet")
> writeWorksheet(wb, ChickWeight, sheet = "chickSheet", startRow = 3, startCol = 4)
> saveWorkbook(wb)
```

Please note that only at the point when we call saveWorkbook(), the Excel file is written to disk. All the previous operations are performed in-memory, which has great performance advantages.

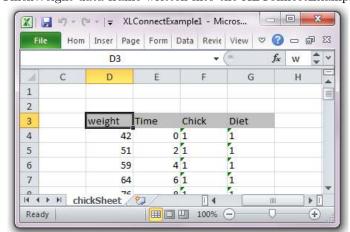


Figure 1: ChickWeight data frame written into the XLConnectExample1.xlsx file

#### 3.5 Example: writing a sheet with one call

The four lines of code presented in the previous example can be replaced with a single call of the writeWorksheetToFile() function:

```
> require(XLConnect)
> writeWorksheetToFile("XLConnectExample2.xlsx", data = ChickWeight,
+ sheet = "chickSheet", startRow = 3, startCol = 4)
```

writeWorksheetToFile() loads the workbook, creates the sheet and finally saves the workbook. When you only need to write one sheet into an Excel file, this is probably the better choice. If you need to write more sheets, however, using the functions presented in the previous example will be more efficient. This is because calling writeWorksheetToFile() multiple times will open, write and close the Excel file with each call. Using the functions in the first example will, in contrast, allow you to open the workbook, do multiple operations on it and only then close it.

#### 3.6 Example: writing a named region

In this example we will show how to write data into a named region. We will use the **women** dataset.

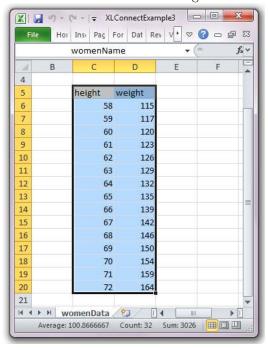
Similarly as in the example of writing an Excel sheet, we first load the workbook, using loadWorkbook(), and then create a sheet named "womenData", using createSheet().

We then use createName() to produce a named region "womenName", starting in the C5 cell of the "womenData" sheet. Calling writeNamedRegion() writes the name into the workbook. At the end, we use saveWorkbook() to write the Excel file to disk.

```
> require(XLConnect)
```

- > wb <- loadWorkbook("XLConnectExample3.xlsx", create = TRUE)
- > createSheet(wb, name = "womenData")
- > createName(wb, name = "womenName", formula = "womenData!\$C\$5", overwrite = TRUE)
- > writeNamedRegion(wb, women, name = "womenName")
- > saveWorkbook(wb)

Figure 2: women dataset written into womenName named region in the XLConnectExample3.xlsx file



#### 3.7 Example: writing a named region with one call

The writeNamedRegionToFile() function can be used to produce the same result as in the previous example, with only one function call:

#### 3.8 Reading Excel files: basic functions

#### 3.8.1 readWorksheet() - reading worksheets of an Excel workbook

readWorksheet() allows for reading data from a workbook that has been previously loaded and is passed as the object argument. The name or index of the worksheet to read from should be passed as the sheet argument. The startRow and startCol arguments specify the location of the top left corner of data to be read, while endRow and endCol specify the bottom right corner. If header = TRUE, the first row is interpreted as column names of the data frame object read in.

If the startRow, startCol, endRow and endCol arguments are not specified, or are passed as <= 0, the "bounding box" of the data is treated as the corresponding boundaries.

All arguments (except object) are vectorized, which allows for reading of multiple worksheets with one call.

#### 3.8.2 readWorksheetFromFile() - reading worksheets of an Excel file

readWorksheetFromFile() allows for reading data from a workbook with one call, without loading the workbook first. The file argument is the path of the file to read from. All arguments of the readWorksheet() function can be passed within the '...' argument.

```
Read data from a worksheet of an Excel workbook with one call readWorksheetFromFile(file, ...)
```

#### 3.8.3 readNamedRegion() - reading named regions of an Excel workbook

readNamedRegion() can be used for reading data from named region in an Excel workbook. The workbook must first be loaded and passed as the object argument. Remaining arguments are the name of the named region and header, specifying whether the first row of data should be interpreted as column names.

```
Read data from a named region of an Excel workbook
readNamedRegion(object, name, header = TRUE)
```

#### 3.8.4 readNamedRegionFromFile() - reading named regions of an Excel file

readNamedRegionFromFile() is a convenient wrapper function which allows for reading named regions from an Excel file with one call. The function subsequently calls loadWorkbook() and readNamedRegion().

The file argument specifies the path to the Excel file to be read and name - the named region to be read. The header argument specifies whether the first row of data should be interpreted as column names.

```
Read data from a named region of an Excel file

readNamedRegionFromFile(file, name, header = TRUE)
```

#### 3.9 Example: reading from an Excel sheet

In this example, we will show how you can use **XLConnect** to read from an Excel sheet. For this purpose, we will use the file created in the example in section 3.4. We set the endRow argument to 10, to limit the result. We set the rest of arguments specifying boundaries as 0, so that they are automatically determined.

Please note, that alternatively to setting the sheet argument to the name of the sheet we want to read from, "chickSheet", we could also specify it with the sheet index, as sheet = 1.

```
> require(XLConnect)
> wb <- loadWorkbook("XLConnectExample1.xlsx", create = TRUE)
> data <- readWorksheet(wb, sheet = "chickSheet", startRow = 0, endRow = 10,
                         startCol = 0, endCol = 0)
> data
  weight Time Chick Diet
      42
1
            0
                   1
            2
      51
2
                   1
                        1
      59
3
            4
                   1
4
      64
            6
                   1
                        1
5
      76
            8
                   1
                        1
6
      93
           10
                        1
                   1
7
     106
           12
                   1
                        1
```

#### 3.10 Example: reading from an Excel sheet with one call

The readWorksheetFromFile() function can be used to, with only one call, obtain the same result as was shown in the previous example:

```
> require(XLConnect)
> data <- readWorksheetFromFile("XLConnectExample1.xlsx", sheet = "chickSheet",
+ startRow = 0, endRow = 10, startCol = 0, endCol = 0)</pre>
```

#### 3.11 Example: reading from an Excel named region

In this example, we will show how to use **XLConnect**'s functions to read from a named region in an Excel file. We will use the file created in the example in section 3.6.

```
> require(XLConnect)
> wb <- loadWorkbook("XLConnectExample3.xlsx", create = TRUE)
> data <- readNamedRegion(wb, name = "womenName")
> data
   height weight
1 58 115
```

```
2
        59
                117
3
        60
                120
4
        61
                123
5
        62
                126
6
        63
                129
7
        64
                132
8
        65
                135
9
        66
                139
10
        67
                142
11
        68
                146
12
        69
                150
        70
13
                154
14
        71
                159
        72
15
                164
```

#### 3.12 Example: reading from an Excel named region with one call

The result obtained in the previous example can be reproduced by calling the wrapper function: readNamedRegionFromFile(), witout the necessity of loading the workbook first:

```
> require(XLConnect)
> data <- readNamedRegionFromFile("XLConnectExample3.xlsx", "womenName")</pre>
```

#### 4 Advanced Usage and Examples

#### 4.1 Generating an Excel Report of Swiss Franc (CHF) Exchange Rates

In this example, we will show an example use case of **XLConnect**: generation of a simple Excel report, showing the development of exchange rates (CHF vs EUR, USD and GBP).

For this example we will be using additional packages:

- zoo: S3 Infrastructure for Regular and Irregular Time Series
- ggplot2: An implementation of the Grammar of Graphics

```
install.packages(c("XLConnect", "zoo", "ggplot2"))
```

Loading the required packages:

```
> require(XLConnect)
> require(zoo)
> require(ggplot2) # >= 0.9.3
Preparing the data to be reported:
> # Read in (historical) currency data
> # For this example take sample data set 'swissfranc' from XLConnect
> curr <- XLConnect::swissfranc
> curr <- curr[order(curr$Date),]
Now, let's write the data to Excel:
> # Workbook filename
> wbFilename <- "swiss_franc.xlsx"
> # Create a new workbook
```

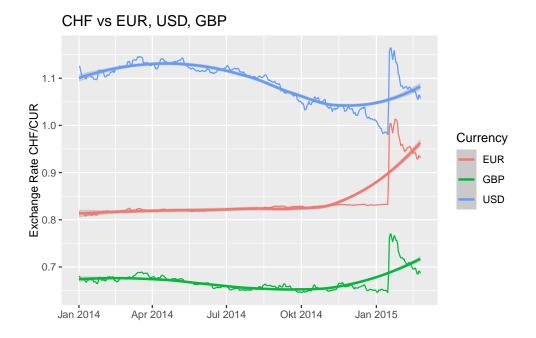
```
> wb <- loadWorkbook(wbFilename, create = TRUE)
> # Create a new sheet named 'Swiss_Franc'
> sheet <- "Swiss_Franc"</pre>
> createSheet(wb, name = sheet)
> # Create a new Excel name referring to the top left corner
> # of the sheet 'Swiss_Franc' - this name is going to hold
> # our currency data
> dataName <- "currency"</pre>
> nameLocation <- paste(sheet, "$A$1", sep = "!")</pre>
> createName(wb, name = dataName, formula = nameLocation)
> # Instruct XLConnect to only apply a data format for a cell
> # but not to apply any other cell styling
> setStyleAction(wb, XLC$"STYLE_ACTION.DATA_FORMAT_ONLY")
> # Set the default format for numeric data to display
> # four digits after the decimal point
> setDataFormatForType(wb, type = XLC$"DATA_TYPE.NUMERIC", format = "0.0000")
> # Write the currency data to the named region created above
> # Note: the named region will be automatically redefined to encompass all
> # written data
> writeNamedRegion(wb, data = curr, name = dataName, header = TRUE)
> # Save the workbook (this actually writes the file to disk)
```

Now, we are going to enhance the report further. Let's say that for each currency we want to highlight the points in time when there was a change of more than 2% compared to the previous day.

```
> # Load the workbook created above
> wb <- loadWorkbook(wbFilename)</pre>
> # Create a cell style for the header row
> csHeader <- createCellStyle(wb, name = "header")</pre>
> setFillPattern(csHeader, fill = XLC$FILL.SOLID_FOREGROUND)
> setFillForegroundColor(csHeader, color = XLC$COLOR.GREY_25_PERCENT)
> # Create a date cell style with a custom format for the Date column
> csDate <- createCellStyle(wb, name = "date")</pre>
> setDataFormat(csDate, format = "yyyy-mm-dd")
> # Create a highlighting cell style
> csHlight <- createCellStyle(wb, name = "highlight")</pre>
> setFillPattern(csHlight, fill = XLC$FILL.SOLID_FOREGROUND)
> setFillForegroundColor(csHlight, color = XLC$COLOR.CORNFLOWER_BLUE)
> # Apply header cell style to the header row
> setCellStyle(wb, sheet = sheet, row = 1,
               col = seq(length.out = ncol(curr)),
               cellstyle = csHeader)
> # Index for all rows except header row
> allRows <- seq(length = nrow(curr)) + 1</pre>
> # Apply date cell style to the Date column
> setCellStyle(wb, sheet = sheet, row = allRows, col = 1,
               cellstyle = csDate)
> # Set column width such that the full date column is visible
> setColumnWidth(wb, sheet = sheet, column = 1, width = 2800)
> # Check if there was a change of more than 2% compared
> # to the previous day (per currency)
> idx <- rollapply(curr[, -1], width = 2,</pre>
                   FUN = function(x) abs(x[2] / x[1] - 1),
                   by.column = TRUE) > 0.02
```

```
> idx <- rbind(rep(FALSE, ncol(idx)), idx)</pre>
> widx <- lapply(as.data.frame(idx), which)</pre>
> # Apply highlighting cell style
> for (i in seq(along = widx)) {
   if (length(widx[[i]]) > 0) {
      setCellStyle(wb, sheet = sheet, row = widx[[i]] + 1, col = i + 1,
                   cellstyle = csHlight)
   }
   # Note:
   # +1 for row since there is a header row
   # +1 for column since the first column is the time column
> saveWorkbook(wb)
As a next step, let's add a graph to our report.
> wb <- loadWorkbook(wbFilename)</pre>
> # Stack currencies into a currency variable (for use with ggplot2 below)
> currencies <- names(curr)[-1]</pre>
> gcurr <- reshape(curr, varying = currencies, direction = "long", v.names = "Value",
                   times = currencies, timevar = "Currency")
> # Create a png graph showing the currencies in the context
> # of the Swiss Franc
> png(filename = "swiss_franc.png", width = 800, height = 600)
> p <- ggplot(gcurr, aes(Date, Value, colour = Currency)) +
   geom_line() + stat_smooth(method = "loess") +
   scale_y_continuous("Exchange Rate CHF/CUR") +
   labs(title = paste0("CHF vs ", paste(currencies, collapse = ", ")),
         x = "") +
  theme(axis.title.y = element_text(size = 10, angle = 90, vjust = 0.3))
> print(p)
> dev.off()
> # Define where the image should be placed via a named region;
> # let's put the image two columns left to the data starting
> # in the 5th row
> createName(wb, name = "graph",
+ formula <- paste(sheet, idx2cref(c(5, ncol(curr) + 2)), sep = "!"))
> # Note: idx2cref converts indices (row, col) to Excel cell references
> # Put the image created above at the corresponding location
> addImage(wb, filename = "swiss_franc.png", name = "graph",
           originalSize = TRUE)
> saveWorkbook(wb)
```

As a result, we obtain the following graph:



Check out the Excel file to see how the data and the graph have been exported!

#### 4.2 Scope of named regions

In XLConnect functions that use named regions, it is possible to specify an argument worksheetScope. This argument can be used to specify the worksheet in which the targeted named region is defined.

- worksheetScope = "Sheet1" targets named regions scoped to the worksheet named Sheet1.
- worksheetScope = "" targets the named region defined in the global (workbook-wide) scope.
- when omitting the parameter (leaving the default value NA), the first matching name will be targeted.

All methods that return a value based on a named region (e.g. readNamedRegion) can optionally set a work-sheetScope attribute on the returned value, which will contain the name of the the worksheet scope in which the named region was found. To enable this behavior, set the option XLConnect.setCustomAttributes to TRIFE.

options(XLConnect.setCustomAttributes = TRUE)

You can then access the worksheet scope value using R's attr function.

#### 5 What's new in XLConnect version 1.2.0

A summary of news in **XLConnect** 1.2.0 can be found in the NEWS file on CRAN.

#### 6 Frequently Asked Questions

## 6.1 Running out of memory when processing large data sets Question:

I'm running out of memory when processing large data sets:

```
writeNamedRegionToFile(file = "huge.xls", data = giant.data.frame,
namedRegion = "LargeRegion", formula = "LotsOfData!A1")
Error: OutOfMemoryError (Java): Java heap space
```

#### Answer:

This is caused by the fact that **XLConnect** needs to copy your entire data object over to the JVM in order to write it to a file and the JVM has to be initialized with a fixed upper limit on its memory size. To change this amount, you can pass parameters to R's JVM just like you can to a command line Java process via rJava's options support:

```
options(java.parameters = "-Xmx1024m")
library(XLConnect)
```

Note, however, that these parameters are evaluated exactly once per R session when the JVM is initialized - this is usually once you load the first package that uses Java support, so you should do this as early as possible.

Some general Java advice: The upper limit of the Xmx parameter is system dependent - most prominently, 32bit Windows will fail to work with anything much larger than 1500m, and it is usually a bad idea to set Xmx larger than your physical memory size because garbage collection and virtual memory do not play well together.

### 6.2 How can I style my output - set fonts, colors etc? Question:

How can I style my output - set fonts, colors etc?

#### Answer:

**XLConnect** does not currently allow direct access to low-level formatting options. However, it is possible to assign named cell styles to cells, so the preferred workflow would be to:

- 1. define some named cell styles in an Excel document ("Format" -> "Styles" in pre-2007 Excel, "Cell styles" on the default pane of Excel 2007 and on)
- 2. save the document to a file
- 3. then load this template in **XLConnect** and use the setCellStyle method to assign the predefined styles:

### 6.3 I'm getting errors trying to import Excel data Question:

I'm getting errors trying to import Excel data like:

```
Unexpected eval type (org.apache.poi.hssf.record.formula.eval.MissingArgEval)
```

or

Error: NotImplementedException (Java): Error evaluating cell Sheet1!A1

#### Answer:

This type of error is triggered when **XLConnect** can not determine the value of a cell in the region you're trying to import. Usually, this happens because Apache POI does not support all possible Excel formulae.

There is no direct solution for accessing the values of fields that Apache POI doesn't know how to compute. However, if you can live without the cell values and just want to ignore uncomputable cells, have a look at the onErrorCell function to tell **XLConnect** that you want to ignore errors.

If you have Excel and are willing to invest some manual effort, you can manually create a static copy, that can be imported as follows:

- Select the region containing your data
- Edit -> Copy
- Select an empty cell and Edit -> Paste Special
- In the Paste radio group, select Values

You should then be able to import the pasted region without problems.

#### 7 Contact and Support

We are very glad that you are using **XLConnect** and we would be happy to hear from you!



Please log any bug reports, feature requests or technical inquiries at:

https://github.com/miraisolutions/xlconnect/issues



For any other feedback you may have, please contact us at:

xlconnect@mirai-solutions.com



You can also follow and contact us on LinkedIn:

https://www.linkedin.com/company/mirai-solutions-gmbh/

We will do our best to reply to your enquires as quickly as possible!

#### 8 Further Resources and References

1. Mirai Solutions website:

https://mirai-solutions.ch

2. Mirai Solutions on LinkedIn:

https://www.linkedin.com/company/mirai-solutions-gmbh/

3. **XLConnect** on CRAN:

https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=XLConnect

4. **XLConnect** on RDocumentation:

https://www.rdocumentation.org/packages/XLConnect

#### 5. **XLConnect** on METACRAN:

https://www.r-pkg.org/pkg/XLConnect

#### 6. **XLConnect** on r-universe:

https://miraisolutions.r-universe.dev/XLConnect

#### 7. **XLConnect** in the R Programming section on Wikibooks:

 $https://web.archive.org/web/20240821111632/https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/R\_Programming/Importing\_and\_exporting\_data$ 

#### 8. R and Excel: Making Your Data Dumps Pretty with XLConnect:

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