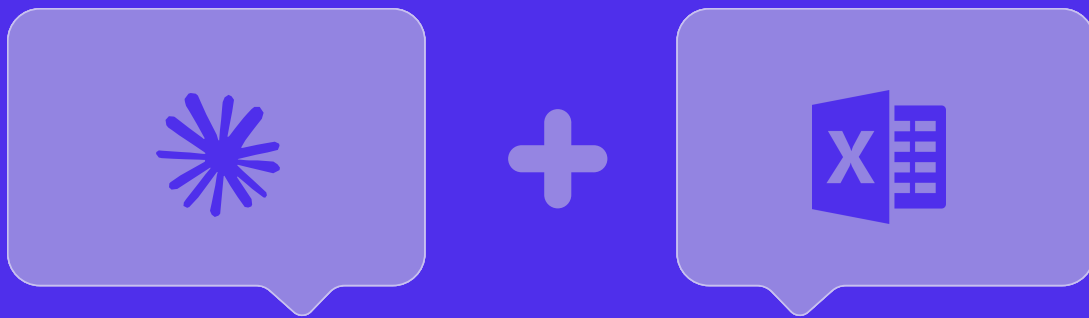


The Finance Leader's Guide To

Claude + Excel



Practical workflows, real prompts, and
best practices for CFOs, Controllers,
and FP&A teams

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Why Claude + Excel & Why Now

Finance teams are under more pressure than ever to close faster, report deeper, and scale without adding headcount. Spreadsheets remain the lingua franca of finance, but the manual work that surrounds them hasn't changed in decades.

Claude's integration with Excel changes that. For the first time, you can bring AI reasoning directly into the tool your team already lives in — no exports, no switching tabs, no copy-pasting into a chatbot.

Work where you already work

No new interface to learn. Claude meets your team inside Excel, embedded in the workflow.

Finance-grade tasks, done faster

Variance narratives, journal entry descriptions, reconciliation reviews — in seconds, not hours

Context-aware outputs

Claude can read your actual spreadsheet data, not just a prompt — making outputs relevant and precise.

A Brief History of Claude in Excel

AI-native integrations with productivity software have moved quickly — and Anthropic's move into Excel reflects a shift: embedding context-specific AI inside the tools where work actually happens will up-level every function.

Late 2025

Claude in Excel launches in beta. Early access for select users, with support for natural language prompting, formula generation, and data summarization directly inside spreadsheets.

Early 2026

Claude in Excel becomes generally available. All users can install the plugin and leverage Claude's full capabilities — from complex data analysis to narrative generation — without leaving Excel.

Practical Use Cases

Claude in Excel isn't a single feature or a simple plugin — it's a set of capabilities that map directly to the most time-intensive finance workflows. Here's where it makes the biggest difference.

Variance Analysis & Flux Narratives

Paste or reference your actuals vs. budget P&L and ask Claude to identify material variances, explain likely root causes, and draft board-ready narrative. What used to take two hours takes two minutes.

Journal Entry Descriptions

Stop writing the same JE narratives from scratch each month. Claude reads the transaction details in your spreadsheet and generates audit-ready descriptions that reference source documents and use proper accounting terminology.

Reconciliation Review

Upload your reconciliation schedule and ask Claude to flag unmatched items, highlight stale reconciling differences older than 30 or 60 days, and surface anything that lacks clear business support.

Scenario Modeling Narratives

Build three-scenario models (base, upside, downside) and have Claude document the assumptions, calculate the cash impact, and write the executive summary for your board deck — all without leaving the file.

Audit Prep Checklists

Feed Claude your prior year PBC list, open items, and general ledger structure. It generates a prioritized checklist grouped by P&L, balance sheet, and controls — showing what's ready and what still needs attention.

Formula Generation & Debugging

Describe what you want a formula to do in plain English and Claude writes it. Or paste a broken formula and ask Claude to explain what's wrong and how to fix it — no Stack Overflow required.

Prompts You Can Use Today

These prompts are structured using a four-part framework: Goal, Return Format, Requirements, and Context. Each one is designed to work directly inside Claude in Excel — or in any Claude interface with your spreadsheet data pasted in.

VARIANCE ANALYSIS

You are a CFO assistant. I'm sharing a P&L with actuals vs. budget for [Month]. Goal: Identify line items with variance >10% or >\$50K and write flux explanations. Return Format: Table — Line Item | Actual | Budget | Var \$ | Var % | Root Cause, plus a 2–3 sentence narrative for each material variance. Requirements: Tie explanations to business drivers (volume, pricing, timing). Context: [Paste your P&L data or reference the sheet range]



JOURNAL ENTRY DESCRIPTION

You are a Senior Accountant. Goal: Write a clear, audit-ready JE narrative. Return Format: 2–3 sentences explaining what the entry records, why it's necessary, and a reference to supporting documentation. Requirements: Use proper accounting terminology. Reference the source document. Context: Transaction: [amount, accounts, date] | Purpose: [what this relates to] | Support: [invoice/contract/approval reference]



RECONCILIATION EXCEPTION REVIEW

You are an Accounting Manager reviewing a reconciliation for [Account Name]. Goal: Flag anomalies, identify missing support, and highlight stale items. Return Format: Summary of reconciled vs. unreconciled balance, exceptions list (items missing support, timing differences >30 days), and remediation steps. Requirements: Flag entries >\$10K without clear business purpose. Context: [Paste or reference reconciliation data | prior month balance | typical activity]



SCENARIO MODEL ASSUMPTIONS

You are an FP&A Analyst building three scenarios for [Quarter/Period]. Goal: Document base, upside, and downside assumptions and show the cash impact. Return Format: Table — Scenario | Revenue | COGS | OPEX | EBITDA | Cash, plus a bulleted assumptions list for each scenario. Requirements: Base = current run rate. Upside = +20% bookings. Downside = -15% retention. Context: Current metrics: [\$X revenue, X% growth, X% margin] | Key risks: [list]



Building a complex model from scratch

One of the most powerful ways to use Claude for complex modeling isn't to start in Excel — it's to start in Claude. Here's the workflow:

I want to build a complex SaaS financial model in Excel. Before you build anything, ask me all the clarifying questions you need so you can create the best possible spec. What do you need to know?



Claude will ask targeted questions: time horizon, cohort structure, expansion modeling, headcount assumptions, and more. You answer, it refines. Once you're aligned, Claude generates a full requirements doc. Upload that doc back into Claude and ask it to build the model.

The principle here is simple: give full context upfront, let Claude ask what it's missing, and only then start building. It's the same discipline you'd apply with any senior stakeholder — begin with the end in mind.

Tips From the Field

These aren't hypothetical. They're how finance teams are actually using Claude in Excel today.

01 Use it to understand models you didn't build.

Starting a new role or inheriting a spreadsheet from a teammate? Upload the file and ask Claude: *"Walk me through how this model works. What are the key drivers, assumptions, and dependencies?"* Claude can act as your onboarding guide for any workbook — surfacing the logic without you having to reverse-engineer it cell by cell.

02 Ask it what it would improve.

Before you finalize any model or report, prompt Claude: *"What improvements would you make to this workbook? Are there any structural issues, missing checks, or ways to make this more robust?"* It's like having a second set of eyes from a senior analyst who never gets tired.

03 It's genuinely great for ad hoc analysis.

One-off requests, fast calculations, quick comparisons — Claude handles these well. When your CFO needs a number sliced a different way in the next 10 minutes, Claude is faster than rebuilding a pivot or writing a new formula from scratch.

04 Prompt it and go do something else.

This is underrated. Claude doesn't need you to hover. Give it a detailed prompt — variance analysis, audit checklist, scenario documentation — and walk away. The output will be ready when you come back. Finance teams that treat Claude as a parallel worker, not just a chatbot, get the most out of it.

Formatting Outputs with Markdown

Markdown is a lightweight formatting language that uses simple symbols to control how text is displayed. Instead of clicking "Bold" in a toolbar, you type `**like this**`. Instead of inserting a table manually, you define it with pipes and dashes.

Most AI tools, including Claude, natively support Markdown. When you ask Claude to return its output in Markdown format, you get structured, readable responses that are easy to paste into Word, Google Docs, Notion, or most reporting tools — with zero cleanup.

For finance workflows, this matters because the outputs you're generating aren't just for you. They go into board decks, audit files, management reports, and team documentation. Markdown-formatted outputs arrive ready to use.

How Markdown Works

Here are the core formatting elements and when to use them in finance contexts:

Syntax	What It Does	Best Used For
<code>**bold text**</code>	Bold text	Labels, key figures, critical findings
<code># Heading</code> <code>## Subheading</code>	Large Headers Medium Headers	Board commentary, audit memos, long reports
<code>- item</code> <code>1. item</code>	Bulleted List Numbered List	
<code> Col Col </code>	Table	Variance reports, scenario models, recon summaries
<code>> text</code>	Blockquote	Highlighting a key insight or critical finding

How to Request Markdown in Your Prompts

Add one of these phrases to any prompt and Claude will structure its output accordingly:

Return your output in Markdown format.



Format as a table with columns: Account | Balance | Status | Notes.



Format as a structured memo with H2 section headers and bullet points.



Use bold for all key figures and a blockquote to call out the most critical finding.



When pasting into Word or Google Docs, Claude's Markdown renders automatically in most rich-text editors. For Excel specifically, plain-text outputs are usually cleaner — ask Claude to skip Markdown and use tab-separated values if you're pasting directly into cells.

Best Practices

Getting great outputs from Claude in Excel comes down to a few consistent habits. These apply whether you're a CFO asking for board commentary or an analyst debugging a formula.

01 **Set up context once, reuse it always.**

Start a session by telling Claude your company context: industry, revenue range, accounting standard (GAAP/IFRS), ERP, and current period. You only need to do this once per session. Everything Claude produces will be calibrated to your specifics.

02 **Reference real data, not summaries.**

Claude produces better outputs when it can read actual numbers — not your verbal description of them. Reference the cell range or paste the raw table directly. Summaries introduce ambiguity; data eliminates it.

03 **Be explicit about output format.**

Tell Claude exactly what you want back: a table, a numbered list, a paragraph, a memo. Vague prompts produce vague outputs. The more structure you specify, the more usable the result.

04 **Use validation prompts before finalizing.**

Before using any AI-generated analysis in a board deck or audit file, run: *"Recheck your calculations — walk through each step"* and *"Critique this analysis — what assumptions might be wrong?"* Treat Claude as a capable first drafter, not a final authority.

05 **Know when not to use AI.**

Claude excels at drafting, formatting, analyzing, and explaining. It is not a substitute for a licensed CPA, tax advisor, or legal counsel. Final audit opinions, formal tax positions, and compliance certifications require qualified human professionals.

Join Our Weekly Vibe Code Sessions

Finance leaders are moving fast on AI, but most content is either hype or too technical. **This is the opposite.**

Join us for a practical, live session on how finance teams are using Claude + Excel, Claude Cowork, and MCP — and how this connects to modern finance workflows. Bring your laptop, bring your real problems, and we'll build a few solutions together.

What we'll cover

Real examples of Claude + Excel, Claude Cowork, and MCP

A few community use cases (you can even volunteer yours)

Live Q&A

What's next for AI in finance ops and how teams should think about it

[Register now](#)