CFO EYES

Excel — From Beginner to Pro

Curriculum, reference and self-study guide for finance, operations and analyst teams.

Includes a paired Excel workbook with shortcuts, formulas, dataset and exercises for charts, pivots and print setup.

Live training delivered on request — fredrik@cfoeyes.com

Contents

Who this is for

This curriculum is built for finance, controlling, operations and analyst teams that want to move from intermediate Excel use to a confident, professional level. It assumes basic familiarity with cells, formulas and saving files, and takes you through the workflow patterns that separate slow, error-prone spreadsheets from fast, audit-ready models.

How to use this curriculum

Each module is designed for ~60–120 minutes of focused work. The accompanying Excel workbook (CFO_Eyes_Excel_Mastery_Workbook.xlsx) contains a dataset, shortcut reference, 40 formulas with live examples, and three guided exercises (charts, pivots, print).

Recommended pace: one module per evening over two weeks, or a single full-day workshop covering modules 1–6.

Module 1 — Foundations

Excel is a calculation engine wrapped in a grid. Mastery starts with naming the parts: workbook, worksheet, cell, range, formula bar, name box, ribbon, status bar.

File hygiene is non-negotiable: save as .xlsx (never .xls), use clear filenames with version and date (e.g. *Budget_2026_v3_2026-05.xlsx*), and keep a single source of truth for inputs.

Formatting is communication. Use consistent number formats, lock down inputs in blue and formulas in black, and avoid merging cells in data ranges — they break filters, sorts and pivots.

Learning outcomes

• Navigate workbooks confidently with the ribbon and status bar.

• Apply consistent number formats and cell styles.

• Save in correct formats (.xlsx, .xlsm, .csv) and understand when to use each.

Exercises

→ Open the Workbook → Cover sheet and locate every section.

→ On a blank sheet, format A1 as currency, A2 as percent, A3 as date — practice Ctrl+1.

Module 2 — Keyboard shortcuts

Speed in Excel is 80% shortcuts. The fastest analysts almost never touch the mouse. The Shortcuts sheet of the workbook lists 80+ Win/Mac shortcuts grouped by category.

Start with the seven that change everything: **F2** edit cell, **F4** toggle absolute reference, **Ctrl+Arrow** jump to edge of data, **Ctrl+Shift+Arrow** select to edge, **Ctrl+;** insert today's date, **Alt+=** AutoSum, **Ctrl+T** create table.

Print the Shortcuts sheet (Ctrl+P) and keep it next to your monitor for two weeks. By week three the shortcuts are muscle memory.

Learning outcomes

• Navigate large datasets without using the mouse.

• Insert/edit/format cells with shortcuts only.

• Use F4 fluently to lock cell references.

Exercises

→ Open Dataset sheet → use Ctrl+End to jump to last cell, then Ctrl+Home back.

→ Select column F (Revenue), press Ctrl+Shift+1 to apply number format.

→ On Formulas sheet, edit any =SUM cell with F2, press F4 four times — observe how $ moves.

Module 3 — Essential formulas

There are ~500 functions in Excel; you need ~40. The Formulas sheet of the workbook has each one with a live example you can edit.

Group them mentally: **aggregation** (SUM, AVERAGE, MAX, MIN, COUNT), **logic** (IF, IFS, AND, OR, IFERROR), **conditional aggregation** (SUMIFS, COUNTIFS, AVERAGEIFS), **lookup** (VLOOKUP, XLOOKUP, INDEX/MATCH), **text** (LEFT, RIGHT, MID, TEXT, SUBSTITUTE, TRIM), **date** (TODAY, EOMONTH, DATEDIF, YEAR/MONTH/DAY), **dynamic array** (UNIQUE, FILTER, SORT).

Always wrap risky formulas in IFERROR. Always reference cells, never hardcode numbers inside formulas. Always trace precedents (Ctrl+[) before changing a model you didn't build.

Learning outcomes

• Choose between VLOOKUP, XLOOKUP and INDEX/MATCH appropriately.

• Build multi-criteria SUMIFS and COUNTIFS without errors.

• Use TEXT, dates and string functions for clean reporting.

Exercises

→ On the Formulas sheet, change Target (G9) to 30000 and observe how the IF result flips.

→ Replace the VLOOKUP example with an XLOOKUP — note the cleaner syntax.

→ Add a SUMIFS to total revenue for region North in the Dataset sheet.

Module 4 — Data cleaning

Data cleaning consumes more analyst time than analysis. The toolkit: convert to Table (Ctrl+T), Remove Duplicates, Text-to-Columns, Flash Fill (Ctrl+E), Find & Replace, sort/filter.

Tables are transformative: dynamic ranges that grow automatically, structured references like *Sales[Revenue]*, banded formatting, header lock on scroll.

When importing CSVs, always check: leading/trailing spaces (TRIM), text-as-number (=value*1 or use Paste Special multiply by 1), date format mismatches, hidden line breaks (Ctrl+J in Find & Replace).

Learning outcomes

• Convert any data range to a Table and use structured references.

• Clean messy text with TRIM, SUBSTITUTE and Flash Fill.

• Remove duplicates safely without losing related data.

Module 5 — Charts & graphs

A chart is a story. Choose the chart type based on the message: column for comparisons across categories, line for trend over time, bar for ranked items, combo for revenue + margin together, scatter for relationships.

Strip the noise. Defaults include gridlines, chart borders, legends, axis tick marks — most can go. Add only what helps the reader: title that states the conclusion, data labels for the values that matter, one accent color for the highlight series.

Charts in dashboards must update with new data. Anchor them to Tables (Ctrl+T) or named ranges so they grow automatically.

Learning outcomes

• Pick the right chart type for the data and message.

• Format charts to remove default visual noise.

• Build a combo chart with primary and secondary axes.

Exercises

→ Open Ex_Charts sheet, study the bar and line charts already inserted.

→ Add a third chart: combo with Revenue+Cost as columns and Margin% as line on secondary axis.

Module 6 — Pivot tables

PivotTables collapse a 500-row dataset into a one-page summary in 30 seconds. They are the single highest-leverage skill in Excel for analysts.

The mental model: Rows = breakdown, Columns = sub-breakdown, Values = what to measure, Filters = top-level slice. Slicers turn filters into clickable buttons — perfect for dashboards.

Discipline matters: always source from a Table so new rows flow in; refresh after every data change (Alt+F5); set number formats inside Field Settings (they survive refresh, cell formats don't); use GETPIVOTDATA to lift specific values into static dashboards safely.

Learning outcomes

• Build a PivotTable from a Table source.

• Add slicers and calculated fields.

• Use GETPIVOTDATA to wire pivot results into a dashboard.

Exercises

→ Open Ex_Pivot sheet, follow the 6 numbered steps end-to-end.

→ Build a second pivot showing Revenue by Channel × Quarter.

Module 7 — Print & page setup

Most Excel files were never designed to be printed. With small effort they can produce board-quality A4 one-pagers.

The five levers: **Page Layout** (orientation, paper size, margins), **Scale to Fit** (1 page wide × tall), **Print Area** (set, clear, expand), **Print Titles** (repeat header rows), **Headers/Footers** (logo, page X of Y, date).

Always preview in Page Break Preview before sending. For PDF output, use Ctrl+P → Microsoft Print to PDF rather than screenshotting.

Learning outcomes

• Configure A4 print output that fits on one page.

• Use Print Titles to repeat headers across pages.

• Add headers, footers and page numbering.

Exercises

→ Open Ex_Print sheet, follow the 8-step print checklist.

→ Save the result as a PDF and open it to verify.

Module 8 — Dashboards & light automation

Dashboards combine everything: clean data in Tables, calculations in named ranges, presentation in charts and PivotTables, navigation via slicers and hyperlinks.

Conditional formatting (Home → Conditional Formatting) is your fastest path to insight: color scales for trends, data bars for magnitude, icon sets for status (green/amber/red).

Light automation lives in the Macro Recorder (View → Macros → Record). Record a routine task once, save the .xlsm, edit lightly in the VBA editor (Alt+F11). For most finance use cases you don't need to write VBA from scratch.

Learning outcomes

• Apply conditional formatting and data validation to dashboards.

• Use named ranges to make formulas readable.

• Record and replay a simple macro for a repetitive task.

Self-assessment checklist

Tick each item once you can do it without help. Aim for all 20 within four weeks of starting the curriculum.

- ■ I can navigate any workbook using only the keyboard.
- ■ I know what F2, F4 and Ctrl+arrow do, and I use them daily.
- ■ I can write a SUMIFS with three criteria correctly on the first try.
- ■ I can replace a VLOOKUP with XLOOKUP and explain why it's better.
- ■ I always wrap fragile formulas in IFERROR.
- ■ I convert every dataset to a Table (Ctrl+T) before analysing it.
- ■ I can clean a messy CSV with TRIM, Text-to-Columns and Flash Fill.
- ■ I can build a column chart, line chart and combo chart from a dataset.
- ■ I can pick the right chart type for a given message.
- ■ I can build a PivotTable in under a minute from a Table source.
- ■ I add slicers and calculated fields to PivotTables when needed.
- ■ I refresh PivotTables after every data update without thinking.
- ■ I use GETPIVOTDATA to wire pivot output into a dashboard cell.
- ■ I configure Print Area, Scale to Fit and Print Titles before printing.
- ■ I produce a clean A4 one-pager PDF from any model.
- ■ I apply conditional formatting (color scales, data bars, icon sets).
- ■ I use named ranges instead of opaque cell references in formulas.
- ■ I add data validation to inputs to prevent invalid entries.
- ■ I have recorded at least one macro that saves me time weekly.
- ■ I file save with version + date and never overwrite the master.

Live training & coaching

This curriculum can also be delivered as a live workshop tailored to your team's level and use cases. Sessions are practical, hands-on and built around your real datasets.

Formats

- **Half-day workshop** (3 h) — Modules 1–4. Best for teams new to Excel.
- **Full-day workshop** (6 h) — Modules 1–6. The most popular format.
- **Two-day intensive** — Full curriculum + dashboard build using your data.
- **1:1 coaching** — 60-minute weekly sessions over 4–8 weeks.

How to book

Email **fredrik@cfoeyes.com** with team size, level (beginner / mixed / advanced) and preferred format. We confirm scope, agree a date and tailor the agenda within one week.

Workshops can be delivered onsite (Stockholm and Nordics) or remotely via Teams/Zoom. Course materials, exercises and the Excel workbook are included.