

100 Tips for the AI Finance Operator

CFO Lab

cfolab.ai/newsletter

The cheat sheet for CFOs who operate, not just report. From actual workflows — not theory.

1 · CONTEXT & SETUP

1. **Write Your Role Context Once** — Describe title, company, metrics, priorities in a reusable block
2. **Build Three Context Layers** — Every project needs Instructions (role), Knowledge (docs), and Task
3. **Separate Projects Per Department** — One Claude Project each for Finance, Marketing, Tech, and HR
4. **Upload 5 Most-Referenced Files First** — Board decks, budgets, org charts, strategic plans, KPI dashboards
5. **Export Excel as CSV for AI** — CSV files parse more reliably; strip complex formatting before upload
6. **Export Decks and Reports as PDF** — PDFs preserve structure best; convert PowerPoint and Word first
7. **Keep Projects to 20 Files Max** — 20 curated files beat 50 random uploads every single time
8. **Delete Outdated Files Monthly** — Keep last 12 months; archive old docs to prevent stale context
9. **Pay for Premium From Day One** — \$20/month unlocks 5+ hours/week savings; free tiers waste time
10. **Test Setup With Known Answers** — After upload-ing, verify AI retrieves metrics you already know

2 · PROMPT ENGINEERING

11. **Use the 5-Part Prompt Framework** — Every prompt needs Role, Task, Context, Format, and Constraints
12. **Specify Output Format Explicitly** — "Table with columns X, Y, Z" beats "make a table" every time
13. **Add Business Context Every Time** — AI doesn't know your targets or priorities — spell them out
14. **Include Anti-Hallucination Guards** — Add "Only use attached files. If unsure, say so" to prompts
15. **Save Working Prompts to a Library** — Copy-paste beats rewriting; build your template collection
16. **Iterate Fast, Don't Start Over** — If output is mediocre, refine with specifics instead of rewriting
17. **5 Min Context Saves 50 in Edits** — Front-load context investment; the 5-for-50 rule always pays
18. **Ask AI to Cite Its Source** — Forces source attribution; lets you verify accuracy in 30 seconds

19. **Reference Files by Name in Prompts** — "In the Q3 Board Deck PDF" not "in the data" — be explicit
20. **Break Complex Tasks Into Steps** — Extract, then calculate, then narrate — each step separately

3 · FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

21. **AI for Narratives, Excel for Models** — Build the model in Excel, paste results into AI for commentary
22. **Automate Top-5 Variance Analysis** — Upload actuals + budget CSVs; ask for variances over 10%
23. **Generate Dashboard Commentary** — Three sentences per metric: what happened, why, what it means
24. **AI for Cash Flow Commentary** — Identify 3 biggest changes vs prior period and runway impact
25. **AI Catches Patterns You Miss** — AI finds 2-3 anomaly patterns typically missed in manual review
26. **Verify Every Number AI Produces** — Non-negotiable: AI hallucinating \$8.2M vs actual \$7.1M happens
27. **Synthesize 4 Department Inputs** — Combine submissions into unified forecast summary in 20 minutes
28. **Build AI Feedback Loops** — AI generates, AI cross-checks source data, you spot-check the rest
29. **Link Every Number to Its Source** — Every figure traces back so you can defend any slide in real time
30. **Build for Understanding, Not Complexity** — If the newest team member can't follow it, simplify

4 · FORECASTING & BUDGETING

31. **Never Ask AI for Revenue Bridges** — Complex waterfall formulas fail in AI; Excel does it in 20 min
32. **AI Writes Commentary, Not Forecasts** — AI narrates around the numbers; you build the model in Excel
33. **Model 3 Scenarios in One Prompt** — Compare cost, risk, scalability across best/base/worst instantly
34. **Keep Models in Excel for Audit Trail** — Version control and "show me the cells" transparency matters
35. **Present Ranges, Not Point Estimates** — Three scenarios with assumptions beat false single-number certainty
36. **Separate Targets From Forecasts** — Name the gap between stretch goals and realistic expectations
37. **Deliver Bad News Faster Than Good** — Flag forecast misses immediately; don't wait for quarter-end

38. **Never Trust Data Older Than 30 Days** — Build alerts for stale fields quietly destroying accuracy
39. **Use Budgeting to Think, Not Calculate** — Treat it as a forcing function for hard strategic questions
40. **Document 3 Versions of Your Data** — Finance, Ops, and System versions differ — make gaps visible

5 · BOARD & INVESTOR COMMS

41. **Cut Board Prep: 6 Hours to 90 Min** — Upload Thursday, AI analyzes Friday, finalize Monday morning
42. **Upload Materials the Day Before** — Gives AI processing time; lets you catch issues before crunch
43. **AI-Generate Executive Summaries** — 3 paragraphs: biggest wins, concerning trends, decisions needed
44. **Anticipate Board Questions With AI** — Feed member profiles + materials; get 10 predicted Q&As back
45. **Validate AI Insights With Your Leads** — Slack dept heads the top 3 AI-flagged variances first
46. **Add Political Context After AI Draft** — AI optimizes for clarity; you add ambiguity where needed
47. **Draft Investor Updates in 5 Minutes** — Specify revenue, wins, concerns, tone, and CTA in one prompt
48. **AI for Pre-Meeting Risk ID** — Ask "What risks am I missing? What would a sharp member ask?"
49. **3 Versions of Every Key Metric** — Best case, expected, downside for every number that gets questioned
50. **Write the Tough Slide First** — Start prep with the metric you're least comfortable explaining

6 · MARKETING OPERATIONS

51. **Compare Campaigns With History** — Upload current vs last 3 campaigns; flag declining CAC or conversion
52. **Track CAC/LTV Trends Monthly** — AI tables flag months where LTV:CAC ratio drops below 3:1
53. **Check Content vs Product Launches** — One prompt flags content gaps for upcoming releases
54. **Competitive Intel in 15 Minutes** — AI researches competitor pricing, launches, and funding fast
55. **Flag Rising Spend + Worsening CAC** — One prompt catches underperforming channels your team misses

6 · MARKETING OPS (cont.)

- 56. Track Engagement Velocity Over Score** — 10 touchpoints in 2 weeks converts better than 20 over 6 months
- 57. Replace Lead Scoring With Warmth** — Track multi-channel signals, not arbitrary point systems
- 58. Feed 6 Months of CRM Data to AI** — Let AI find which behaviors preceded closed deals in your data
- 59. Start Every Campaign With Economics** — When marketing reports to finance, channels become investments
- 60. Connect Lead Gen to Forecasting** — Same data model between marketing pipeline and finance forecasts

7 · TECH & VENDOR OPS

- 61. Score Roadmap by ROI and Fit** — AI scores value, effort, alignment; recommends Now/Next/Backlog
- 62. Build Vendor Comparison Matrices** — Upload 4 proposals; get cost, features, timeline compared fast
- 63. Build vs Buy Analysis in 15 Min** — Compare 3-year cost, time to value, maintenance, strategic risk
- 64. AI-Flag Non-Standard Contracts** — Upload vendor contract with your standards; flag deviations by risk
- 65. Assess Tech Debt by Business Impact** — Upload stack docs + incident logs; top 5 items by revenue impact
- 66. 3-Question Enterprise Tool Test** — Model in 30 min? Team can modify? Still need Excel? Don't buy
- 67. Evaluate by 5 Adoption Criteria** — Real problem? Value in 2 hours? Team modifiable? Data portable?
- 68. Power Tools for Power Users Only** — Claude Code for personal workflows; Notion for team processes
- 69. Budget for AI's Phase 2 Dip** — Most teams quit AI at month 2-6; they only budgeted for the hype
- 70. Deploy AI Before Adding Headcount** — Ask if one person + right AI tools replaces hiring three people

8 · HR & PEOPLE OPS

- 71. Benchmark Comp With AI** — AI shows P25/P50/P75 ranges; recommends offers matching your philosophy
- 72. Model 3 Org Structures Side by Side** — Compare cost, layers, comm paths, single-point-of-failure risks
- 73. Synthesize 15 Reviews in 15 Minutes** — AI finds recurring themes, skills gaps, flight risks across teams
- 74. Job Descriptions With Real Context** — Include team size, tools, comp range, reporting line for output
- 75. Analyze Hiring Velocity Bottlenecks** — Time-to-fill, acceptance rates, source effectiveness from data
- 76. Track Time-to-Productivity** — 90 vs 60 days to contribute changes the economics of every hire
- 77. Start Global Hiring Where You're Expert** — Begin with ICs in your strongest domain before leadership abroad
- 78. Hire Imagination Over Excel Skills** — Screen for people who see solutions that don't exist yet
- 79. Become an AI Super Teacher** — Stop hoarding workflows; teach context windows, memory, prompting
- 80. Screen Hires for AI Building** — Ask if they've built automations or just use ChatGPT as search

9 · CROSS-DEPARTMENT

- 81. Weekly CEO Update via AI Synthesis** — Feed 4 dept updates; get 3 cross-functional insights in 15 min
- 82. AI Connects Cross-Department Dots** — "CAC rising while Tech deprioritizes onboarding" — AI catches this
- 83. Separate Bases, Cross-Reference** — Keep department context clean; synthesize across for integration
- 84. Quarterly Strategic Alignment Check** — Compare plan vs execution; flag unplanned work eating resources
- 85. Spot Conflicting Priorities** — Budget pressure + 3 roles open 60 days = a problem AI can flag

9 · CROSS-DEPT (cont.)

- 86. Cut Context-Switching Cost by 75%** — Separate AI knowledge bases save 7.5 hours/week in transitions
- 87. Friday Integration Day** — One prompt pulls cross-functional insights from the entire week
- 88. Same KPI Definitions Everywhere** — Revenue means one thing — make Finance, Sales, Marketing agree
- 89. One Cross-Functional Dashboard First** — Start with 5 metrics every department touches before going deep
- 90. Flag When Dept Wins = Company Loss** — Marketing hitting leads while Support drowns = system failure

10 · WORKFLOW RULES

- 91. The 15-Minute Rule** — If AI can't solve it in 15 minutes, bail to Excel with zero guilt
- 92. Ship at 90%, Not 100%** — The last 10% takes 3 hours and adds 2% value; move on
- 93. 7:30am Morning Prep Workflow** — Pull meeting context from AI knowledge base in 5 min, not 30
- 94. Track Hours Saved Per Tool Weekly** — Kill any tool not saving 2+ hours/week; measure ruthlessly
- 95. Target 70-75% AI Success Rate** — Lower = wrong tasks; higher = not experimenting enough
- 96. Verify Everything at Leadership Level** — AI assists, you verify — especially numbers for exec output
- 97. Reinvest Saved Time Into Strategy** — 15+ hours/week back for CEO partnership, team building, planning
- 98. Document Wins, Kill Failures Fast** — Log every prompt success and failure for compounding returns
- 99. Maintain Knowledge Base Every Friday** — 30 min: upload new docs, delete stale files, update instructions
- 100. Ask AI Before Searching Email** — Query your AI knowledge base first; faster than digging through inbox