

C1-C2 ENGLISH LISTENING WORKSHEET

Microsoft Excel World Championship: Is This Really a Sport?

30 October 2026

Great Big Story - *Here's the Most Niche Esport on Earth* (4:53)

In Las Vegas, competitors race to solve increasingly difficult spreadsheet puzzles as a live crowd cheers them on. Meet Michael Jarman, the unlikely world champion turning Excel into a spectator event.

Before your lesson: Watch once without subtitles, then listen again to complete the tasks. Support your answers with specific details from the interview, and prepare ideas for the discussion.

[Watch the Great Big Story video on YouTube](#)

Listening Comprehension

Answer in your own words. Several questions require you to connect details or explain the speaker's meaning, not just recall a fact.

Write brief notes in the spaces provided. Use a separate notebook or document for longer answers.

No.	Listening question and answer space
1	Michael calls himself hopeless at ball sports. What contrast does he draw with his current public profile, and which broadcaster illustrates the irony?
2	Why did the organisers move away from a purely financial-modelling format? Explain how the newer competition was meant to appeal to people watching for the first time.
3	Reconstruct Michael's first experience of competitive Excel: who introduced him to it, what did he expect, and what was the actual result?
4	How does the film contrast the competition's earlier public profile with its status after the rebrand? Include the audience, venue and media coverage.
5	Explain the elimination format in detail. How do the round length, increasingly difficult levels, bonus questions and five-minute intervals affect a player's strategy?
6	Give three specific puzzle themes mentioned in the film. What do they suggest about the range of problems competitors now have to tackle?
7	Michael says the finals are mentally exhausting despite the short rounds. Which features of the Vegas final intensify the pressure, and what physical-sport comparison does he avoid making?
8	Michael describes two emotions when he won in 2024. What were they, and which two unexpected forms of media attention followed?
9	What does the film suggest competitive Excel offers beyond winning? Identify the social benefit Michael mentions and the shared interest that brings people together.
10	What kind of person does Michael encourage to enter the competition? Explain how his invitation reflects the organisers' broader attempt to make Excel esports more accessible.

Phrase Match

Match each **exact expression heard in the video** (1-10) with its contextual meaning (A-J).

Expressions (1-10)	Meanings (A-J)
1. get something on the board	A. tiredness caused by sustained intellectual effort
2. a driving force	B. think of or devise an idea
3. nothing to write home about	C. a major influence making something happen
4. come up with	D. one immediately after another, without a break
5. back to back	E. have the same enthusiasm for finding solutions to problems
6. the glitz, the glamour	F. score some points so that you are no longer on zero
7. taken an interest in it	G. try doing something, especially for the first time
8. share your passion for problem solving	H. become interested in it or start paying attention to it
9. give it a go	I. not particularly impressive or remarkable
10. mental fatigue	J. the showy excitement and attractive spectacle of an event

Synonym Match

Match each **word heard in the video** (1-10) with its closest synonym in context (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. coordination	A. knockout
2. approachable	B. basically
3. rebrand	C. situations
4. ascending	D. devotees
5. elimination	E. brand makeover
6. scenarios	F. unconventional
7. exhausting	G. accessible
8. essentially	H. rising
9. quirky	I. draining
10. enthusiasts	J. motor control

Use the New Language

Choose five expressions or words from this lesson and write an original sentence using each one.

No.	Your sentence
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Discussion Questions

Use the video as a starting point. Give reasons, counterarguments and relevant examples; challenge each other's conclusions.

Student A - Personal experience	Student B - Opinions and analysis
1. Have you ever become unexpectedly good at something you initially thought was beyond you? What changed?	1. Does a competition need physical exertion to qualify as a sport, or should mental endurance be equally important?
2. Which everyday skill do you have that might surprise people if it became a competition?	2. Has televising increasingly obscure competitions enriched popular culture, or merely turned everything into a spectacle?
3. Have you ever pursued an unusual hobby that other people struggled to understand?	3. When organisers make a specialist activity more 'gamey', do they broaden participation or undermine its original purpose?
4. What is the most intense competition or examination you've experienced? How did you manage the pressure?	4. Why are exceptional intellectual skills often less celebrated publicly than sporting or entertainment talent?
5. Do you prefer solving difficult problems alone or with people who share your enthusiasm? Why?	5. Do elimination formats create genuine excitement, or do they reward risk-taking at the expense of deeper ability?
6. Have you ever watched an activity you previously dismissed and found yourself fascinated by it?	6. Can a highly specialised community retain its identity once it gains mainstream attention and commercial sponsorship?
7. If you entered an Excel-style championship, which kinds of themed puzzles would appeal to you most?	7. Is the pressure of performing complex mental tasks before a cheering crowd comparable to that faced by elite athletes?
8. Would you ever take part in a niche competition for enjoyment, even without recognition or prize money?	8. If almost any skill can become a spectator competition, what should determine which abilities society rewards?

60-Second Argument Challenge

Choose one: **"Competitive Excel is a real sport"** or **"Competitive Excel is entertainment, not sport"**. Defend your position with two details from the video, acknowledge one counterargument, and use at least two expressions from the phrase match.

Access the Video Transcript

Michael speaks quickly, with a strong British accent and frequent natural hesitations. After completing the listening task, turn on YouTube captions or use **Show transcript** to check difficult passages. The full transcript is not reproduced here.

[Watch the video and open its transcript](#)

Answer Key

Listening Comprehension

- [0:27-0:40] Michael says he has "zero coordination". He cannot kick a ball and can barely hit or throw one, yet he is now appearing on ESPN through competitive Excel.
- [0:50-1:11] Watching financial modelling was not especially interesting; the championship became more 'gamey' and 'approachable' for people just tuning in.
- [1:12-1:36] A work colleague introduced him to competitive Excel. He entered Model Off in 2017, thinking "I definitely won't get anywhere", but unexpectedly finished third.
- [1:40-2:18] Previously there was no audience or media attention and only a little prize money. After a rebrand, the final was in Las Vegas, shown on ESPN, with a much larger crowd - nearly filling the arena compared with 2023.
- [2:20-2:41] Each round lasts 30 minutes; levels become harder, competitors can attempt risky bonus questions, and the lowest score is eliminated every five minutes. Players must balance scoring against the risk of falling behind.
- [2:49-3:11] The themes include World of Warcraft, detective thrillers and Scrabble. These varied scenarios show that competitors solve creative, game-based problems rather than only financial calculations.
- [3:15-3:31] Finalists complete two difficult cases 'back to back' amid lights, 'the glitz, the glamour' and cheering. He stresses mental fatigue but does not claim to be a marathon runner.
- [3:54-4:14] Winning brought 'joy' and 'a lot of relief'. He unexpectedly trended on TikTok and appeared on the front page of The New York Times.
- [4:18-4:42] It brings a community of spreadsheet enthusiasts together. Michael values meeting people who 'share your passion for problem solving' and this niche sport.
- [4:35-4:49; 0:57-1:11] He encourages people who like problem solving and spreadsheets to 'give it a go'. This matches the shift towards a more game-like, approachable event for newcomers.

Phrase Match: 1=F, 2=C, 3=I, 4=B, 5=D, 6=J, 7=H, 8=E, 9=G, 10=A

Synonym Match: 1=J, 2=G, 3=E, 4=H, 5=A, 6=C, 7=I, 8=B, 9=F, 10=D

Example Sentences With the Phrases

No.	Example sentence
1	At the start of the quiz, I was relieved to get something on the board .
2	A small group of volunteers became a driving force behind the festival.
3	The prize was decent, but nothing to write home about .
4	We had to come up with a solution under intense time pressure.
5	The finalists completed two complicated puzzles back to back .
6	The glitz, the glamour , and the cheering made the final feel like a major sports event.
7	People who once dismissed the contest have taken an interest in it .
8	It's refreshing to share your passion for problem solving with others.
9	Even if the competition looks difficult, you should give it a go .
10	Prolonged concentration can lead to mental fatigue , even while seated.

Teacher note: Accept accurate paraphrases that retain the interview's key meaning. The model answers use recognisable wording from the video. Some inference questions allow different well-supported explanations; timestamps are approximate. Student sentences and discussion responses are open-ended.