THE PICARDI ACADEMY

Business Analyst Field Manual

A practical guide and workbook for analysts in any industry.

FIRST EDITION, 2026
PUBLISHED BY PICARDI SOLUTIONS LLC
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What this book is. General guidance on business analysis. It is not legal, compliance or regulatory advice. Where your organization's policies, systems or legal duties say something different, follow them. Every scenario, name and figure in the examples is fictional.

BEFORE YOU START

How to use this book

A business analyst's first months are mostly questions, notes and follow-ups. This book gives you the questions, and the forms to write the answers on.

Part I is a short manual. It starts with the job itself and with how to read an organization (Chapters 1 and 2). Then it covers three situations you will meet almost everywhere: records that start and end, transactions that follow rules, and dependence on outside firms (Chapters 3 to 5). The last four chapters are about doing the work well: artifacts and requirements, the working day, protecting sensitive information, and how to spend your first fortnight (Chapters 6 to 9).

Part II is the workbook. Twenty-five forms, grouped by what you are doing. Print blank copies of the ones you reach for most; Forms 11, 15 and 22 are the likeliest to become weekly habits.

Whenever you see LOCAL DETAIL, the answer depends on where you work. Ask, and note it beside the text. If your organization already has a template for something, use that one and borrow the questions from these forms.

WHERE TO START

IF YOU ARE	START HERE
New to the role	Chapters 1, 2 and 9, then Form 1 on your first morning.
Handed a problem nobody can explain	Chapter 3 or 4, then Forms 15 and 16. If a vendor is involved, Chapter 5 and Form 18.
Writing your first requirement	Chapter 6, then Forms 6 and 7.
Running a meeting tomorrow	Chapter 7, then Forms 12 and 10.
Preparing to release a change	Chapter 6, then Forms 23 and 24.

ALSO ONLINE

Every form in Part II is on **picardiacademy.com/field-manual**. You can print blank copies without an account, or create a free account to fill the forms in on screen and keep them. Use fictional or redacted data only when you do.

WHERE TO FIND THINGS

Contents

Part II · The Workbook

CHAPTER 1

The analyst's job

Most workplace failures are failures of shared understanding. Two people leave a meeting each sure the other agreed to something different. A business analyst exists to catch that gap early, while fixing it still costs a conversation instead of a rebuild.

WHAT YOU PRODUCE

Analysts are judged by what they leave behind. Five things matter, and they tend to appear in roughly this order.

YOU PRODUCE	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS
A problem statement	What is actually wrong, for whom, and what is it costing?
A picture of today's work	Who does what, in what order, with which tools, and where does it leave the normal path?
A set of rules	What does the organization decide, and on what basis?
Requirements	What must the solution do, stated so that a tester could check it?
A decision record	Who chose what, when, and what did they turn down?

Notice what is missing from the list: the solution itself. You will have opinions about it, and you should share them, but you are rarely the one who decides or builds it. Your product is the clarity that lets other people do both well.

WHERE NEW ANALYSTS GO WRONG

- **Starting with the answer.** Requests usually arrive as solutions ("add a column to the report"). Ask what problem the request solves before agreeing that it is the right fix.
- **Treating the loudest voice as the requirement.** Seniority and volume tell you who cares, not what is needed. Check claims against the data and against the people who do the work.
- **Writing for yourself.** If a developer, a tester and an executive cannot each read your document and take away the same thing, it is not finished.
- **Letting scope drift quietly.** Every addition has a cost. Make it visible and let the owner choose what to give up.
- **Keeping knowledge in your head.** Anything only you know leaves when you do. Put it where the next person will look.

THE FOLLOW-UP NOTE

After each meeting that matters, send a short note the same day: what was decided, what was left open, who is doing what by when, and what you are assuming. It takes ten minutes and buys something rare, a cheap chance for everyone to correct you before the misunderstanding is built into anything.

Notes that are reliably accurate get kept, quoted and forwarded, and over time that turns a newcomer into the person others check with. Form 10 is a ready-made layout, and the worked example at the front of Part II shows one filled in.

SIGNS IT IS WORKING

- People stop asking "what did we decide?" and start asking "where is your note?"
- Testers find defects in what was built, not questions about what was meant.
- You can explain why a rule exists and who chose it.
- A problem that came back every quarter stops coming back.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

Take one request you are working on. Write the underlying problem in a single sentence that does not mention any solution. If you cannot, that is your next question for whoever asked.

CHAPTER 2

How to read an organization

Whatever the business, you can learn its shape in a week if you know what to look for: who pays, where the money goes, what a customer goes through, and which rules bind the whole thing.

START WITH THREE QUESTIONS

1. **Who pays us, and for what?**
2. **Where does that money go?** Which teams, systems and outside firms spend it?
3. **Which rules limit how we work?** Laws, contracts, industry standards and the organization's own policies all count.

A request that earns money, saves money or keeps the organization inside its rules has a reason to exist. One that does none of those needs a better explanation. One that does more than one usually deserves to go first. Details that vary from one workplace to the next are marked LOCAL DETAIL: find out yours and write it in the margin.

TRACE ONE CUSTOMER END TO END

Pick one real customer (or order, or student, or patient) and follow them from first contact to the last report that mentions them. At every stop, ask the same three things.

THE STOP	WHAT TO FIND OUT	WHERE IT TENDS TO BREAK
First contact	How is the person or business identified and approved?	Duplicate or mismatched records
Setup	Where does the master copy live, and which terms apply to this customer?	Terms entered wrongly, or from the wrong date
Changes of status	When something starts, pauses or ends, how does every other system find out?	One system updated and another not
The work itself	Who does it, and which tools does it touch?	Manual workarounds and rework
Money moves	What triggers charges, payments, refunds and statements?	Amounts that do not reconcile
Checking and reporting	Who checks the outcome, and who is told?	Reports built on different definitions

LOOK FOR THE SEAMS

Trouble gathers wherever information crosses a boundary: between systems, between teams, or between the organization and an outside firm. When a number looks wrong, resist asking who made the mistake. Ask where it was last correct, then study what happened between there and here.

ONE BOOK, EIGHT INDUSTRIES

The next three chapters describe three situations that appear in nearly every industry: something with a start and an end, a transaction that follows rules, and work that depends on an outside party. The vocabulary changes from place to place; the situations do not. Use this table to translate.

INDUSTRY	SOMETHING WITH A START AND AN END	A TRANSACTION THAT FOLLOWS RULES	THE QUEUE OF EXCEPTIONS	AN OUTSIDE PARTY YOU DEPEND ON	SENSITIVE DATA
Retail	Loyalty membership, promotion period	Order	Orders held for fraud or stock review	Payment processor, shipper	Card data, customer contact details (PCI DSS)
Restaurant	Staff schedule, menu price dates	Check or ticket	Voids and comps flagged for review	POS and delivery platforms	Card data, staff personal data
Real estate	Listing period, lease term	Offer through closing	Contingencies not yet cleared	Listing service, title company	ID and financial documents
Banking	Account life, rate period	Payment or loan application	Payments held for review	Card processor, core-system vendor	Account and ID data (GLBA, PCI DSS)
HR and people analytics	Employment period, benefits enrollment	Payroll run, time-off request	Payroll exceptions	Payroll and benefits vendors	SSN, salary, leave and medical data
Education	Enrollment term, course registration	Registration, grade change	Registration holds	Learning-system and student-records vendors	Student records (FERPA)
Hospital	Admission stay, care episode	Encounter through billing	Coding holds, denied claims	Clearinghouse, lab	Protected health information (HIPAA)
Health insurance	Coverage period	Claim	Claims waiting for a person to review	Pharmacy benefit manager, clearinghouse	Protected health information (HIPAA)

Regulation names are examples, not legal advice; which rules apply depends on where you work LOCAL DETAIL

CHAPTER 3

Anything with a start and an end: status and dates

Memberships, contracts, jobs, leases, prices and promotions are true only between two dates. Get the dates wrong and everything built on them (billing, access, eligibility, reports) goes wrong quietly, often for months.

STORE PERIODS, NOT FLAGS

A column that says "active" is a summary of something else. What is really stored, or should be, is a **period**: a start, an end, and the thing the period applies to. "Was this customer active on 14 March?" then becomes a question you answer by looking for a period that covers that day.

Two habits follow. Always ask *on which date?* before you ask *what status?* And when someone insists a record is wrong, ask to see its periods, not just its current flag.

SIX WAYS A PERIOD GOES WRONG

DEFECT	WHAT YOU SEE	A CHECK YOU CAN RUN
Overlap	Two periods cover the same day, so the record is in two states at once.	Sort each record's periods by start date and flag any start that falls before the previous end.
Gap	A day or more belongs to no period, so the record disappears and then returns.	Flag any start that is later than the previous end plus one day.
Boundary confusion	One system counts the end date as included and another does not.	Test a record on its last day in both systems.
Open-ended dates	A blank end and a far-future end ("9999-12-31") both mean "no end", and code treats them differently.	List every end-date convention in use.
Clock and cut-off	A change made at 11:55 pm lands on the next day in another time zone or batch run.	Compare timestamps with the cut-off rule.
Late entry	A change is keyed days after it took effect, so work already done used the old facts.	Count the days between entry date and effective date.

WHOSE VERSION WINS

Often two parties keep the same facts: your system and a regulator, a parent company, a payment network, a school registrar. When they disagree, decide in advance which one is authoritative and reconcile toward it. Otherwise each side spends its time proving the other wrong.

1. Name the authority for each fact, in writing.
2. Compare your records with theirs on a fixed schedule, not only when someone complains.
3. Sort the differences into three piles: ours to fix, theirs to fix, and needs a decision.
4. Track the size of each pile over time. A pile that only grows means the cause has not been found.

> **FIVE QUESTIONS FOR A BACKDATED CHANGE**
>
> 1. What work was done using the old dates (invoices, approvals, access, grades)?
> 2. Which of it still stands, and which must be reversed or recalculated?
> 3. Who must be told, inside and outside the organization?
> 4. How far back may a change reach? Is there a limit? LOCAL DETAIL
> 5. What evidence will show the correction was complete?

PASSING STATUS ALONG

Status rarely stays in one place. It is copied, by file or feed, to the systems and outside firms that act on it. A customer who is current in your system but absent from a partner's list will be refused service by that partner. After every transfer, compare the two sides: how many records left, how many were accepted, and which ones sit on one list but not the other.

> CASE · THE GYM FREEZE
>
> A member asks to freeze their membership for June. The request is keyed on 3 July, effective 1 June. The billing run already charged the June fee, the door system still lets the member in, and the partner discount app shows them as active. Three systems, three answers.
>
> The fix is a sequence, not one correction: confirm the freeze rule, reverse the fee, close the access period, resend the status to the partner, then check that all three lists agree.

INVESTIGATING A MISMATCH

1. Pick one record and lay every system's start and end dates side by side (Form 16).
2. Find the earliest difference, then ask which hand-off could have produced it.
3. Look at what happened between the last time the dates agreed and the first time they did not.
4. Count how many other records share the pattern. One record is an incident; a hundred is a defect.
5. Fix the record, fix the cause, and settle what was already done inside the affected period.

> **TRY IT THIS WEEK**
> Choose one record at your workplace that has a start and an end date. List every system that stores those dates. Do they all agree today? If you cannot tell, you have found your first project. Sheet A of Form 4 has the questions to ask.

CHAPTER 4

Transactions that pass through rules

An order, a payment, a loan application, a time-off request: each is a request that travels through a chain of checks before someone says yes, no or wait. Much of an analyst's investigating comes down to finding where in that chain one particular request went sideways.

A CHAIN OF CHECKS

The details vary, but most chains look something like this. Learn the order for your own workplace; it is your map for every investigation.

STAGE	THE QUESTION IT ASKS	A TYPICAL WAY IT FAILS
Arrival	Did the request come in complete and readable?	A missing field, a damaged file, a double submission.
Shape check	Is it correctly formed?	A wrong format or code, so the request is turned away before the main system ever sees it.
Who is involved	Which customer, account and counterparty is this?	The wrong match, or two records for one person.
Standing	Were they entitled on the date that matters?	Dates that disagree (Chapter 3).
Terms and limits	Which contract, price list or limit applies?	The wrong version, or terms that have expired.
Rule checks	Do policy, approvals and screening allow it?	A missing rule, or rules applied in the wrong order.
Amount	What is the correct amount or outcome?	Rounding, currency, stacked discounts.
Outcome and notice	Approve, reject or hold, and who is told?	The right decision with the wrong message, or none.

FIND THE FIRST WRONG TURN

1. Get one concrete case, with its identifier and the outcome someone disputes.
2. Write down, stage by stage, what the correct input and output should have been.
3. Collect evidence for each stage: screens, logs, reports.
4. Find the first stage whose output is wrong. The fault lies in that stage or in whatever fed it.
5. Decide which kind of problem it is, using the list below.

FOUR KINDS OF PROBLEM

- **The rule is set up wrongly.** It exists, but its configuration is incorrect.
- **There is no rule for this case.** Nobody ever wrote it down or built it.
- **The rule is fine, but its input is bad.** The data reaching it is wrong.
- **The rule is fine, but its effect is hidden.** It works, yet no one can see what it did.

Form 15 sets this method out as a worksheet.

CASE · THE EXPENSE REPORT THAT BOUNCED

An employee's expense report is rejected for "missing receipt" although a receipt is attached. Tracing it shows the attachment was filed in the wrong folder at the shape check, so the rule check never saw it. The rule was right; its input was wrong.

Repeating the trace on ten similar rejections showed the same misfiling nine times. The fix belongs upstream, in how attachments are filed.

THE NUMBERS PEOPLE WATCH

MEASURE	WHAT IT TELLS YOU	HOW IT CAN MISLEAD
Straight-through rate	The share finished with no human touch.	It rises if hard cases are quietly parked somewhere else.
Backlog by age	How much is waiting, and for how long.	An average hides the few very old items.
Turnaround time	Elapsed time from receipt to completion.	Teams start and stop the clock at different points.
Accuracy and rework	How often work has to be redone.	It only measures what gets sampled.
Top exception reasons	Where work stops.	Reason codes are sometimes chosen for convenience.
Complaints and reversals	What customers actually notice.	They lag the real cause by weeks.

RANK THE REASONS

When someone asks you to "find improvements", start here. Pull a period of exceptions (a year is a good start), group them by reason with a count and a cost, sort the largest first, and add a running share. A handful of reasons usually account for most of the volume.

REASON AN ORDER WAS HELD	COUNT	SHARE	RUNNING SHARE
Billing address does not match the card	412	34%	34%
Payment authorization expired	268	22%	56%
Item out of stock at picking time	181	15%	71%
Suspected duplicate order	132	11%	82%
Everything else (eleven reasons)	217	18%	100%

For each of the top reasons ask three things. Could a rule change remove it? Could an earlier check catch it? Is the real cause upstream, in the data or in another team's process?

COMPLAINTS ARE TRANSACTIONS TOO

A complaint travels its own chain, usually against a legal or contractual clock. Send it to the right place first (Form 17), trace what happened (Form 15), then look for the cause (Form 19). Sheet B of Form 4 has the questions to ask about how your own chains work.

CHAPTER 5

Third parties and vendors

Outside firms process your payments, ship your orders, host your systems and print your letters. You can hand over the work but not the accountability, so your job here is mostly about evidence.

WHAT TO GATHER ABOUT ANY OUTSIDE FIRM

DOCUMENT	WHAT IT SETTLES
The contract and any work orders	What is being supplied, the price, the term, and how changes are agreed.
Service levels	What "good" means, how it is measured, and the remedy for a miss.
Data specification	Layout, timing, transport, and what happens when something goes wrong.
Security and privacy terms	What data may move, and who is responsible if it leaks.
Contacts and escalation path	Who to call at each level, and after how long.
Issue history	What has gone wrong before, and what was promised in response.

WRITE A SERVICE LEVEL YOU CAN MEASURE

A measurable service level names four things: what is counted, over what period, against what target, and who measures it. If any of the four is missing, the standard cannot be enforced.

WEAK

Statements are mailed promptly.

BETTER

Customer statements are mailed within 2 business days of the statement date. Measured monthly from the mail house's postage records. Target: 98% of statements each month.

THREE EVENTS, THREE PROOFS

Most arguments about late or missing data are really arguments about which of three separate things happened. Keep the proof for each.

EVENT	WHO CAN PROVE IT	WHAT THE PROOF LOOKS LIKE
The file leaves the sender	The sender	Their transmission log, with time and record count.
The file arrives with us	Us	Our transfer log, with file name, size and time.
The file loads correctly	Us	The load report: rows accepted, rows rejected, errors.

Form 18 walks a failed file through all three.

WHEN THEY MISS

1. Log the miss the same day, with the time, the evidence and the number of records affected (Form 21).
2. Work out who was affected and what they were told.
3. Ask the firm for a written cause and a date for the fix.
4. Check that the fix worked before you close the item.
5. Bring open items to the next review, not only new ones.

RUN A REVIEW THAT PRODUCES DECISIONS

Bring one page: each service level, its target, the result and the trend (Form 22). Start with the misses. For each one, leave with an owner and a date. Finish by asking what is changing on their side: volume, staffing, systems, contract terms.

STARTING AND ENDING A RELATIONSHIP

BRINGING A FIRM ON	LETTING A FIRM GO
▪ Agree the data specification in writing. ▪ Test sample files in both directions. ▪ Run alongside the old process for one full cycle. ▪ Decide who watches what during the first month.	▪ Agree how your data is returned and then deleted. ▪ Decide who finishes work still in progress. ▪ Keep the evidence file. ▪ Confirm every access they hold has been removed.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

Pick one outside firm your team depends on. Can you find their service levels, their data specification and last quarter's misses? Each thing you cannot find is a task. Sheet C of Form 4 has the questions, and Form 21 is where the answers go.

CHAPTER 6

Documents you will produce, and writing requirements well

Documents are how your analysis outlives the meeting where you did it. The right document is the lightest one that lets the next person act without phoning you.

CHOOSE THE LIGHTEST DOCUMENT THAT WORKS

YOU NEED TO...	USE	KEEP IT TO
Decide whether a request is worth doing	A request brief (Form 6)	One page
Show how work moves today	A process map with lanes for each team	One page per process
Agree what will be built	Requirements (Form 7) or a backlog of stories	One behavior each
Change something already agreed	A change request (Form 9)	One change each
Move data between systems	A data mapping table	One row per field
Prove it was built right	A test log (Form 23) and defect reports (Form 20)	One test, one result
Remember why a choice was made	A decision register (Form 25)	Date, choice, reason, owner

FIVE CHECKS FOR A REQUIREMENT

A good requirement can be read by three different people with the same result. Test yours against five questions.

1. **One behavior.** If the sentence joins two things with "and", it is two requirements.
2. **Testable.** Someone could mark it pass or fail without having to ask you what you meant.
3. **What, not how.** It names no screens, tables or products. Those are design choices, and belong in notes.
4. **Awkward cases covered.** It says what happens when input is wrong or missing, when there is nothing to process, and when history is corrected later.
5. **Owned.** A named person can say yes or no to it.

WEAK
Late deliveries need to be handled properly.

BETTER
When an order's promised delivery date passes without a delivery scan, the system will send the customer a message within 30 minutes giving a new estimated date, so that customers do not have to contact support to find out.

Now apply the awkward-case check to the better version:

- **Wrong or missing input.** The order has no customer contact details: route it to the support queue.
- **Nothing to process.** The parcel is scanned a moment before the message goes out: cancel the message.
- **History corrected later.** The promised date is amended afterwards: recalculate, and send nothing if the order is no longer late.

Two to four examples written as *starting situation, what happens, expected result* make the requirement checkable, and they become your acceptance tests. Form 7 has room for all of it.

CHANGE, TEST, RELEASE

- **Changing what was agreed.** Write the change down (Form 9): what changes, from when, whether it is backdated, what work already done is affected, who else it touches, how it will be tested and who approved it.
- **Testing.** Every test traces to a requirement, uses recorded data, and has an expected and an actual result (Form 23). When a test fails, write a defect that anyone could reproduce (Form 20).
- **Releasing.** Before go-live, work through the readiness checklist (Form 24). After the first real cycle, check that the number you set out to move actually moved.

A REGISTER YOU ACTUALLY KEEP

One list holds risks, issues and decisions (Form 25). Give it five minutes each week: add new entries, update statuses, close what is finished. A decision with no date and no owner is a rumor.

TRY IT THIS WEEK
Take one requirement you have written or received and run it through the five checks. How many does it pass? Rewrite it until all five do.

CHAPTER 7

A working week

No two weeks look alike, but the good ones share a rhythm: time to think, time with people, and time to close loops.

SHAPE THE DAY

- **Triage first.** Scan overnight alerts, your queue and anything marked urgent before you plan anything.
- **Protect one thinking block.** Do the work that needs the most concentration first, before meetings claim the day.
- **Spend the middle with people.** Working sessions, observation, vendor calls, testing with users.
- **Close loops late.** Send notes, update tickets, and send questions to colleagues who can reply while you are away. Then write a few lines in your journal (Form 14).

RUN A WORKING SESSION

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
▪ State the purpose in one sentence. ▪ Send three questions ahead of time. ▪ Invite only the people you need.	▪ Begin with a real case, not a description. ▪ Follow the odd cases: they hide the rules. ▪ Write rules in the speaker's own words. ▪ Read back what you heard.	▪ Send a written summary the same day. ▪ List open questions, each with a name. ▪ Book a follow-up if one is needed.

Form 12 gives you the plan and the notes in one place.

OBSERVE BEFORE YOU ASK

Sit beside someone while they do real work (Form 5). Ask permission first. Watch two or three ordinary cases and one unusual one, and ask what they did the last time it went wrong. Notice the tools that live outside the official systems: spreadsheets, sticky notes, favors owed. Those are requirements in disguise.

SIX DATA MOVES WORTH MASTERING

1. **Count and group.** How many, by status, by reason, by month?
2. **Compare two versions.** What is in the second snapshot that was not in the first, and the reverse?
3. **Find duplicates.** The same thing entered twice, or paid twice.
4. **Match across sources.** Records in A but not in B, and in B but not in A.
5. **Show change over time.** A simple trend, with the unusual month explained in one sentence.
6. **Label every number.** Say where it came from, as of when, and what it includes. A number with those three labels gets acted on; one without them gets argued with.

Even if you do not yet write the queries yourself, learn to describe them precisely. A clear data request (Form 8) is half the skill.

MEETINGS THAT LEAVE A TRAIL

After a meeting where something was decided, send a follow-up note (Form 10). For a committee that keeps formal records, use minutes (Form 11). Once a week, send a status report (Form 13): an overall colour, the reason for it, what you finished, what comes next, and what you need from whom. Raise a risk while it is still amber; a red should never be a surprise.

> **TRY IT THIS WEEK**
>
> Keep a work journal (Form 14) for five working days. On Friday, read it back. What kept getting stuck, and who could unstick it?

CHAPTER 8

Handling sensitive data

You will see information that people would be upset to see mishandled. A few plain habits keep you and your organization safe, and they are also simply good manners.

FOUR HABITS

- **Take only what the task needs.** Twenty rows often answer a question that a full extract would only bury. Ask for the smallest slice that works.
- **Keep it where it belongs.** Use the approved storage and tools. Do not send or copy sensitive data into private email, home computers, personal cloud storage or tools nobody has approved, and use masked or fake data for testing. Where it may live at your workplace is a LOCAL DETAIL.
- **Mask before you share.** Screenshots, tickets, chats and slides travel further than you expect. Remove names, ID numbers, account numbers and contact details first.
- **Ask before going big.** Large extracts and new data flows deserve a quick word with whoever owns the data.

WHAT COUNTS AS SENSITIVE

KIND	EXAMPLES	A USUAL WAY TO MASK IT
Identity	Full name with date of birth, ID or passport numbers	Replace with a code.
Money	Card and bank numbers, salaries, balances	Keep the last four digits, or a range.
Health	Diagnoses, treatments, claims	Summarize, or remove.
Work and school records	Performance notes, grades, disciplinary files	Summarize, or remove.
Contact and location	Home address, phone number, precise location	Keep the region only.

KNOW YOUR CLOCKS

Some events start a legal or contractual timer: a formal complaint, a privacy incident, a dispute, a request to see or delete someone's data. If a requirement you are writing touches one, note it in the requirement and tell its owner early. A deadline is the one thing you cannot renegotiate after it has passed. Which timers apply to you is a LOCAL DETAIL.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

1. Stop, and tell the right person quickly, using the route your organization has set.
2. Do not investigate alone, delete anything, or try to fix it quietly.
3. Write down what you saw, when, and where, in plain facts.
4. Keep the matter out of ordinary project tickets and chats.

Suspected fraud or misconduct follows the same path: report it, do not investigate it.

> **USING THE FORMS IN THIS BOOK**
> Forms 15, 16, 17, 20 and 23 often involve real records. On paper, mask personal identifiers before you share or file a sheet. On the website, use fictional or redacted data only; the online forms warn you if you type something that looks like a Social Security or card number.

> **TRY IT THIS WEEK**
> Find out where your workplace says sensitive data may be stored, and who to tell about a slip. Write both on Form 1.

CHAPTER 9

Settling in: your first fortnight

The first two weeks shape how people see you for a long time. Nobody expects you to know things. They do notice whether you write things down and follow up.

A FORTNIGHT IN FOUR STEPS

WHEN	FOCUS	FORMS
Day 1	**Get set up.** Ask for access to all the tools you expect to need, write down what your manager expects, and start your vocabulary list.	1, 2
Days 2 to 4	**Watch and listen.** Sit beside the people who do the work. Notice the odd cases and the side tools.	5, 3
Days 5 to 8	**Draw and ask.** Put your one-page sketch in front of two colleagues and ask what it gets wrong. Put the discovery questions to the right people.	4
Days 9 to 14	**Read and deliver.** Pick one outside firm and read its contract and data specification from start to finish, meet each outside contact, and finish one small useful thing.	3, 14

Whatever the day, spend a few lines at the end of it on your work journal (Form 14). In six weeks you will be glad you did.

ONE PAGE YOU DRAW YOURSELF

By the end of the first week, sketch how work and information move through your area, as best you can tell. Then walk two colleagues through the sketch and ask what is wrong with it. A sketch that is wrong in week one costs an afternoon; the same wrong belief in month three can cost a project.

QUESTIONS THAT SOUND NAIVE AND ARE NOT

- "What does that stand for?"
- "Who uses this report, and for what?"
- "What happens after this step?"
- "What did people do before this system existed?"
- "What do you wish I would ask?"

People answer more openly than you expect, and their answers are your map. Every new word goes on your vocabulary list (Form 2), with whose meaning it is.

DELIVER ONE SMALL THING

By day fourteen, hand someone something they can use: a clearer picture of a process, a ranked list of the most common exceptions, a one-page who-does-what, a glossary of the local jargon. People remember what they were given, not how quickly you learned.

BY THE END OF WEEK TWO, CAN YOU ANSWER THESE?

- which three people's support matters most, and what each needs from you;
- where the master record for your main data lives;
- the most common way work goes wrong here;
- which outside firms matter, and where their contracts and data specifications are kept;
- what you will deliver in the next month.

Then go back to Chapter 1 and read it again. It will read differently.

APPENDIX A

Glossary

Words you will hear in almost any workplace, in plain terms. Add your own local ones to Form 2.

TERM	MEANING
Acceptance criteria	The conditions a piece of work must meet before the requester agrees it is done.
Assumption	Something treated as true for planning that has not been proven. Write it down so it can be checked.
Audit trail	A record of who did what, and when, detailed enough to reconstruct a decision or a change.
Backdated change	A change entered today that takes effect on an earlier date, so past work may need revisiting.
Baseline	An agreed version of scope, plan or measure, used as the point of comparison for later changes.
Business rule	A statement of how the organization decides something, such as "orders above $500 need approval".
Change request	A formal ask to alter something already agreed: scope, a rule, a price or a setting.
Clearinghouse	An intermediary that checks and routes electronic transactions between organizations.
Data dictionary	A list of data fields with their meaning, type, allowed values and whether they may be blank.
Data mapping	A field-by-field statement of how a value in one system becomes a value in another.
Defect	Behavior that does not match a requirement or a reasonable expectation.
Dependency	Something a piece of work needs from elsewhere before it can proceed.
Edge case	An unusual but possible situation at the limits of normal use: empty input, an extreme value, a date at a boundary.
Effective date	The date from which a fact, rule or price applies, which may differ from the date it was entered.
Elicitation	Drawing out needs and knowledge from people, by interview, observation or workshop.
Escalation	Moving an issue to someone with more authority when it cannot be settled at the current level.
Exception queue	The pile of items automated processing could not finish, waiting for a person.

TERM	MEANING
Grain	What one row of a dataset stands for: one order, one customer per month, one payment.
Handoff	A point where work or data passes between people, teams or systems.
Interface	An agreed way for two systems or firms to exchange data, covering format, timing and error handling.
Master record	The copy of a piece of data that the organization treats as authoritative. Often called the source of truth.
Minimum necessary	The principle of using only as much sensitive data as a task really requires.
Process map	A diagram of the steps, roles and decisions in a workflow.
Provenance	Where a number came from, as of when, and what it includes.
Reconciliation	Comparing two sets of records to find and explain the differences.
Regression testing	Re-testing existing behavior after a change, to be sure nothing else broke.
Requirement	A statement of something a solution must do or be, worded so that it can be tested.
Rework	Doing work again because it was not right the first time.
Root cause	The underlying reason a problem happened. Removing it stops the problem returning.
Scope creep	Gradual, unapproved growth in what a project covers.
Service level	A measurable standard of performance promised by a supplier, with how it is measured and what happens on a miss.
Sign-off	Formal confirmation by the accountable person that work is accepted.
Stakeholder	Anyone affected by the work or able to influence it.
Straight-through processing	Handling an item from start to finish with no person touching it.
Swimlane diagram	A process map divided into lanes, one for each role or team.
Test data	Records chosen or prepared to exercise a test case.
Traceability matrix	A table linking each requirement to its design, its tests and their results.
Turnaround time	Elapsed time from a request arriving to it being completed.
User acceptance testing	Testing by the people who will use the result, to decide whether to accept it. Often shortened to UAT.
User story	A short requirement told from the user's side: "As a ..., I want ..., so that ...".
Vendor	An outside firm that supplies goods or services.
Workaround	An unofficial way of getting a task done around a limitation.

APPENDIX B

Form finder

Not sure which sheet you need? Find the moment you are in.

FORM	NAME	CHAPTER	REACH FOR IT WHEN
1	First-day briefing sheet	8, 9	The first morning of a new role.
2	Vocabulary log	9, A	Whenever you meet a word you cannot define. Keep adding for the first two months.
3	Contacts and systems map	9	As you learn who knows what, and which system holds which data.
4	Discovery question sheets	3-5	Your first fortnight: put the questions to the right people and note who answered.
5	Work observation notes	7	When you spend time with someone as they do their job.
6	New request brief	6	When someone brings you a new request. If a key section stays blank, return to the requester before you begin.
7	Requirement card	6	For each requirement, before any building starts.
8	Data request brief	7	When someone asks for numbers, a report or an extract.
9	Change request	6	When a rule, rate or setting is about to change.
10	Follow-up note	1, 7	The same day, after any meeting where something was decided.
11	Formal minutes	7	For a committee or standing meeting that keeps formal minutes.
12	Working session plan and notes	7	To plan a working session, and to capture it as it happens.
13	Weekly status report	7	Once a week for each active project.
14	Work journal	7, 9	At the close of each day, plus a weekly look-back.
15	Transaction trace	4	When a transaction came out wrong and you need to find out why.
16	Dates and status mismatch investigation	3	When a record shows one status in one place and another elsewhere.

FORM	NAME	CHAPTER	REACH FOR IT WHEN
17	Complaint intake and routing	4, 8	When a complaint or escalation reaches you.
18	Failed file incident report	5	When a file is late, missing or arrives incomplete.
19	Root cause review	4	After an incident, once the immediate problem is contained.
20	Defect report	6	When testing finds behavior that does not match the requirement.
21	Vendor record and miss log	5	One per vendor, kept up to date, with a line for each missed commitment.
22	Vendor review scorecard	5	For each vendor review meeting.
23	Acceptance test log	6	Before each release goes live.
24	Launch readiness and follow-through	6	The week before go-live, and again once the first live cycle has run.
25	Risk and decision register	6	From the start of any project, updated every week.

PART II

The Workbook

Twenty-five forms, grouped by what you are doing. Each one is a single working sheet: fill it in, keep it, and hand it to the next person.

HOW TO USE THE FORMS

- **Print, then write.** Keep a small stack of the forms you use most and fill them in by hand. A rough sheet that exists is worth more than a tidy one you never started.
- **One sheet, one subject.** One requirement on each Form 7, one meeting on each Form 10, one vendor on each Form 21.
- **Look at the examples first.** The next pages show three forms already filled in, each in a different industry: Form 7 (banking), Form 10 (retail) and Form 15 (health insurance).
- **File what you fill.** A folder of completed sheets shows what you learned and what you delivered, and it helps at review time and in an audit.

The forms come in six groups: getting started, requests and requirements, meetings and reporting, investigations and incidents, vendors, testing and delivery. The contents page lists them all, and Appendix B helps you find the one you need.

SENSITIVE DATA

Forms 15, 16, 17, 20 and 23 often involve real customer or employee records. Mask or remove personal identifiers before sharing a sheet, and follow your organization's rules for where such records may be stored.

On the website, fill these in with fictional or redacted data only.

TWO FORMS HAVE A SHORTCUT ONLINE

Forms 6 (New request brief) and 8 (Data request brief) are filled in on the website through **Intake Notes**, which saves your notes and builds a ticket summary you can paste into your tracker. The printable sheets here work the same way on paper.

FORM 7 · REQUESTS AND REQUIREMENTS

Requirement card

Write a single requirement so it can be built, tested and traced back to whoever asked for it.

Worked example. Fictional data, shown so you can see how the form is meant to be used.

REQUIREMENT NO.	BELONGS TO (PROJECT OR REQUEST)	PRIORITY
REQ-014	INT-2026-031	◉ Must ○ Should ○ Could

THE REQUIREMENT, WRITTEN AS: WHEN [SITUATION], THE SYSTEM WILL [ACTION], SO THAT [REASON].

When a payment has been held for review for more than 2 business days, the system shall notify the account owner and the operations queue owner, so that customers are not left without an explanation and the hold is worked within the service standard.

HOW WE WILL CHECK IT

STARTING SITUATION	WHAT HAPPENS	EXPECTED RESULT
A payment placed on hold at 9:00 on Monday	Two business days pass with no decision	The account owner and the queue owner are both notified by 9:00 on Wednesday
A payment released at 8:59 on Wednesday	The 2-day mark passes	No notification is sent

AWKWARD CASES

CASE	EXPECTED BEHAVIOR
Input is wrong or missing	Payment released before the 2-day mark: no notification, and nothing is queued.
Nothing to process	No contact preference on file: use the default email address and flag the record.
History is corrected later	Hold start date corrected after the fact: recalculate the 2-day mark from the corrected date.

WHO ASKED, AND WHEN

Deena Ortiz, Payments Operations manager, meeting of 2026-03-04

ASSUMPTIONS, AND WHAT THIS DEPENDS ON

The queue owner is one named role, not a shared inbox.

Compliance approves the notification wording.

Depends on the hold-reason field always being filled in.

BEFORE IT GOES TO REVIEW

- [x] It describes one behavior
- [x] A tester could mark it pass or fail
- [x] It says what, not how: no screens, tables or products
- [x] It covers failure and empty cases
- [x] The person who can approve it is named

FORM 10 · MEETINGS AND REPORTING

Follow-up note

Send this the same day: what was decided, who does what by when, and what is still open.

Worked example. Fictional data, shown so you can see how the form is meant to be used.

MEETING ABOUT	DATE
Weekend flash-sale promotion rules	Jun 11, 2026

WHO WAS THERE

Priya S. (Merchandising), Tom K. (E-commerce), Lena R. (Store operations), Marcus D. (Business analyst)

WHAT WE DECIDED

DECISION	DECIDED BY
The sale runs Friday 6:00 am to Sunday 11:59 pm, store time.	Priya S.
Online and in-store prices must match; store prices load Thursday night.	Tom K.
Returns follow the standard 30-day policy, with no exclusions.	Lena R.

WHO DOES WHAT

ACTION	OWNER	DUE
Confirm which items are excluded from stacking with loyalty offers	Priya S.	Jun 13, 2026
Draft the Thursday-night price-load checklist	Marcus D.	Jun 14, 2026
Confirm the POS can apply a time-boxed price rule	Lena R.	Jun 15, 2026

STILL OPEN, AND WHO WILL FIND OUT

Does the mobile app need the same banner copy? Tom K. to confirm with the app team by Monday.

NEXT STEP OR MEETING	CORRECTIONS BY
Price-load dry run, Wednesday 2026-06-17	Jun 12, 2026

Reply by the date above with any corrections. If nothing comes back, I will proceed as written.

FORM 15 · INVESTIGATIONS AND INCIDENTS

Transaction trace

Follow one transaction from arrival to outcome to locate the earliest point where wrong information appeared.

Worked example. Fictional data, shown so you can see how the form is meant to be used.

TRANSACTION ID	CUSTOMER OR ACCOUNT	RELEVANT DATES
CLM-2026-004417	Member M-10382	Service 2026-03-14; received 2026-03-19
OTHER PARTY	**TYPE**	**OUTCOME AND AMOUNT**
Provider P-2207	Professional claim	Denied, $412.00

STAGE BY STAGE

STAGE	CORRECT?	WHAT I SAW (VALUE, SCREEN OR REPORT)
Arrival and basic checks	◉ Yes ○ No	Received through the clearinghouse on 03/19 and passed the front-end edits.
Who the parties are, and their status on that date	○ Yes ◉ No	Core system shows coverage ended 2026-03-01. The enrollment vendor file shows active through 2026-03-31.
Terms or contract in force	◉ Yes ○ No	Provider contract active on the service date.
Limits and eligibility rules	◉ Yes ○ No	Within limits.
Approvals	◉ Yes ○ No	No approval needed for this service.
Automated checks and flags	◉ Yes ○ No	No edit fired other than the coverage denial.
Price or amount calculation	◉ Yes ○ No	Not reached, because the claim stopped at the coverage check.
Other parties involved	◉ Yes ○ No	No other party involved.
Final outcome and notice sent	○ Yes ◉ No	Denied with reason "coverage not in effect".

THE COMPLAINT AS FIRST RAISED, AND WHAT THE PERSON THOUGHT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED

The provider's billing manager says the patient was enrolled when treated and the claim should not have been denied.

FIRST STAGE WHERE THE INPUT WAS WRONG, AND WHY

Stage 2, who the parties are and their status on that date. The core system holds a coverage end date of 2026-03-01 that the enrollment vendor file does not have.

ISOLATED OR WIDESPREAD?

○ Isolated ◉ Widespread

SIMILAR CASES FOUND

37 claims for 9 members

VALUE AT STAKE

$14,820 in denied claims

FIX FOR THIS CASE

Correct the end date on this record and reprocess the claim.

FIX SO IT CANNOT RECUR

Add a daily comparison of end dates against the vendor file to the file-load checks.

FIX OWNED BY

Enrollment operations lead

REQUESTER TOLD (WHO, WHEN)

Provider billing manager, 2026-03-24

MASK OR REMOVE PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS BEFORE SHARING THIS SHEET.

FORM 1 · GETTING STARTED

First-day briefing sheet

Write down what your manager expects, who matters most and which access you still need, while the first day is fresh.

REPORTING TO	BEST WAY TO REACH THEM	REGULAR CHECK-IN (DAY AND TIME)

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE, AS YOUR MANAGER DESCRIBES IT

BY THE END OF WEEK TWO	BY THE END OF MONTH ONE	BY THE END OF MONTH THREE

PEOPLE WHOSE SUPPORT YOU WILL NEED

NAME AND ROLE	WHAT THEY WILL EXPECT FROM YOU	WHAT YOU WILL NEED FROM THEM

ACCESS TO REQUEST

TOOL OR SYSTEM	WHAT IT IS FOR	REQUESTED ON	WHO APPROVES	WORKING ON
Email, calendar and chat				
The main business application				
Reports and dashboards				
Read access to the data				
Task or ticket tracker				
Shared documents and wiki				

GROUND RULES TO CONFIRM

QUESTION	ANSWER	WRITTEN DOWN IN
Where may sensitive data be stored, and where must it never go?		
Is there a safe place to test with fake or masked data?		
Who do I tell about a suspected privacy or security slip?		
How do I raise something that looks improper or unethical?		

FORM 2 · GETTING STARTED

Vocabulary log

Keep a running list of the words, abbreviations and shorthand you hear, with what each one means where you heard it.

WORD OR ABBREVIATION	MEANING IN THIS WORKPLACE	HEARD FROM, OR USED IN

If two teams use one word differently, give each meaning its own line and say whose it is.

Contacts and systems map

Record who knows what, and which system holds the authoritative copy of which data.

WHO TO ASK

NAME	TEAM AND ROLE	ASK THEM ABOUT	HOW TO REACH THEM

SYSTEMS

SYSTEM	MASTER RECORD FOR	RECEIVES DATA FROM	SENDS DATA TO	OWNER

Discovery question sheets

Questions to put to colleagues in your first fortnight, with a place to note who gave each answer.

SHEET A: RECORDS THAT START AND END

QUESTION	WHAT YOU LEARNED	WHO TOLD YOU
Where does the master copy of these records live, and who may edit it?		
Does an outside body (a regulator, partner or parent company) send us the authoritative version? How often?		
How are backdated changes approved and applied, and what happens to work already done in the affected period?		
Which other systems and firms receive changes, on what schedule, and who hears when a transfer fails?		
What usually causes a record to look right in one place and wrong in another?		

SHEET B: TRANSACTIONS THAT FOLLOW RULES

QUESTION	WHAT YOU LEARNED	WHO TOLD YOU
List the stages a transaction passes through, in order. Which are automatic, and which need a person?		
Where are the rules kept, and who can change them?		
What are the most common reasons a transaction is stopped, rejected or sent back?		
What do managers look at each week to judge the flow, and where does each figure come from?		
Is there a known problem the team is tired of talking about?		

SHEET C: OUTSIDE FIRMS AND PARTNERS

QUESTION	WHAT YOU LEARNED	WHO TOLD YOU
Which outside firms send us data or receive it, and on what schedule?		
Where are their contracts, service levels and technical specifications kept?		
How would we notice if a file was sent but never loaded?		
Which firms are in trouble with us right now, and what has been agreed to fix it?		

SHEET D: YOUR OWN AREA (ADD QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO YOUR TEAM OR INDUSTRY)

QUESTION	WHAT YOU LEARNED	WHO TOLD YOU

FORM 5 · GETTING STARTED

Work observation notes

Record how work really gets done when you sit beside the person doing it.

PERSON OBSERVED	THEIR JOB	DATE
		MM / DD / YYYY

THE WORK AS IT REALLY HAPPENS (STEPS, TOOLS, DOCUMENTS)

WHAT THEY DO WHEN IT IS NOT STRAIGHTFORWARD

WORKAROUNDS OUTSIDE THE OFFICIAL TOOLS (SPREADSHEETS, NOTES, FAVORS)

WHAT FRUSTRATES THEM, AND WHAT THEY WOULD CHANGE FIRST

LOOSE ENDS: QUESTIONS TO CHASE, AND WHO MIGHT ANSWER

New request brief

Turn a vague ask into a clear problem, its cost, a deadline and a test for done.

ASKED BY	DATE ASKED	REFERENCE
	MM / DD / YYYY	

THE PROBLEM IN PLAIN WORDS (ONE SENTENCE)

WHO FEELS IT

HOW MANY PEOPLE OR RECORDS

WHAT IT COSTS TODAY (MONEY, RISK, TIME, GOODWILL)

HOW PEOPLE COPE RIGHT NOW

WHAT WILL PROVE THE PROBLEM IS SOLVED

NEEDED BY, AND WHY THEN

SET BY A LAW OR CONTRACT?

○ Yes ○ No

SYSTEMS AND OUTSIDE PARTIES INVOLVED

STILL UNKNOWN

Requirement card

Write a single requirement so it can be built, tested and traced back to whoever asked for it.

REQUIREMENT NO.	BELONGS TO (PROJECT OR REQUEST)	PRIORITY
		○ Must ○ Should ○ Could

THE REQUIREMENT, WRITTEN AS: WHEN [SITUATION], THE SYSTEM WILL [ACTION], SO THAT [REASON].

HOW WE WILL CHECK IT

STARTING SITUATION	WHAT HAPPENS	EXPECTED RESULT

AWKWARD CASES

CASE	EXPECTED BEHAVIOR
Input is wrong or missing	
Nothing to process	
History is corrected later	

WHO ASKED, AND WHEN

ASSUMPTIONS, AND WHAT THIS DEPENDS ON

BEFORE IT GOES TO REVIEW

- ☐ It describes one behavior
- ☐ A tester could mark it pass or fail
- ☐ It says what, not how: no screens, tables or products
- ☐ It covers failure and empty cases
- ☐ The person who can approve it is named

Data request brief

Agree exactly what data is wanted, for whom, over what period, and how you will confirm the result is plausible.

ASKED BY

NEEDED BY

MM / DD / YYYY

HOW OFTEN

○ One-off ○ Recurring

THE DECISION THIS WILL INFORM

WHO OR WHAT IS IN SCOPE, AND WHAT IS LEFT OUT

WHICH DATE COUNTS

○ Event date ○ Date received ○ Date posted ○ Date processed

TIME PERIOD

ONE ROW PER...

COLUMNS WANTED, AND SORT ORDER

LEAVE OUT

☐ Voided items ☐ Adjustments ☐ Duplicates ☐ Test records ☐ Cancelled items

ANYTHING ELSE TO LEAVE OUT

INCLUDES SENSITIVE DATA?

○ Yes ○ No

WHERE THE DATA COMES FROM

HOW WE WILL CHECK THE RESULT MAKES SENSE

DATA AS OF

MM / DD / YYYY

DELIVERY DATE

MM / DD / YYYY

FORMAT

WHERE THE QUERY IS SAVED

Change request

Describe a change, when it should take effect and who it touches, then record testing and approval.

RAISED BY	DATE RAISED	REFERENCE
	MM / DD / YYYY	

HOW IT WORKS TODAY

HOW IT SHOULD WORK

START DATE WANTED

MM / DD / YYYY

BACKDATED?

○ Yes ○ No

BACK TO

MM / DD / YYYY

WORK COMPLETED BEFORE THE CHANGE, AND WHAT HAPPENS TO IT

WHO AND WHAT ELSE IS AFFECTED

- ☐ Other settings or rules
- ☐ Reports
- ☐ Outside firms
- ☐ Filings to regulators
- ☐ Customer letters or notices

NEEDS A COMPLIANCE OR LEGAL REVIEW?

○ Yes ○ No

REVIEWER

ESTIMATED COST OR EFFORT

HOW IT WILL BE TESTED

DECISION, AND BY WHOM

DATE

MM / DD / YYYY

LIVE AND VERIFIED ON

MM / DD / YYYY

CHECKED BY

FORM 10 · MEETINGS AND REPORTING

Follow-up note

Send this the same day: what was decided, who does what by when, and what is still open.

MEETING ABOUT	DATE
	MM / DD / YYYY

WHO WAS THERE

WHAT WE DECIDED

DECISION	DECIDED BY

WHO DOES WHAT

ACTION	OWNER	DUE

STILL OPEN, AND WHO WILL FIND OUT

NEXT STEP OR MEETING	CORRECTIONS BY
	MM / DD / YYYY

Reply by the date above with any corrections. If nothing comes back, I will proceed as written.

FORM 11 · MEETINGS AND REPORTING

Formal minutes

Minutes for a committee or standing meeting: who attended, what was discussed, what was decided and what happens next.

COMMITTEE OR MEETING		DATE
		MM / DD / YYYY
TIME AND PLACE	CHAIR	RECORDED BY

ENOUGH MEMBERS PRESENT?
○ Yes ○ No

PREVIOUS MINUTES APPROVED?
○ Yes ○ No

ATTENDANCE

NAME	ROLE OR TEAM	ATTENDANCE
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent
		○ Present ○ Absent

ITEMS DISCUSSED

TOPIC	DISCUSSION	OUTCOME

ACTIONS ARISING

ACTION	OWNER	DUE	PROGRESS

NEXT MEETING

MINUTES SENT ON

MM / DD / YYYY

APPROVED ON

MM / DD / YYYY

Working session plan and notes

Plan a working session before it starts, and record what was actually said during it.

BEFORE: PLAN AND SEND

SUBSCRIPT OF THE SESSION

DATE AND LENGTH

WHAT WE NEED TO HAVE SETTLED BY THE END

THREE QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT BEFOREHAND

WHO NEEDS TO ATTEND, AND WHY

DURING: NOTES

NOTES, WITH RULES RECORDED IN THE SPEAKER'S OWN WORDS

WHERE PEOPLE DISAGREED (WHO, ABOUT WHAT)

WHAT I READ BACK, AND HOW THEY CORRECTED ME

WRITTEN SUMMARY SENT AT

ANOTHER SESSION NEEDED?

○ Yes ○ No

FORM 13 · MEETINGS AND REPORTING

Weekly status report

A one-page weekly update: an overall rating, the reason for it, and what you need from others.

PROJECT

WEEK ENDING

MM / DD / YYYY

OVERALL

○ Green ○ Yellow ○ Red

REASON FOR THE RATING (ONE SENTENCE)

FINISHED THIS WEEK

COMING UP NEXT WEEK

NEXT MILESTONE

ON TRACK FOR IT?

○ Yes ○ No

RISKS, BLOCKERS AND REQUESTS

WHAT	IMPACT IF IT STAYS UNRESOLVED	NEEDED FROM	BY WHEN

Raise a risk while it is still amber. A red rating should never come as a surprise.

Work journal

A short daily record of progress, obstacles and next steps, with a weekly look back.

WEEK BEGINNING

MM / DD / YYYY

DAY	PROGRESS	STUCK ON, AND WHO CAN UNSTICK IT	NEXT
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

WEEKLY LOOK BACK

WHAT I FINISHED

WHAT I LEARNED THIS WEEK

SUPPORT I WANT FROM MY MANAGER IN THE COMING WEEK

Transaction trace

Follow one transaction from arrival to outcome to locate the earliest point where wrong information appeared.

TRANSACTION ID	CUSTOMER OR ACCOUNT	RELEVANT DATES
OTHER PARTY	TYPE	OUTCOME AND AMOUNT

STAGE BY STAGE

STAGE	CORRECT?	WHAT I SAW (VALUE, SCREEN OR REPORT)
Arrival and basic checks	○ Yes ○ No	
Who the parties are, and their status on that date	○ Yes ○ No	
Terms or contract in force	○ Yes ○ No	
Limits and eligibility rules	○ Yes ○ No	
Approvals	○ Yes ○ No	
Automated checks and flags	○ Yes ○ No	
Price or amount calculation	○ Yes ○ No	
Other parties involved	○ Yes ○ No	
Final outcome and notice sent	○ Yes ○ No	

THE COMPLAINT AS FIRST RAISED, AND WHAT THE PERSON THOUGHT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED

FIRST STAGE WHERE THE INPUT WAS WRONG, AND WHY

ISOLATED OR WIDESPREAD?
○ Isolated ○ Widespread

SIMILAR CASES FOUND

VALUE AT STAKE

FIX FOR THIS CASE

FIX SO IT CANNOT RECUR

FIX OWNED BY

REQUESTER TOLD (WHO, WHEN)

MASK OR REMOVE PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS BEFORE SHARING THIS SHEET.

Dates and status mismatch investigation

Compare a record's start and end dates in every system that holds them, to see where they part company.

RECORD	REPORTED BY, AND WHEN	DATE IN QUESTION
		MM / DD / YYYY

WHAT EACH SYSTEM SAYS ABOUT THE RECORD

SYSTEM	START	END	PLAN, LEVEL OR NOTES
The authoritative outside source			
Our main system			
A downstream view			
A partner's system			
Other			

WHAT THE CUSTOMER, PARTNER OR USER WAS TOLD

LAST HAND-OFF THAT CARRIED CORRECT DATA (SEND AND RECEIVE TIMES)

WORK ALREADY DONE INSIDE THE DISPUTED PERIOD (COUNT, VALUE, ACTION TAKEN)

CORRECTED BY

DATE

MM / DD / YYYY

CORRECTED DATA RE-SENT TO, AND CONFIRMED BY

LIKELY CAUSES (TICK ALL THAT FIT)

- ☐ Duplicate record
- ☐ Overlapping periods
- ☐ Wrong reason or code at entry
- ☐ Change of level or status
- ☐ Backdated ending or reinstatement
- ☐ A one-day gap
- ☐ Wrong plan or product
- ☐ A partner file that never arrived or was incomplete

MASK OR REMOVE PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS BEFORE SHARING THIS SHEET.

Complaint intake and routing

Send a complaint to the right place first, then record what happened and how it was put right.

CASE REFERENCE	RECEIVED FROM, AND HOW	DATE AND TIME RECEIVED

ROUTE FIRST, RESEARCH SECOND

WHAT KIND OF CASE IS IT?

- ☐ Formal complaint
- ☐ Possible privacy breach
- ☐ Urgent: the customer has no service
- ☐ Appeal or formal dispute
- ☐ Possible fraud or misconduct
- ☐ None of these

SENT TO

SENT ON (DATE AND TIME)

RESPONSE DEADLINE BEGINS

WHAT THE CUSTOMER WENT THROUGH, TOLD IN THEIR OWN WORDS

WHAT THE RECORDS SHOW, WITH EVIDENCE

IMMEDIATE HELP GIVEN (WHAT, WHEN, BY WHOM)

OTHER CUSTOMERS AFFECTED BY THE SAME CAUSE

LONG-TERM FIX PROPOSED, AND THE LOG OR TICKET THAT WILL TRACK IT

MASK OR REMOVE PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS BEFORE SHARING THIS SHEET.

Failed file incident report

Trace a missing or damaged file from sender to load, and record the impact, the recovery and how to prevent a repeat.

FILE OR FEED

PARTNER AND DIRECTION

EXPECTED AT

ARRIVED AT

WHERE THE FILE WAS SEEN

CHECKPOINT	TIME	COUNT OR PROOF
Sender says it left		
Reached our transfer point		
Picked up by the loading job		
Rows loaded		
Rows rejected, with error report		
Receipt confirmation sent back		

IMPACT DURING THE OUTAGE (CUSTOMERS, PAYMENTS, DEADLINES)

TOLD (WHO, WHEN)

SERVICE LEVEL MISSED?

RECOVERY STEPS (RERUN, RESEND, BACKFILL, MANUAL FIX)

HOW COMPLETENESS WAS CONFIRMED (COUNTS MATCHED, SPOT CHECKS)

WHICH SAFEGUARD WOULD HAVE CAUGHT THIS EARLIER

> *Sending and loading are separate events, so record each one. Keep counts and times here, never personal data from inside the file.*

Root cause review

Work from a problem down to a cause you can fix, then set out what to contain, correct and prevent.

WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN, AND HOW BIG

KEEP ASKING WHY

WHY	BECAUSE...
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

THE UNDERLYING CAUSE, PHRASED SO THAT REMOVING IT STOPS IT HAPPENING AGAIN

STOP THE DAMAGE (NOW)

PUT IT RIGHT (THIS CYCLE)

STOP IT RETURNING (LASTING)

OWNER

CHECK ON

MM / DD / YYYY

HOW WE WILL CHECK

WHERE DID IT START?

AREA	WHAT CONTRIBUTED
Settings or configuration	
Data or feeds	
Process or procedure	
Gaps in requirements or testing	
A partner or supplier	
Training or documentation	

> *If a 'why' is answered with 'someone slipped', ask what let the slip reach customers.*

Defect report

Report a defect so someone else can reproduce it, judge its importance and confirm the fix.

DEFECT NO.	RELATED REQUIREMENT OR TEST	WHERE FOUND

HEADLINE (ONE SPECIFIC LINE)

HOW TO REPRODUCE IT, WITH THE SPECIFIC DATA YOU TESTED WITH

WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED

WHAT HAPPENED INSTEAD

SEVERITY

○ Critical ○ High ○ Medium ○ Low

WHY THAT SEVERITY (BUSINESS IMPACT)

HAPPENS

○ Every time ○ Sometimes

EVIDENCE ATTACHED

WORKAROUND UNTIL FIXED

ASSIGNED TO

ON

MM / DD / YYYY

RETESTED AND CLOSED BY

ON

MM / DD / YYYY

MASK OR REMOVE PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS BEFORE SHARING THIS SHEET.

FORM 21 · VENDORS

Vendor record and miss log

Keep the basics on an outside firm, and a running log of every commitment they missed, with proof.

FIRM

WHAT THEY DO FOR US

DO THEY PERFORM A REGULATED TASK FOR US?

○ Yes ○ No

OUR RELATIONSHIP OWNER

THEIR CONTACT AND ESCALATION ROUTE

WHERE CONTRACT AND SERVICE LEVELS ARE KEPT

CONTRACT END OR RENEWAL

MM / DD / YYYY

DATA EXCHANGED

FILE OR FEED	DIRECTION	SCHEDULE AND CUT-OFF	WHO IS ALERTED IF IT FAILS

MISSED COMMITMENTS

DATE	WHAT WAS MISSED	PROOF (FILE, TIME, COUNTS)	CAUSE GIVEN	FIX AND CLOSURE

Log each miss on its own line, and close it only when you hold proof that it is fixed.

Vendor review scorecard

Record a review with an outside firm: how they performed against each standard, what went wrong, and what happens next.

FIRM	PERIOD REVIEWED	REVIEW DATE
		MM / DD / YYYY

PRESENT (OURS AND THEIRS)

PERFORMANCE AGAINST STANDARDS

STANDARD	TARGET	RESULT	MET?	WHERE THE FIGURE COMES FROM
			○ Yes ○ No	
			○ Yes ○ No	
			○ Yes ○ No	
			○ Yes ○ No	
			○ Yes ○ No	

MISSES DISCUSSED, THEIR EXPLANATION, AND THE EVIDENCE THEY GAVE

ISSUES STILL OPEN FROM LAST TIME, AND WHY

CHANGES COMING (VOLUME, STAFF, SYSTEMS, CONTRACT, REGULATION)

FORMAL CORRECTIVE PLAN NEEDED?
○ Yes ○ No

PLAN REFERENCE

ESCALATED TO

AGREED ACTIONS AND OWNERS

Acceptance test log

Record each acceptance test, its data, its expected and actual result, and the sign-off.

PROJECT OR RELEASE

TEST ENVIRONMENT

TEST DATE

MM / DD / YYYY

TESTS RUN

TEST	REQ.	TEST DATA (RECORDS, TRANSACTIONS, DATES)	EXPECTED RESULT	RESULT	DEFECT
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	
				○ Pass ○ Fail	

SIGN-OFF

TESTED BY

BUSINESS OWNER

SIGNED ON

MM / DD / YYYY

TEST DETAIL (ONE PAGE PER TEST)

TEST NO.

REQUIREMENT

DEFECT NO. IF FAILED

SETUP AND TEST DATA

STEPS TAKEN

EXPECTED

ACTUAL

RESULT

○ Pass ○ Fail

TESTER

DATE

MM / DD / YYYY

MASK OR REMOVE PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS BEFORE SHARING THIS SHEET.

FORM 24 · TESTING AND DELIVERY

Launch readiness and follow-through

Check you are ready to go live, then confirm the change actually worked once real cycles have run.

RELEASE OR CHANGE	GO-LIVE DATE
	MM / DD / YYYY

READY TO LAUNCH?

ITEM	READY?	OWNER OR COMMENT
Every failed test is fixed, or its risk is accepted in a signed note	◯ Yes ◯ No	
Outstanding defects have been ranked and agreed	◯ Yes ◯ No	
Business owner has signed off	◯ Yes ◯ No	
Outside firms told about the change	◯ Yes ◯ No	
Staff trained and quick guides updated	◯ Yes ◯ No	
Customer and partner messages reviewed	◯ Yes ◯ No	
A way back is planned	◯ Yes ◯ No	
Post-launch checks planned (what, and when)	◯ Yes ◯ No	

AFTER LAUNCH

DATE	CHECK PERFORMED	OUTCOME

DID THE MEASURE WE WANTED TO IMPROVE ACTUALLY IMPROVE? WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

LESSONS FOR NEXT TIME

> *Launch is not the finish line: the change is done when real cycles show it working.*

Risk and decision register

One running list of risks, issues and decisions, each with an owner and a status.

PROJECT	LAST UPDATED
	MM / DD / YYYY

RISKS AND ISSUES

NO.	TYPE	WHAT IT IS AND ITS IMPACT	WHAT WE ARE DOING ABOUT IT	OWNER	STATUS
	○ Risk ○ Issue				
	○ Risk ○ Issue				
	○ Risk ○ Issue				
	○ Risk ○ Issue				
	○ Risk ○ Issue				
	○ Risk ○ Issue				
	○ Risk ○ Issue				
	○ Risk ○ Issue				

DECISIONS

DATE	WHAT WAS DECIDED	WHY, AND WHAT WAS REJECTED	DECIDED BY

KEEP GOING

The forms are only half of it

A checklist tells you what to ask. Practice is how you get fast at hearing the answer.

Picardi Academy teaches the data side of this job by having you do it: an inbox of realistic requests from colleagues, answered with real queries against real data, with lessons built around the skills you keep missing. If you want to practice the work in this book, that is where to do it.

Everything in this book, and every form in Part II, stays free at **picardiacademy.com/field-manual**: print blank copies, or fill them in online with a free account.

> **FOUND A MISTAKE, OR SOMETHING MISSING?**
> This is a first edition. Tell us what a chapter got wrong for your industry, and what you wish the book had asked. Send it through the contact details on picardiacademy.com.