A SHOPFLOOROPS FIELD BOOK

One Finding. The Audit Response Trail.

A field book for answering an audit finding: from the auditor's exact words to proof the gap stays closed.

8 STEPS · 11 TOOLS



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FIELD BOOK 06

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The plant, the audit, the finding and every number in this book are a made-up example. The tool sidebars show ShopFloorOps tools, which I make and sell. Every chapter teaches the step itself, so you can use your own forms. New to a term? See the quality glossary.

CHAPTER 1

Requirement

STEP 1 OF 8 | ANSWER THE QUESTION ASKED

Wednesday, 4:40 in the afternoon, a meeting room off the assembly floor. The customer's auditor reads four findings at the closing meeting. The third is yours: gasket adhesive past its expiry date, in use. The customer gives you 30 days to respond.

A written finding has two parts. One is the requirement the auditor says was not met. The other is the objective evidence they recorded. Everything in your response answers those two things, so they go into the first section of your response before you do anything else, in the auditor's words.

Copy the requirement exactly

In this case the customer's supplier manual says that material with a shelf life must not be used after its expiry date. That is this customer's rule, in this customer's manual. Your own customer or auditor will cite theirs. Follow the requirement they cite, and do not guess at what any standard says.

Write the evidence down as facts

1. **Where.** The assembly line, stations 12 and 27.
2. **What.** A container of gasket adhesive in use with an expiry date 19 days past at station 12, and 41 days past at station 27.
3. **How many.** 2 of the 8 stations the auditor sampled.
4. **Who and when.** The customer's auditor, on the second day of a two day audit.

Check each fact against the auditor's notes. If you cannot read a station number or a date, ask before you leave the room. This is the cheapest moment you will get.

Check which question it asks

This requirement is about use. Expired material must not be used. A response about how the stockroom rotates stock answers a different question, and so does one about how often containers get checked. Those may be good things to fix. The response still has to say how expired adhesive came to be used and how you will show it will not happen again.

This is the first of the four reasons a response comes back: it answers a different question than the finding asked. The others are in the chapters ahead. If the requirement is unclear, ask the auditor in writing before the response is due. A question in week 1 costs nothing. A rejected response in week 6 costs the cycle.

Read more: the free audit finding response builder. Its first two sections are the requirement and what the auditor found, and it flags either one when it is empty or too short to be the exact wording. For any term you do not know, see the quality glossary.

The mistake to avoid

Paraphrasing the requirement. Your version is softer than theirs, and the softer version is the one you end up answering.

TOOL SIDEBAR

The tool: Audit Findings & Response Log (QA-F-260)

Log the finding the day the closing meeting ends: finding number, the requirement in the auditor's words, the evidence, and the response due date. Every later step reads from that row. If you keep your own audit log, those four fields go in first.

ON THE FLOOR MONDAY

- Pull the last finding you answered.
- Compare the requirement you quoted with the report.
- Put the auditor's exact words back in your log.

All 11 tools in this book: Audit Response Trail Bundle

CHAPTER 2

Restate It

STEP 2 OF 8 | AGREE THE PROBLEM BEFORE YOU DIG

Wednesday, 5:10, a quiet desk with the audit report and a blank page. The auditor is packing up and will be on site until 6. The finding is correct as written, and it is still not something you can work from.

The auditor wrote what they saw. You need a problem statement: what, where, how many and against which requirement, with no cause in it and nobody blamed. Writing it takes ten minutes. Getting the auditor to agree to it takes one email, and it settles what the response has to cover.

Write the statement

For this case: "Containers of gasket adhesive past their expiry date were in use at 2 of 8 assembly stations sampled, stations 12 and 27, 19 and 41 days past expiry, on the second day of the audit. The customer's supplier manual says expired material must not be used." It names the material, the place, the count, the size of the gap and the requirement. A reader can check every word against the audit report.

Keep out what does not belong

1. **A cause.** "Operators did not check dates" is a guess. It belongs in step 5, after you have asked why.
2. **A fix.** "Operators must check expiry dates" is a solution. Written here it hides what the problem is.
3. **A wider scope.** The statement says what was found. Step 4 widens the look. The statement does not widen it, because the finding does not.

Send it to the auditor

Email the statement and ask one question: does this describe what you saw? Make sure you and the auditor are about to answer the same finding. If the auditor corrects a number or a word, change your statement, and use the corrected one from here on.

Skipping this step is how a response gets rejected for something it never addressed. The auditor reads the response against what they remember, and the statement is the one page that shows you were working from the same facts.

Read more: how to write a problem statement. In the free audit finding response builder this is the section called What the auditor found.

The mistake to avoid

Restating the finding as the action you plan to take. Once the statement reads like a procedure change, the investigation has already been decided.

TOOL SIDEBAR

The tool: A3 Problem Solving Template (QA-F-360)

An A3 gives the problem statement, the requirement and the auditor's evidence one page to share. Fill in the statement and the current condition and leave the cause blank. If you use a different one page format, keep the statement on top and the cause empty until step 5.

ON THE FLOOR MONDAY

- Take one open finding.
- Write the statement with no cause in it.
- Send it to the auditor this week.

All 11 tools in this book: Audit Response Trail Bundle

CHAPTER 3

Correction

STEP 3 OF 8 | FIX THE INSTANCE FOUND, NOTHING MORE

Wednesday, 6:00 in the evening. Two containers of adhesive sit on the supervisor's desk with red tags on them. The auditor has gone. Fixing what was found is the one part of the response you can finish before dinner.

A correction deals with the specific instance the auditor wrote down. Here that is two containers and the product made with them. It does not change a label, a procedure or a person. That is the corrective action, and keeping the two apart is how you avoid a response that looks closed and is not.

What the correction covers

1. **Remove the containers.** Both come off the line, get tagged and go to the quarantine shelf the same day.
2. **Find the product made with them.** Station 12 used its container for 19 days past expiry at about 140 parts a day, which is 2,660 parts. Station 27 used its container for 41 days at about 85 a day, 3,485 parts. Together that is 6,145 parts.
3. **Say where the parts are.** 4,300 have shipped and 1,845 are in stock. Hold the stock.
4. **Test what you can.** Peel test 20 pieces from stock for each station, 40 in all. All 40 passed.
5. **Tell the customer.** Parts made with expired adhesive have shipped. Send them the numbers and the test data and let them decide what they want done with their parts.

The count of parts is an estimate from days and daily rates, and the response should say so. Write down how you got each number. A number the auditor cannot trace is worth less than a

rougher one they can.

Keep it separate

Do not add the new label, the weekly check or the retraining to the correction. They answer a different question. The correction says what you did about the two containers. The corrective action says why it cannot happen again. When the two blur together, the response looks strong and the auditor still cannot find where the system changed.

The correction is also dated. Containers removed on day 0, parts located on day 1, test results back on day 5. A correction with no dates reads as intention.

Read more: containment vs correction vs corrective action. In the free audit finding response builder this is the Correction section, and the builder flags a correction that reads like a system change instead of a fix for the instance found.

The mistake to avoid

Treating the correction as the response. A removed container makes the finding look closed. The next audit finds the third one.

TOOL SIDEBAR

The tool: Audit Findings & Response Log (QA-F-260)

Record the correction on the same row as the finding: what was removed, when, who confirmed it, and the parts affected with where they are. Keep it in its own column, away from the corrective action. This is the log from step 1, so it counts once. Use your own log if you have one.

ON THE FLOOR MONDAY

- Open the correction on your last finding.
- Check it names what was done and the date.
- Move any system change out of it.

All 11 tools in this book: Audit Response Trail Bundle

CHAPTER 4

Look Beyond the Sample

STEP 4 OF 8 | CHECK WHAT THE AUDITOR DID NOT PULL

Thursday, 6:30 in the morning, the stockroom, before the first shift. The auditor looked at 8 of your 31 assembly stations. Whatever is true of those 8 might be true of the other 23, and nobody in the building knows yet.

An auditor writes up what they saw in a sample. The finding describes the sample. Your response has to describe the plant. That means defining what you are checking, checking all of it and writing down what you looked at and what you found.

Define the population

For an expiry finding the population is every place a container can be. Here that is the 31 stations, the 46 containers on the stockroom shelf and every other material on the floor that carries an expiry date.

Check all of it and count

1. **The 23 stations not sampled.** One more expired container in use: station 5, 6 days past expiry, about 110 parts a day, which is 660 parts. It gets the same correction as the first two, including a peel test of 20 pieces, which passed.
2. **The stockroom shelf.** 46 containers, 3 expired and never issued. Removed and tagged.
3. **Other materials with an expiry date.** 4 of them, two sealants, a primer and a cleaner, 38 containers in all. None expired. They turn over faster. They are relabeled the same way, so the same gap is there waiting.

Put the totals in the response. Expired adhesive was in use at 3 of 31 stations, which is 9.7 percent. The auditor's sample showed

2 of 8, or 25.0 percent. The sample was not wrong. It showed that a gap exists, and a count of the whole plant shows how big it is. The parts affected rise from 6,145 to 6,805.

Say it when you find more

Finding a third container after the audit is the point of the step, not bad news to hide. A response that says "we checked and found no others" with no numbers behind it is the one that gets questioned. Write what you checked, how many, and what you found, area by area.

This is the fourth reason a response comes back: it fixes the sample but not the system. Fixing the two containers the auditor saw does nothing for the third one they did not.

Read more: the free audit finding response builder. Its section on looking beyond the sample flags a response that does not say what was checked.

The mistake to avoid

Checking only the area where the auditor looked. The gap rarely respects the boundary of the sample.

TOOL SIDEBAR

The tool: Internal Audit Checklist (QA-F-210)

Turn the finding into one checklist line and walk it across the whole plant: every station, the shelf and each other material with an expiry date. Record the count checked and the count found per area. A checklist you already own works the same way.

ON THE FLOOR MONDAY

- Take your last finding.
- List every place the same gap could exist.
- Check them all and write down the counts.

All 11 tools in this book: Audit Response Trail Bundle

CHAPTER 5

Root Cause

STEP 5 OF 8 | END AT A PROCESS, NOT A PERSON

Friday, 10:00, a small meeting room. The stockroom lead, the receiving clerk, an assembly supervisor and quality sit with the report. The first answer in the room arrives in under a minute: operators should have checked the date.

That answer describes what happened. It is also where a finding goes to die. An audit finding is a system failure found in a sample. If the cause ends at a person, nothing in the system changes, and the next person makes the same mistake. Ask why until the chain ends at a process, a responsibility or a check that was missing.

Ask why, with evidence

1. Why was expired adhesive in use? The operator had no way to see the expiry date at the station. The container label showed the date it was received.
2. Why? The stockroom puts its own label on each container at receiving. The manufacturer's expiry date is on the outer carton, and the carton is thrown away.
3. Why is the expiry date not on the label? The label template has no field for it, and the receiving steps for consumables do not mention shelf life.
4. Why? Consumables are not in the receiving inspection plan. The plan covers product material.
5. Why? Nobody owns shelf life for consumables. Quality checks product. The stockroom lead issues stock and assumes the supplier's date is being watched. That is a missing responsibility and a missing check.

Write beside each answer how you know it: the label template, the receiving procedure, the inspection plan, an interview. An answer with no evidence is a guess. Stop at the fifth answer. You can control it and you can prove it.

Test the cause

Ask three questions of it. If every person involved were replaced tomorrow, would the gap come back? Yes, so it is a system cause. Does it explain all three stations? Yes, none of them could see a date. Does it explain the 3 expired containers on the shelf? Yes, nothing sweeps the shelf, because nobody owns it. It also explains why the 4 other shelf life materials have the same gap, even though none has expired yet.

The chain gives you 3 causes to fix: the label shows the received date, receiving has no shelf life check, and nobody owns it. Step 6 needs an action for each.

Why not the operator

This is the second reason a response comes back: it stops at a person or at training. "The operator did not check the date" gets flagged by the free audit finding response builder for exactly that. The operator is one step in the chain, and the cause sits behind it: the reason they could not see what mattered.

Read more: how to do a 5 Why, a worked 5 Why example, how to make a fishbone diagram and the free 5 Why helper.

The mistake to avoid

Stopping at the first answer that sounds reasonable. If your answer contains a person's name or the word forgot, ask one more why.

TOOL SIDEBAR

The tools: 3-Legged 5 Why Analysis (QA-F-310) and Fishbone Diagram Excel Template (QA-F-365)

Use the 5 Why to walk the chain and keep the evidence beside each answer. Use the fishbone as a check afterward, to see whether a method, a machine or a measurement cause was skipped. Mark every cause confirmed, ruled out or unknown. Your own forms work the same way.

ON THE FLOOR MONDAY

- Pull the root cause on your last finding.
- Check whether it names a person or training.
- Ask one more why and write the answer down.

All 11 tools in this book: Audit Response Trail Bundle

CHAPTER 6

Corrective Action

STEP 6 OF 8 | CHANGE THE SYSTEM, NOT THE PERSON

Monday, 8:00, the action meeting. The first draft on the whiteboard reads: retrain all assembly operators and send a reminder. It took four minutes to write and it would take one afternoon to complete. It would also change nothing about why the date could not be seen.

Training and reminders fade. A corrective action that depends on someone remembering is the usual reason a response comes back. Change the thing the person works with: the procedure, the form, the schedule or the check, so the gap closes whether or not anyone remembers.

Put an action against each cause

Step 5 gave three causes. Four actions answer them:

1. Weekly expiry sweep of all 31 stations and the shelf, signed on a sweep log. Owner: stockroom lead. Due: day 7.
2. Name the stockroom lead as owner of shelf life materials in the receiving procedure. Owner: quality manager. Due: day 7.
3. Receiving label template gets a required expiry field, and the 43 shelf containers are relabeled. Owner: stockroom lead. Due: day 10.
4. Receiving procedure revised: shelf life check at receiving, expired material to a red tag shelf. Owner: quality engineer. Due: day 14.

The label gap is closed by the template, which will not print without a date. The missing check is closed by the receiving procedure and by the weekly sweep, which looks at every station and the shelf. The missing owner is closed by naming one. Every

cause has an action, and every action answers a cause. An action with no cause behind it is busywork.

Ask the forgetting question

Run each action through one test: if the person forgets, does the gap still close? The label template passes, because the label cannot print without the date. The sweep passes, because it is on a schedule with a log, and a missed sweep leaves a gap in the log that anyone can see. A reminder email fails.

Training can sit under the actions as support. Here the stockroom staff and the assembly leads read the revised procedure and sign that they have. It is not on the list of actions because on its own it would be the second reason a response comes back: it stops at training.

Read more: corrective vs preventive action. In the free audit finding response builder this is the Corrective action section, and it flags training or reminders as the only action.

The mistake to avoid

Choosing the action that is easiest to finish before the response is due. Choose the one that keeps the gap closed, even if it takes longer.

TOOL SIDEBAR

The tool: 8D Corrective Action Excel Form (QA-F-355)

Use it to hold the four actions with their owners, dates and the cause each one answers. If your customer asks for the response in 8D form, this is already most of it. If the customer sends their own format, copy the same fields into it. Keep cause and action paired.

ON THE FLOOR MONDAY

- Read the actions on your last response.
- Pair each one with a cause.
- Replace any that only remind or train.

All 11 tools in this book: Audit Response Trail Bundle

CHAPTER 7

CAR Tracker

STEP 7 OF 8 | OWNER, DATES AND STATUS

Monday afternoon, a spreadsheet open on the shared drive. The finding now has a number, CAR-0417, and four actions with owners. A response is a promise. The tracker is where the promise gets checked every week until the follow up audit.

Each action gets one row, and each row needs four things: one owner, a calendar date, a status and a pointer to the evidence. A date the auditor cannot check is not a date.

Set dates the auditor can check

Counted from the closing meeting, which is day 0, the case runs like this:

1. Day 0: containers removed and tagged. Day 1: all stations and the shelf checked.
2. Day 5: peel test results back.
3. Day 7: first weekly sweep, and the stockroom lead is named owner.
4. Day 10: new labels in use. Day 14: receiving procedure revised.
5. Day 28: response sent, 2 days before the due date of day 30.

Every date is a day, an owner and a deliverable that exists or does not. "Q1", "ongoing" and "in progress" are not dates. A tracker where every status says in progress is a plan, and an auditor reading it will see that.

Review it weekly

Look at the tracker on the same day every week. Anything due in the next three days gets chased. Anything late gets a new date with a reason, not a quiet edit. The owner is a person, not a department. If a department owns it, nobody does.

If the customer wants the response in 8D form, fill the form from the tracker. The same facts go into both, so they cannot disagree.

Read more: how to write an 8D report, the free 8D report checker and NCR vs CAR. In the free audit finding response builder this is the Owner and due date section, and it flags a missing date.

The mistake to avoid

Setting a date and then not looking at it until the week it is due.

TOOL SIDEBAR

The tools: Post Audit CAR Tracker (QA-F-265) and CAR Tracker Excel Spreadsheet (QA-F-375)

Both hold owner, due date and status. The post audit tracker is built around findings from audits and their follow ups. The general tracker holds corrective actions from any source. Use one of them for this finding. If all your corrective actions already live in one log, use that one.

ON THE FLOOR MONDAY

- Open your corrective action log.
- Find every item with no date or no owner.
- Fix them this week.

All 11 tools in this book: Audit Response Trail Bundle

CHAPTER 8

Evidence

STEP 8 OF 8 | RECORDS THAT ALREADY EXIST

Wednesday, day 28, mid morning, the quality office. The fourth sweep finished at 8:00 and its log is in the folder with every other record the response will point to. The response goes out this afternoon, two days early.

Evidence means records made after the change that show it is in place and working. A plan to review the records at the next audit is not evidence, and it is the third way a response gets sent back: it offers a plan where a record is needed. If a record does not exist yet, it is not in the response.

Put the records in the folder

1. **The label template** showing the expiry field, and the relabeling record for all 43 containers on the shelf.
2. **The receiving procedure**, revised, with the stockroom lead named as owner of shelf life.
3. **The sweep logs** for days 7, 14, 21 and 28. Each covers all 31 stations and the 43 shelf containers. Sweep 1 pulled 2 containers within 14 days of expiry to the front for use. No expired container was found in any of the four.
4. **The peel test report**: 60 pieces, from the three stations, no failures. This is evidence for the correction.
5. **The read and sign sheet** for the revised procedure. It supports the sweep and does not replace it.

Next to each record, write its date and where it is kept. Then read it against the requirement from step 1. The finding was about expired material in use. The sweep logs show none in use, four weeks running. The records answer the question asked.

Keep the future out of the response

Twelve weekly sweeps will prove more than four. The twelfth falls on day 84. Those records do not exist yet, so they go on the tracker as dated actions, and they join the file as they are made. The response lists what exists today.

Leave one question on the floor

Add one yes or no question to your layered process audit: does every adhesive container at this station show an expiry date that is still in the future? Anyone auditing can answer it in under a minute. It keeps the gap checked on a schedule after the auditor has left and the sweep owner has moved on. See Check the Floor in Book 1.

Read more: how to run an effectiveness check, how to run a layered process audit and Prove It Worked in Book 1. In the free audit finding response builder this is the Evidence section, and it flags evidence written as a plan.

The mistake to avoid

Writing "records will be reviewed at the next audit" and calling it evidence.

TOOL SIDEBAR

The tools: Effectiveness Verification Tracker (QA-F-393), Layered Process Audit (QA-F-205) and LPA Schedule & Compliance Dashboard (QA-F-392)

The verification tracker holds the proof criteria and the records as they arrive, with the closing box left empty until the review. The LPA template holds the new question. The schedule shows who asks it, where and when, and whether it was done. Use your own forms if you have them.

ON THE FLOOR MONDAY

- Open the evidence list on your last response.
- Mark each item a record or a plan.
- Add one audit question for the gap.

All 11 tools in this book: Audit Response Trail Bundle

Monday Board

One action per step. Pick one and do it this week.

1	Compare the requirement quoted in your last response with the auditor's exact words.	☐
2	Write the problem statement for one open finding with no cause in it, and send it to the auditor.	☐
3	Check the correction on your last finding names what was done and the date, with no system change in it.	☐
4	List every place the same gap could exist beyond the auditor's sample and check them all.	☐
5	Check the root cause on your last finding does not end at a person or at training.	☐
6	Pair each corrective action on your last response with a cause and replace any that only reminds or trains.	☐
7	Find every item in your corrective action log with no owner or no date.	☐
8	Mark each item on your last evidence list a record or a plan.	☐