

FREE PRACTICAL GUIDE

INTERNAL AUDIT RESOURCE LIBRARY

AUDIT PROGRAM

How to Build an Audit Work Program

A practical guide to converting audit objectives into focused, evidence-producing procedures

Why this guide matters

How to Build an Audit Work Program

This guide is designed for internal auditors who need a concise, practical way to apply build an audit work program in real engagements. It focuses on decisions, evidence and common failure points rather than theory.

THE OUTCOME YOU WANT

A practical guide to converting audit objectives into focused, evidence-producing procedures.

The six-step approach

- 1 List each audit objective and the risk it addresses.
- 2 Define the assertion or question each procedure must answer.
- 3 Choose the procedure and evidence source.
- 4 Set population, coverage and sampling logic.
- 5 Assign ownership and expected workpaper output.
- 6 Review the program for duplication, gaps and low-value procedures.

Steps 1-3: Build the foundation

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1

List each audit objective and the risk it addresses.

Define the decision, risk or process question before collecting evidence. Write down what a good outcome would look like.

2

Define the assertion or question each procedure must answer.

Use actual transactions, system evidence, data and accountable owners to confirm how the process operates in practice.

3

Choose the procedure and evidence source.

Record assumptions, exceptions and boundaries early so later testing remains focused and reproducible.

AUDITOR PROMPT

Ask: "What evidence would convince another experienced auditor that this conclusion is reasonable?" If the answer is unclear, strengthen the planned work before moving on.

Steps 4-6: Turn work into assurance

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4

Set population, coverage and sampling logic.

Match the depth of work to the severity of the risk. High-risk conclusions need stronger evidence and clearer documentation.

5

Assign ownership and expected workpaper output.

Challenge exceptions for frequency, impact, root cause and management awareness before deciding what they mean.

6

Review the program for duplication, gaps and low-value procedures.

Finish with an explicit conclusion and next action: no issue, improvement opportunity, finding, escalation or follow-up.

QUALITY CHECK

Before you finalize, ask whether the work directly answers the original audit question, whether evidence is sufficient, and whether a reader can understand the reasoning without being in the audit team.

OBJECTIVE

Assess whether vendor changes are authorized and independently verified.

PROCEDURE

Extract all vendor bank changes, identify users and dates, select high-risk changes, inspect approval and independent verification evidence, and compare to subsequent payments.

OUTPUT

A workpaper that directly supports the control-effectiveness conclusion.

What makes the example useful?

- It starts from a specific risk or audit question.
- It connects evidence and testing to a conclusion.
- It avoids treating process description as proof of control effectiveness.
- It leaves a clear path for management action or follow-up.

Quick reference - use this on your next audit

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Five practical reminders

- Every procedure should answer a question linked to an objective.
- Avoid procedures that say only “review process” or “check compliance”.
- Delete tests that do not change the audit conclusion.

Mini self-check

- ☐ Have I linked the work to a clear audit objective or business risk?
- ☐ Is the evidence strong enough for the importance of the conclusion?
- ☐ Have I distinguished facts, explanations and assumptions?
- ☐ Have I considered root cause and recurrence, not only the immediate exception?
- ☐ Can management understand what decision or action is required?

RESOURCE NOTE

This is a practical learning resource, not formal professional guidance. Adapt the approach to your organization, applicable standards, regulation and audit methodology.