Validate Assumptions

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v2.0 | October 13, 2026 | 5–10 minutes plus field checks

What and why

Validating assumptions means making an unconfirmed statement visible, identifying the decision that depends on it and obtaining an appropriate basis before treating it as established. An assumption can pass through several handoffs until it sounds like a fact. Naming the uncertainty helps the right person resolve it before others rely on it.

Objective: Separate one assumption from confirmed facts and identify its validator, evidence and dependent hold point.

When and where

Use it during planning, purchasing, handoffs and reviews, especially when someone relies on preliminary information, a previous result or an apparently equivalent replacement. At the planning desk and at the work location. Check that the evidence covers the actual item, revision and conditions; refer technical judgments to the required authority.

How to use it

- Write the assumption as a specific statement. Identify what depends on it and what could happen if it is wrong.
- Name the authorized validator, required evidence and deadline before reliance. Hold dependent work when a required condition remains unverified.
- Record the finding and its limits: supported, disproved or unresolved. Carry restrictions into instructions and handoffs; revalidate when relevant conditions change.

Verify It in the Field

Inspect the evidence's source, revision and scope. Confirm it applies to the actual task. Obtain required technical review; do not invent acceptance margins.

Paper practice: a mock schedule says Room A is 'probably available.' Identify the assumption, the affected decision and who owns the current availability record.

Introduce a changed date. Ask whether the previous confirmation still applies. Record the needed evidence and keep the paper decision held until it is supplied.

Failure points and stop triggers

Old evidence used after change; appearance treated as equivalence; confidence replacing a basis; unresolved assumptions lost in handoffs. Hold the dependent decision for absent, conflicting, outdated or out-of-scope evidence. Assignment to a reviewer is not closure; a group vote does not establish a technical condition.

Toolbox talk questions

1. What are we accepting without enough evidence?

2. What fails if that statement is wrong?

3. Who can validate it, and what change requires another check?

Use the separate supervisor field check and attendance sheet. Practice is not qualification or work authorization.

Source: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, printed pp. 22–23. References and task-specific limits on the webpage.

Next step: Apply this skill to one step on the free JHA/JSA field-verification worksheet.

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/validate-assumptions-before-reliance

Based on DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to authorship or copyright ownership of original U.S. Government work. Todd Jerome Jenkins adaptation; no government endorsement implied.