

Procedure Use: Stop When the Instructions Do Not Fit

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 9, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

A procedure needs to fit the actual task. A missing page, changed component or impossible step can leave the crew choosing between guessing and following an unsafe instruction. Bring that mismatch into the open. Keep the affected work safe while the responsible people resolve it through the approved process.

Objective: Confirm that the current procedure fits today's work and route an unsafe or unworkable instruction for authorized resolution before proceeding.

Key hazards or failure points

Obsolete or incomplete instructions; missing prerequisites; a different equipment configuration; conflicting documents; an unclear branch; a familiar workaround replacing the approved method; continuing despite an unexpected result.

Practical controls

- Match the procedure to the task and equipment. Obtain its current approved version and all required pages, attachments and referenced instructions. Confirm how the procedure must be used during this work.
- Review prerequisites, limits, precautions and important steps before action. Identify the controls and checks required first. Familiarity with the job does not establish that today's starting conditions are correct.
- When an instruction is unsafe, unclear or impossible to follow, hold the affected step and report the exact mismatch. Use the approved discrepancy and change process; do not skip, rewrite or improvise the step.

Verify It in the Field

Compare the working copy's identifier, revision and completeness with the controlled source. From a safe position, match the stated task and equipment identity. Record the document checked and any unresolved difference.

Choose a consequential prerequisite. Have its designated verifier locate the governing criterion and obtain the required evidence using the authorized safe method. Record the finding and time; reading the prerequisite does not establish that it exists.

For a reported discrepancy, trace the response to an authorized disposition. Confirm the revised instruction or approved direction, completed protection checks and crew rebrief. An email saying someone is reviewing the problem leaves the affected step on hold.

Stop and reassess

Hold for missing instructions, conflicting requirements, an unsafe step, unknown starting conditions or an unexpected result. Follow the task's safe-state and notification process. Resume only after authorized resolution, required verification and a clear restart point. Record the problem so the next crew does not inherit the same uncertainty.

Ask the crew

1. Which prerequisite must be established before this step?
2. What part of these instructions is difficult to apply here?
3. Who can resolve a discrepancy and authorize the next step?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, pp. 20–21; HSE Procedures; OSHA Hazard Prevention and Control.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/procedure-use-instructions-do-not-fit

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