

Sign-Off: What Evidence Does This Signature Represent?

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

Why this matters

A signature can record attendance, inspection, review or authorization. Each has a different meaning. Before signing, understand the role and scope assigned to that field. The useful question is what work and evidence the next person can rely on—not how quickly the form can be finished.

Objective: Explain one sign-off's defined meaning and confirm the required role, completed work and supporting evidence before signing.

Key hazards or failure points

Unclear signature meaning; signing ahead; signing outside authority; copying another person's initials; unresolved checks hidden by approval; attendance mistaken for qualification or work release.

Practical controls

- Locate the instruction defining the signature field. Identify whether it records preparation, checking, review, approval or acknowledgment. Resolve an unclear meaning with the document owner before using it to release work.
- Confirm the signer has the required competence, authority and involvement. Preserve any required independent review. Someone else's request to sign does not expand your assigned role.
- Sign at the required completion point with the prescribed record. Keep pending work, limitations and discrepancies visible. Use the approved correction process; never backdate, sign for another person or turn an incomplete check into a pass.

Verify It in the Field

Use a blank training form to compare two fields, such as attendance and technical verification. Ask what each field establishes and what evidence it requires. Do not place practice signatures on a live work record.

For an actual required sign-off, trace the named task or item to its governing criterion and completed evidence. Confirm the right revision, checker and actual result using the authorized safe method; do not repeat hazardous work to recreate evidence.

Before the next handoff, have the responsible reviewer check whether required work is complete and exceptions are resolved through the approved process. Record unresolved items and their owner. A signature's presence alone does not prove the underlying control functions.

Stop and reassess

Hold the affected approval or release when meaning, authority, evidence or completion is uncertain. Ask the designated owner to resolve the gap. Keep required protection in place and follow the record-correction and restart process. An attendance acknowledgment never substitutes for required competence, verification or work authorization.

Ask the crew

1. What exactly does this signature field mean?
2. Which evidence must exist before it is signed?
3. Who resolves an incomplete or incorrect sign-off?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, pp. 24–25; OSHA Hazard Prevention and Control.

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

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/safety-sign-off-signature-evidence

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.