

Planning Questions: What Could Make This Plan Wrong?

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

Why this matters

A plan can be consistent and still depend on the wrong starting condition. Before issuing the work package, invite its users to challenge its basis. A useful question identifies evidence that could change the method, rather than seeking agreement.

Objective: Find a consequential planning assumption and identify contrary evidence before the work package is released.

Key hazards or failure points

Copied solutions outside their scope; missing inputs; dismissed concerns; uncertain success criteria; convenient explanations; a review completed before users can contribute.

Practical controls

- Select an important planned activity and state what must be true for its method to work. Identify the source of each consequential input and separate verified information from unresolved assumptions.
- Invite workers and affected technical roles to explain what could invalidate the proposed approach. Ask about changed configuration, access, sequence and later consequences. Resolve differing evidence without requiring the person raising it to prove a failure.
- Assign each open question an owner, needed evidence and decision point. Route technical judgments through the designated authority. Keep dependent release held when a required basis remains uncertain; a planning discussion cannot approve a workaround.

Verify It in the Field

On a draft package, mark one statement that could be wrong. Trace its source, date and scope to the actual planned work. Record what supports it and what remains missing without changing equipment for the exercise.

Ask a person familiar with execution for a concrete counterexample. Have the appropriate reviewer examine it against applicable requirements. Record the actual disposition, reviewer and time; a dismissed comment is not a checked condition.

Follow the answer into the revised package and its restrictions. Confirm required later field checks have owners and safe methods. Label those checks pending until performed; approved planning does not establish that physical protection is installed.

Stop and reassess

Hold the dependent planning release for conflicting information, an unresolved required input or a method users cannot perform safely. Reopen review when scope or conditions change. Before exposure, use the task's separate control checks and work-authorization process.

Ask the crew

1. What would make this proposed method unsuitable?
2. Which fact would change our preferred plan?
3. Where will the answer and its limits reach the crew?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, pp. 13, 14, 15; OSHA — Hazard Prevention and Control.

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

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/planning-questions-challenge-work-package

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.