

Routine Work: Make the Critical Step Stand Out

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

Why this matters

A familiar sequence can carry us past a changed step. Before work, make that decision clear in the approved instruction and setup. Place the cue where it is needed, connect it to the required check and keep required protection intact.

Objective: Identify where a familiar sequence changes and verify an approved cue or check at that point before relying on it.

Key hazards or failure points

Following yesterday's sequence; a changed condition buried in instructions; several similar labels; a cue seen too late; unofficial markings; a reminder mistaken for a safeguard; repeated alerts losing meaning.

Practical controls

- Compare the familiar sequence with today's approved task. Identify the precise point where the required action or prerequisite differs. Explain the difference; experience does not make it obvious.
- Use the responsible owner's process to clarify that decision. The cue must match current instructions and remain readable without obscuring labels, indicators or required warnings.
- Link the cue to a specific check, responsible role and hold condition. Keep technical safeguards and required verification in place. Do not add an informal mark, change a control or rewrite a procedure in the field.

Verify It in the Field

Use clearly marked paper examples of the familiar and changed tasks. Ask a worker to locate the difference and explain the required next step. Compare the answer with the governing instruction; do not rehearse by operating equipment.

From authorized safe access, check whether the approved cue is available before the decision, matches the correct item and can be understood in actual conditions. Record the location, document revision and finding; an unreadable or outdated cue remains unresolved.

Confirm the linked control check uses its actual acceptance source and authorized method. Record verifier, result and time before the affected step. Ask what happens if the expected condition is absent; noticing a cue alone does not verify protection or authorize action.

Stop and reassess

Hold for an unclear difference, conflicting cue, unknown prerequisite or lost step status. Use the task's safe-state and notification process. Obtain an approved correction, required rechecks and a clear restart point. Never repeat an uncertain action simply because it is normally the next step.

Ask the crew

1. Where does today's task depart from the familiar sequence?
2. Will the cue reach us before that decision?
3. What condition must be verified before the next action?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 1, pp. 2-21-2-23; HSE Managing Human Failures.

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

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/routine-work-critical-step-cues

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