

The Right Rule: Check the Conditions Before Choosing a Branch

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

Why this matters

A familiar symptom can lead to the wrong response when today's conditions differ. Before choosing a branch in an instruction, establish what makes that branch applicable. A correct response to a different situation can still create a hazard here.

Objective: Use evidence of actual conditions to select an authorized procedure branch, and refer an unresolved choice for review.

Key hazards or failure points

Similar symptoms with different causes; a remembered shortcut; an unverified starting condition; one clue treated as the whole picture; a branch chosen to keep work moving.

Practical controls

- Identify the decision point and its governing instruction. Read the complete entry conditions, including exceptions and prerequisites. Do not substitute a remembered rule for the current task requirements.
- Establish the conditions through the required safe checks before selecting the response. Keep unknown facts visible. A missing indication does not automatically mean the opposite condition exists.
- Refer an ambiguous choice to the authorized procedure or technical owner. Keep the affected step held under its safe-state arrangement. Communicate the approved selection and its basis before anyone acts.

Verify It in the Field

Use a paper example from the applicable instruction. Have a worker point to the exact condition that selects the branch and identify where its evidence would come from. Compare the explanation with the controlled source; do not operate equipment for the exercise.

For the actual task, the designated checker compares the required entry condition with evidence obtained by the approved method. Record the item, source criterion, actual finding and time. Check all required conditions; one matching symptom does not settle the choice.

Ask a second crew member to explain why the selected branch applies and what would invalidate it. This discussion checks understanding, not technical qualification. Record unresolved differences and the responsible reviewer's disposition before the affected step receives required release.

Stop and reassess

Hold when a prerequisite is unknown, the evidence supports conflicting branches or the instruction does not cover the observed condition. Maintain required protection and obtain authorized resolution. Recheck the choice if conditions change before action; do not blend steps from different branches.

Ask the crew

1. What exact condition makes this branch applicable?
2. Which required fact is still unknown?
3. What change would invalidate this selection?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009 Vol. 1, pp. 2-23-2-25; HSE Procedures; OSHA Hazard Prevention.

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

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/procedure-branch-entry-conditions

Based on DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 1 (June 2009). No claim to authorship or copyright ownership of original U.S. Government work. Todd Jerome Jenkins adaptation; no government endorsement implied.