
Excel Spreadsheet Checklist: A Step-by-Step Review



Repeatable review workflow for owners, analysts, operations, and reviewers



Sequence: scope, structure, data, formulas, formatting, protection, documentation, sign-off



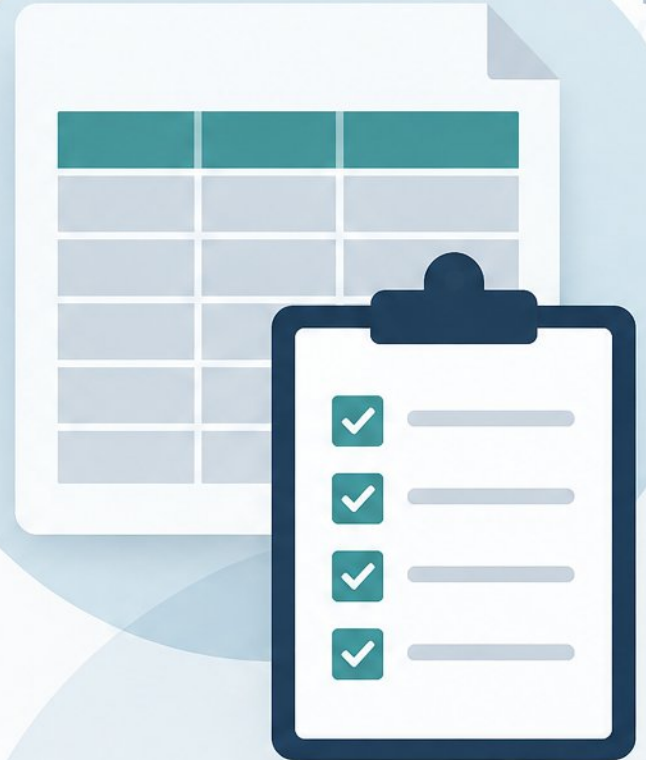
Each review produces a checklist, an issues log, and a sign-off record



Unmanaged spreadsheets bring audit findings, rework, and delayed closes



Treat each workbook as a governed business asset with a named owner



Preparing for Review: Scope, Ownership, and Success Criteria

Excel Spreadsheet Checklist: Preparing for Review



Work on a copy; record properties and calculation mode; disable auto-recalc



Write the problem statement: which output is unreliable, and who relies on it



Confirm owner, users, update rhythm, data sources, links, and manual imports



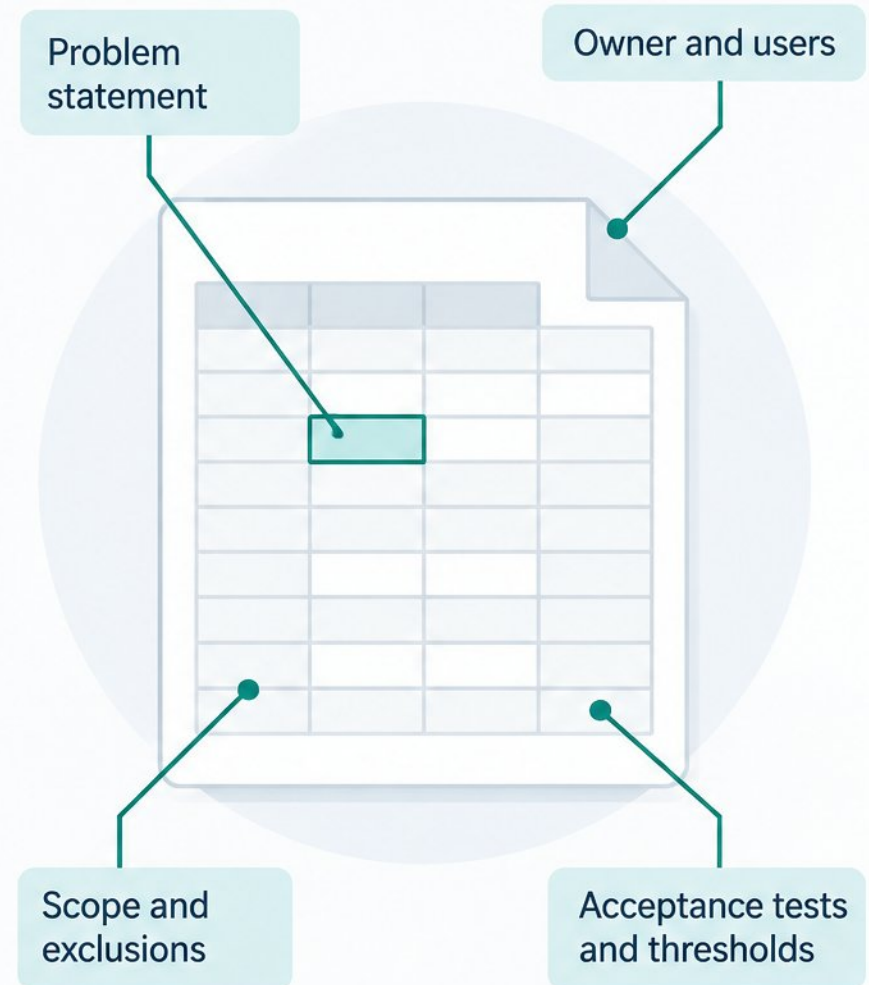
Set scope: full workbook, handover-critical tabs, or key-control-only; state exclusions



Agree acceptance tests and materiality thresholds up front



Decide escalation paths and who holds sign-off authority before starting

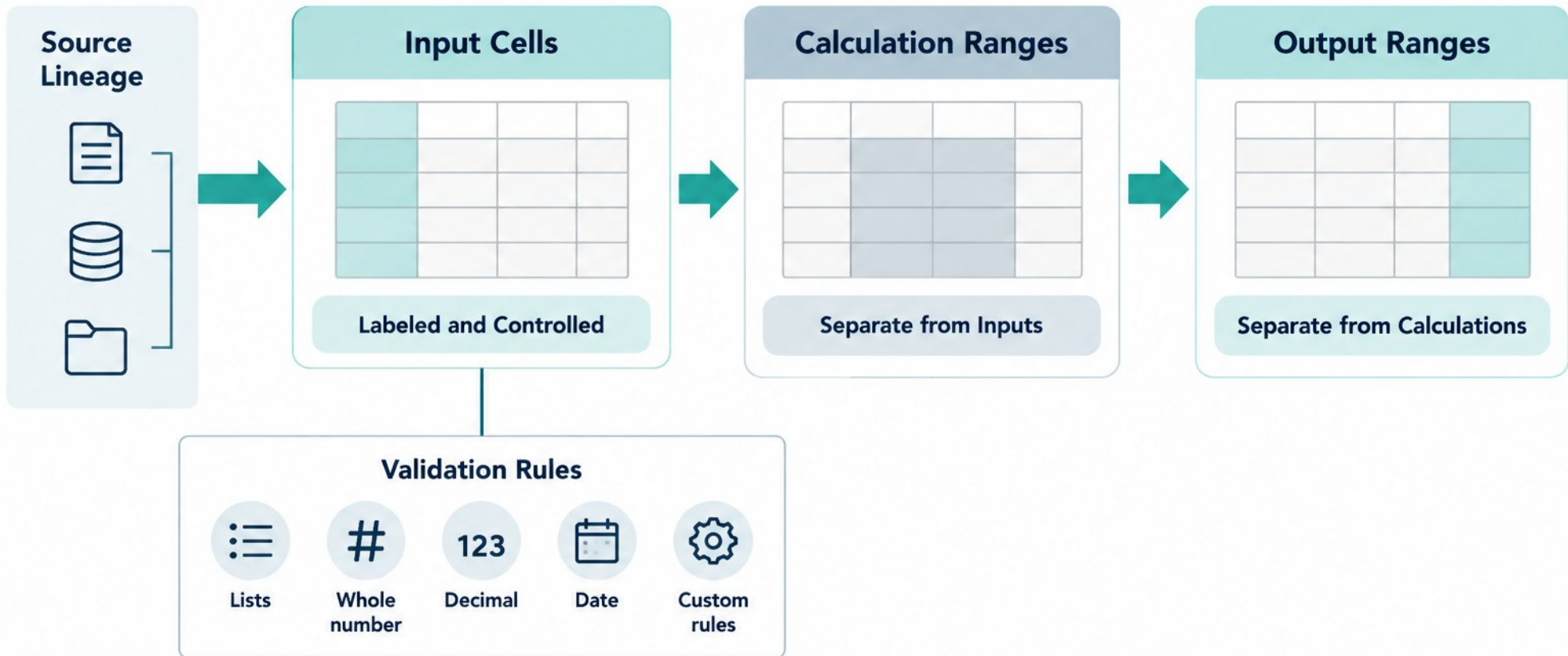


Structural Review: Workbook Architecture and Sheet Organization

- Build a structural inventory: sheets, named ranges, tables, PivotTables, queries, macros
- Flag hidden and very hidden sheets — VeryHidden was deliberately concealed
- Confirm the four-layer pattern: control, inputs, workings, presentation kept separate
- Catch orphaned or duplicate tabs, hard-coded staging sheets, unclaimed work-in-progress
- Check external links and unused names; use Inquire or a manual index sheet
- Ctrl+End and Go To Special to spot stray content far past the real data range



Data Integrity: Validation, Input Ranges, and Source Traceability

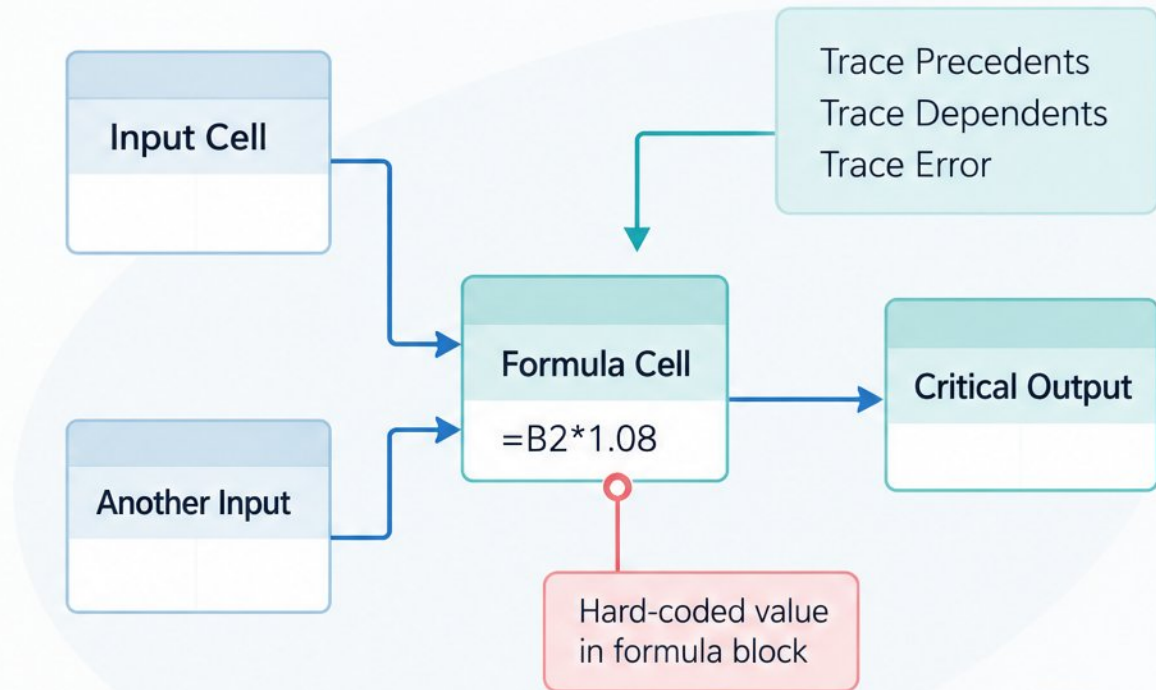


- Separate input, calculation, and output ranges; label every editable cell
- Use lists, whole number, decimal, date, and custom rules for controlled fields
- Stop alerts block critical fields; paste, fill, and macros bypass validation entirely
- Audit existing values with Circle Invalid Data and Go To Special > Data Validation
- Trace source lineage; preserve raw data; screen duplicates, blanks, and text-as-numbers

Formula and Calculation Review:

Tracing, Consistency, and Error Handling

- Show Formulas (Ctrl + `) across every sheet; expose hard-coded values hiding in formula blocks
- Trace Precedents, Dependents, and Trace Error on critical outputs before theories
- Run Error Checking and Circular References; clear what they name first
- Evaluate Formula steps through unreadable logic; IF/CHOOSE branches show #N/A
- Watch Window tracks distant outputs while you edit assumptions
- Classic failures: constants like $=B2*1.08$, inconsistent regions, nested IFs



Edge Cases, Reconciliation, and Reasonableness Testing



Test boundary conditions: zeros, blanks, negatives, huge values, divide-by-zero, partial input rows



Strip IFERROR during review; confirm the fallback is intentional and documented, not a mask



Add cross-check totals: sum of row totals minus grand total should equal zero



Tie outputs to source totals; reconcile opening and closing balances; match row counts



Run analytical review: reasonableness of assumptions, line-item trends, ratios like margin and leverage



Compare against known-good results and check units to catch factor-of-1000 errors

Boundary Test Cases (Examples)

Input / Scenario	Expected Result	Observed Result
Zero		
Blank		
Negative		
Huge values		
Divide-by-zero		
Partial input rows		
Cross-check total		

Verification Checklist

**Pass**

**Fail**

Presentation and Formatting: Readability, Consistency, and Visual Controls

Inconsistent, Ad-hoc Formatting				



Standardized and Consistent				



Apply consistent number formats, fonts, borders, and alignment across similar data



Prefer Center Across Selection over merged cells, which break sorting and filling



Use a documented color key: blue for inputs, black for formulas, green for links



Audit conditional formatting rules for overlapping or conflicting logic



Confirm accessibility: contrast, no color-only meaning, alt text, clear labels



Standardize through cell styles and a governed template, not ad hoc edits

Print Setup and Distribution Readiness

- 1 Set an explicit named print area;
never print helper tables or scratch cells
- 2 Standardize paper size, orientation,
and margins per template
- 3 Prefer Fit to 1 page wide;
avoid scaling below 70 percent
- 4 Use Print Titles so header rows and
key columns repeat on every page
- 5 Place manual page breaks in Page Break
Preview; keep totals with detail
- 6 Footer metadata: page x of y, file path,
last saved date; test print preview before PDF



Protection, Security, and Hidden Content



Confirm sheet protection and locked ranges match intended use; entry cells stay editable



Protection is an integrity control, not security: a bypassable XML metadata flag



Only file-level AES encryption protects data; store passwords in a team vault



Review macros, add-ins, Power Query, and external links; document refresh behavior



Run Inspect Document on a copy: hidden sheets, rows, names, cached Pivot data



Hidden is not private: unhide and review deliberately—Remove All can break formulas



Hidden sheet



Hidden rows and columns



Cached PivotTable data



Stale document properties

Documentation and Handover Package

The essentials for a clear, maintainable handover.

- ✓ README tab lives in the workbook:
purpose, data flow, tab map
- ✓ Update runbook at do-this grain:
sources, paste points, end-state check
- ✓ Change log table plus a single-cell
version stamp
- ✓ Assumptions list with value, unit,
source, date; data dictionary
- ✓ Confess known fragilities as-is;
do not fix mid-handover
- ✓ Name one owner with a successor
and a calendared update



Testing, Sign-Off, and Formal Handover



Agree acceptance tests before testing:
independent sources, tolerances per output



Run final tests on recalculation, Excel versions,
linked files, known sample data



Complete a sign-off record: reviewer, date,
version, open issues, owners, target dates



Successor drives one real update while the
author watches and patches the runbook



Confirm file name, location, permissions;
update the owner line and calendar the cycle



A file changed after approval is new evidence;
verify access against the authorized-user roster

Sign-Off Record

Reviewer

Date

Version

Open issues

Owners

Target dates



Common Failure Modes and How to Diagnose Them



Overwritten formulas

constants inside calculation ranges; restore formula, lock cell



Broken or stale links

update prompts and frozen caches; replace with Power Query



Circular references masking mistakes

rearrange logic, isolate loops, add caps



Volatile functions slowing recalculation

refactor to nonvolatile equivalents



Stale data

dates not matching report period; automate refresh with timestamps

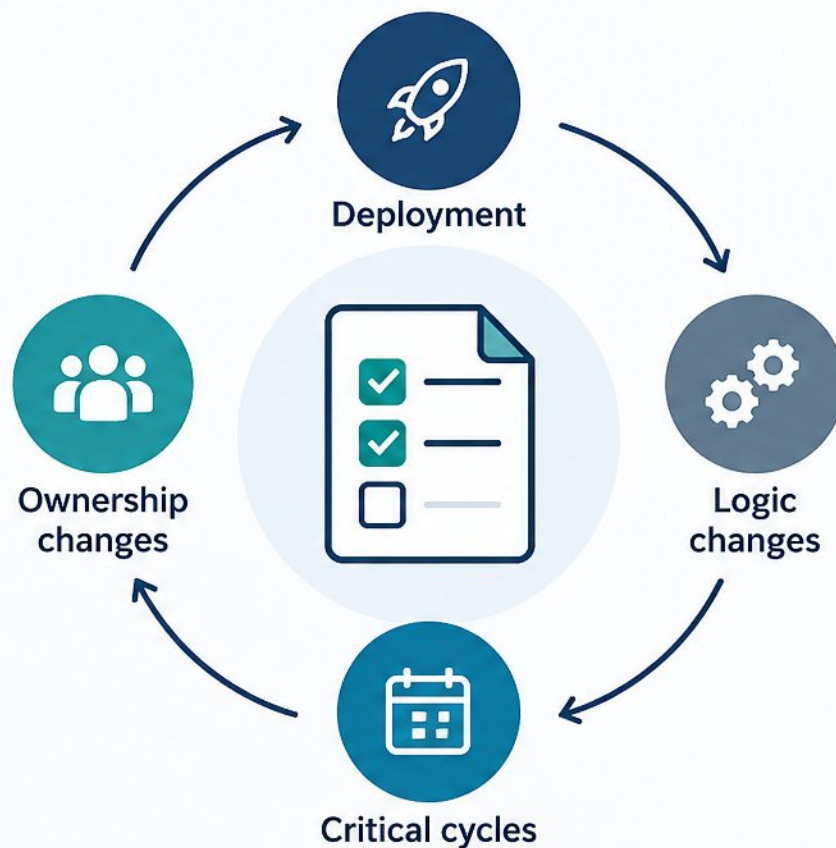


Mixed calculation modes and version drift

stabilize ownership and versioning first

Building the Habit: Ongoing Review, Monitoring, and Improvement

- ✓ Convert the one-time checklist into a reusable controlled template or procedure
- ✓ Bake in print settings, validation, and pass/fail check cells
- ✓ Set a cadence tied to your cycle: spot checks, change-triggered reviews, annual audit
- ✓ Minimum review at deployment, logic changes, critical cycles, ownership changes
- ✓ Track a few concrete metrics: unresolved issues, review time, exception rate
- ✓ Feed findings into templates, training, and preventive controls
- ✓ Add lightweight monitoring: reconciliation, duplicate, blank, and outlier checks
- ✓ Know when to stop patching and rebuild or move to a database-backed workflow



Monitor Key Metrics



Unresolved
issues



Review
time



Exception
rate

PersonWise.

PersonWise • AI digital-human course platform



Scan the code or click anywhere to watch this course live, with voice Q&A

personwise.ai/t/fa36a707/public