

## The role and value of the audit checklist

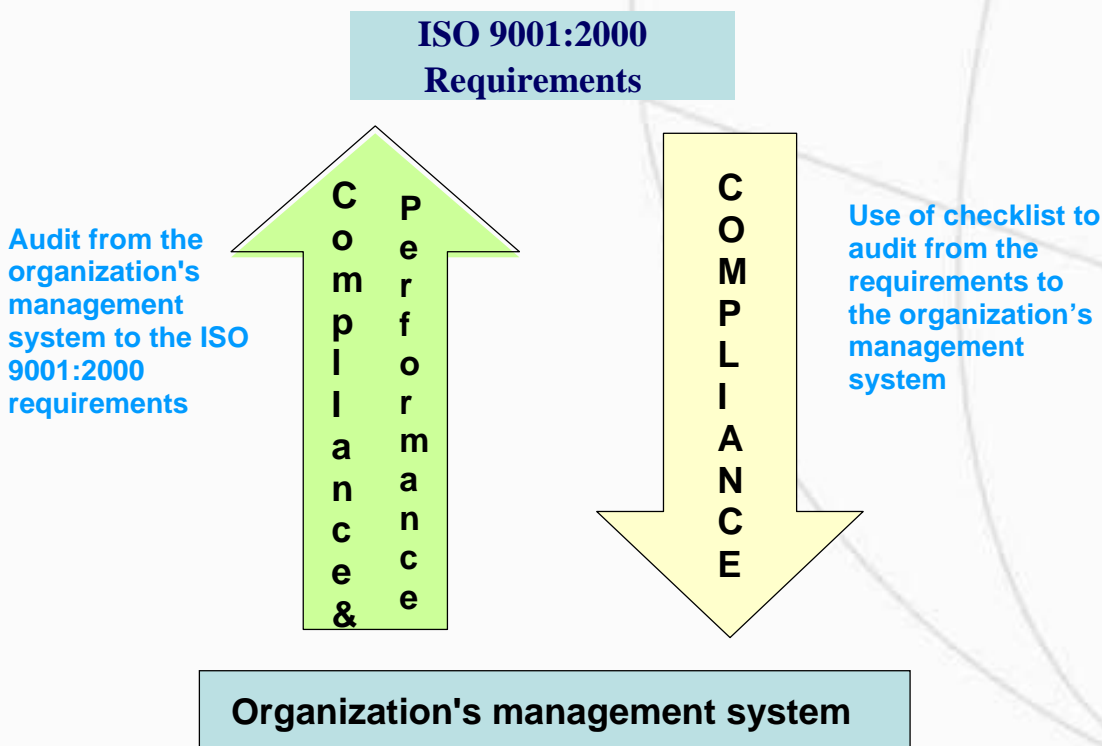
This document provides information on the role and use of audit checklists to actively support the audit process. While the document is primarily directed towards external auditing organizations (including registration and certification bodies), the information can also be used by any organization conducting internal audits.

In looking at current auditing standards, ISO 19011 makes reference to 'Preparing work documents' in Clause 6.4.3. The following is an extract from this clause: 'The audit team members should review information relevant to their audit assignment and prepare work documents as necessary for reference and for recording audit proceedings. Such documents may include checklists and audit sampling plans, and forms for recording information, such as supporting evidence, audit findings and records of meetings. The use of checklists and forms should not restrict the extent of audit activities, which can change as a result of information collected during the audit.'

### The use of audit checklists

Whilst not always required in management system standards, audit checklists are just one tool available from the 'auditors' toolbox'. Many organizations will use them to ensure that the audit at a minimum will address the requirements as defined by the scope of the audit.

An example auditing approach is shown below:



It is beneficial to audit from the organization's quality management system up to the requirements. A checklist may be used to ensure that all relevant ISO 9001 requirements addressed.

## Advantages

Literature available in the marketplace notes the following with respect to the use of audit checklists:

Checklists, if developed for a specific audit and used correctly:

- promote planning for the audit
- ensure a consistent audit approach
- act as a sampling plan and time manager
- serve as a memory aid
- provide a repository for notes collected during the audit process (audit field notes)
- audit checklists need to be developed to provide assistance to the audit process
- auditors need to be trained in the use of a particular checklist and be shown how to use it to obtain maximum information by using good questioning techniques
- checklists should help an auditor to perform better during the audit process
- checklists help to ensure that an audit is conducted in a systematic and comprehensive manner, and that adequate evidence is obtained
- checklists can provide structure and continuity to an audit and can ensure that the audit scope is being followed
- checklists can provide a means of communication and a place to record data for use for future reference
- a completed checklist provides objective evidence that the audit was performed
- a checklist can provide a record that the quality management system (QMS) was examined
- checklists can be used as an information base for planning future audits
- checklists can be provided to the auditee ahead of the on-site audit

## Disadvantages

In contrast, when audit checklists are not available or poorly prepared, the following issues/concerns are noted:

- the checklist can be seen as intimidating to the auditee
- the focus of the checklist may be too narrow in scope to identify specific problem areas
- checklists are a tool to aid the auditor, but will be restrictive if used as the auditor's only support mechanism.
- checklists should not be a substitute for audit planning
- an inexperienced auditor may not be able to clearly communicate what he or she is looking for if they depend too heavily on a checklist to guide their questions

- poorly prepared checklists can slow down an audit due to duplication and repetition
- generic checklists which do not reflect the specific organizational management system may not add any value and may interfere with the audit
- narrow focused checklists minimize unique assessment questions

## Conclusion

There are advantages and disadvantages in using audit checklists. It depends on many factors, including customer needs, time and cost restraints, auditor experience and sector scheme requirements. Auditors should assess the value of the checklist as an aid in the audit process and consider its use as a functional tool.

This article is an edited version of ' The role and value of the audit checklist ' from the website of the ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group, and is reproduced courtesy of ISO and the IAF. These papers were developed on current best practice and therefore have not been formally endorsed as International Accreditation Forum (IAF) guidance or ISO TC176 interpretations. For further information about the Auditing Practices Group

<http://isotc.iso.org/livelink/livelink/fetch/2000/2122/138402/138403/%203541460/customview.html?func=ll&objId=3541460&objAction=browse&sort=name>.

The ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group is an informal group of QMS experts, auditors and practitioners drawn from the ISO Technical Committee 176 Quality Management and Quality Assurance (ISO/TC 176) and the IAF. It has developed a number of guidance papers and presentations that contain explanations about the auditing of QMSs. These reflect the process-based approach that is essential for auditing the requirements of ISO 9001.

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