

# The Founder Guide: End-of-Phase Checks

## Quick gut-checks for Phases 1 through 6

*A companion to The Founder Guide from Claude, Actually. Six short checks, one per phase. The grown-up key is at the bottom.*

These are not tests. Each one takes a few minutes and mixes three kinds of question: can you actually do the thing, why did you choose what you chose, and where did the AI get something wrong. That last kind is the whole point of the guide, so it shows up every single time. Answer out loud or in your journal. If you can't answer a "why" question, you're not stuck, you just haven't decided yet. Go decide.

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### Phase 1 Check: Laptop & Toolset

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1. Open your **Business/** folder and find a file in **01-Research** . Did that take you more than ten seconds? (It shouldn't.)
2. Name two keyboard shortcuts you didn't know a week ago and use them right now.
3. You asked the same question vaguely, then specifically. What changed in the answer, and why?
4. Show me your first "AI got it wrong" journal entry. What did it say confidently that was off, and how did you catch it?
5. Why is the laptop logged as a business asset and not a cost you spent? (Say it in your own words.)

**You're ready for the next phase when:** you move around the laptop without thinking, your journal is started, and your first AI mistake is written down.

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### Phase 2 Check: Idea & Validation

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1. Say your business in one sentence. Who's the customer, and why would they pay you?
2. You ran several brainstorming prompts. Which idea did the AI push hardest, and why did you NOT pick it (or why did you)?

3. You interviewed at least five real people. What did one of them say that surprised you and changed your thinking?
4. Run the "argue why it will fail" prompt on your chosen idea. Which failure reason is real, and what would have to be true for you to survive it?
5. When you asked who already does this, did the AI invent a competitor, get a price wrong, or miss an obvious player? What did you have to correct?
6. Your answer to "why would they pay you" can't be "I'm cheaper." So what is it?

**You're ready for the next phase when:** you can explain the business in one sentence, name your customer, and defend why they'd pay. (Killing a bad idea here counts as a win.)

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### Phase 3 Check: Legal Foundation

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1. You compared sole proprietorship, single-member LLC, and S-corp-later. Which did you pick, and what's the one reason that decided it?
2. What does your state actually charge to start and to keep the business running each year? (For example, a California LLC owes an \$800 annual franchise tax from year one whether it makes money or not.)
3. The AI gave you a fee or a filing step for your state. Did you verify it against the real source? What did you find when you checked?
4. Why does business money never mix with personal money? What goes wrong if it does?
5. Walk me through what you have in hand: filing, EIN, bank account. Anything still open?
6. Your laptop is logged as your first business asset. In which folder, and why does that matter?

**You're ready for the next phase when:** you chose a structure and can defend it, the business is filed, EIN and bank account are in hand, and you know what you owe and when.

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### Phase 4 Check: Brand Foundation

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1. Hand your one-page brand brief to someone who's never seen it. Could they make an on-brand caption from it? If not, what's missing?
2. Name your three to five voice adjectives. Now read me a headline that proves one of them.

3. You looked at ten competitors. What does yours do differently, in one line, that isn't "better service"?
4. The brand prompt was told to push back if your positioning was generic. Did it? Did it ever give you a name or tagline that was clichéd, taken, or just bad, and you tossed it?
5. Why these colors and these fonts, instead of the first set the AI handed you?

**You're ready for the next phase when:** you have a logo, palette, fonts, and a brief someone else could create on-brand work from. (Don't spend three days on a font.)

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## Phase 5 Check: Website Build

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1. Open your live site on a phone. Does a stranger get what you do in five seconds and know how to buy or contact you in thirty?
2. You used the platform decision tree. Why is your platform the right one for what you sell?
3. Point to one block of copy and confirm: did you write it, or did the AI? (The rule is you author, AI edits.)
4. Pick any AI-built code or copy on the page and explain what it does, before we talk about whether it works. Can you?
5. Where did the AI's website copy sound like AI, use marketing speak, or claim something untrue? What did you cut?
6. Are there any placeholders or "lorem ipsum" left anywhere? (There shouldn't be.)

**You're ready for the next phase when:** a stranger finds the site, gets it in five seconds, knows how to buy in thirty, and you can explain every piece of code or copy on it.

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## Phase 6 Check: Launch & First Traction

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1. You're live. Show me lead capture working and the two platforms you're posting on.
2. You soft-launched to your own network first, the people you interviewed in Phase 2. Why them before strangers?
3. Of your twenty pieces of direct outreach, what's the one line that got the best response, and why do you think it worked?

4. If you ran a paid test: what did a click cost, what did a lead cost, what did a sale cost? If you didn't, what are you using instead?
5. The launch prompt was told to push back on unrealistic targets. Did it call out a number as too optimistic? Was it right?
6. First sale, or a clear write-up of why none came and what you'd change. Which one do you have, and what's the single biggest lesson in it?

**You're ready to wrap when:** you launched. You got customers, or you can explain exactly why you didn't and what you'd do differently. Either is a win.

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## Answer & Coaching Key (for the grown-up running it)

These checks aren't graded right or wrong. You're listening for whether the founder can defend a decision and whether they actually caught the AI being wrong. Here's what a strong answer sounds like in each phase, and what to nudge if it's thin.

**Phase 1.** Folder navigation and shortcuts are pass/fail, watch them do it, don't take their word. The two answers that matter are the "vague vs specific prompt" one and the journal entry. A good prompt answer notices that specifics and context produced a sharper, more useful reply. A good journal entry names a concrete thing the AI got wrong (a made-up fact, a broken instruction, a confident guess) and how they noticed. If the journal is empty or vague, that's the one thing to fix before moving on. The asset answer just needs the idea that a computer is something the business owns, not money burned.

**Phase 2.** The one-sentence pitch should be crisp and the "why pay you" answer should not be price. If it's "I'm cheaper," send them back. You want to hear that real interviews changed something, that's the sign they talked to humans and listened. The catch-the-AI question is gold here: AI loves to invent competitors and guess prices. If they say "the AI was totally right," push, did they actually verify? Killing the idea at this stage is a real, payable win. Don't let them treat it as failure.

**Phase 3.** Numbers are the trap. The AI often gets state fees wrong or omits recurring ones like California's franchise tax. The right answer is "I checked the state's own site and the AI had it wrong / right." If they trusted the AI's first number, that's the lesson, have them verify it now,

together. The structure choice just needs a real reason behind it (liability, cost, simplicity), not a coin flip. Confirm the filing, EIN, and bank account actually exist, ask to see them.

**Phase 4.** The brief is the real deliverable, test it by trying to use it yourself. If you can't write an on-brand caption from it, it's not done. Listen for a point of difference that isn't generic. On the catch-the-AI question, you want evidence they rejected something the AI offered: a taken name, a tired tagline, a clichéd color story. A founder who accepted everything the AI gave didn't really make a brand. Cap the time, branding is where people stall forever.

**Phase 5.** The five-second / thirty-second test is the bar, run it on a real phone with fresh eyes. The non-negotiable is question 4: they must be able to explain any code or copy before it ships. "Explain this" comes before "make it work." If they can't explain it, it doesn't go live. The AI-tell question (where copy sounded like a robot or made a false claim) tells you whether they edited or just pasted. Pasted AI copy is the most common way a good site goes bad.

**Phase 6.** A first sale is great but not the pass condition. The pass condition is a real launch plus an honest read of what happened. Cost-per-click / lead / sale numbers (if they ran paid) should be specific, not "it did okay." The best answer to the failure question is specific and a little uncomfortable: a real reason and a real change. Vague optimism ("I think more posts would help") means dig deeper. Failure with a clear lesson beats fake success, pay it like a win.

**Across all six:** the through-line is the catch-the-AI question. By Phase 6 they should answer it fast and almost casually, that ease is the skill the whole program was for. If they ever say the AI was perfect, that's not a green light, that's a sign they stopped checking. Send them back to look harder.