

Traffic Light Guide — When to Trust AI Output

Know when to trust, verify, or own the decision.

🟢 Green Light — Trust the Output

Low stakes, easy to spot errors, your domain knowledge covers it.

Task	Why It's Green
Brainstorming & ideation	Quantity matters, you pick quality
First drafts of emails	You'll review before sending
Summarizing your own documents	You know the content, can spot errors
Meeting agenda creation	Low stakes, easy to edit
Reformatting & restructuring text	Mechanical task, obvious if wrong
Rephrasing for tone/audience	You judge the tone yourself
Data formatting (CSV → table)	Verifiable at a glance
Template creation	You customize before using
Proofreading suggestions	You accept/reject each change
Learning new topics	You're exploring, not deciding

Green rule: If you can spot a mistake in 5 seconds, it's green light.

☐ Yellow Light — Verify Key Points

Important but checkable. Use AI output as a starting point, then validate.

Task	What to Verify
Research & fact-finding	Cross-check key claims with sources
Data analysis & trend spotting	Validate numbers against raw data
Technical content creation	Have a subject expert review
Financial calculations	Re-run critical formulas manually
Competitive analysis	Verify company data is current
Market research summaries	Check dates and sources
Code review suggestions	Test before deploying
Process improvement recommendations	Validate against your operations
Training material creation	Subject expert sign-off
Customer insight analysis	Compare against actual customer data

Yellow rule: Trust the structure, verify the facts. Check numbers, dates, and claims.

☐ Red Light — Human Owns It

High stakes, specialized knowledge, or irreversible consequences. AI assists, you decide.

Task	Why It's Red
Legal advice & contract decisions	Requires licensed professional
Medical or health recommendations	Liability and safety risk

Task	Why It's Red
Final financial decisions (investments, loans)	Fiduciary responsibility
Handling personal/sensitive data (SSN, salary)	Privacy and compliance risk
Official company statements (press, legal)	Reputational and legal exposure
Regulatory compliance determinations	Requires certified expertise
Hiring/firing decisions	Legal liability, human judgment
Security architecture decisions	Risk of breach if wrong
Mergers, acquisitions, strategic commitments	Irreversible, high-stakes
Anything requiring professional certification	AI has no license or liability

Red rule: If getting it wrong has legal, financial, or safety consequences → human decides, AI assists.

Decision Framework

Is the task low-stakes and easy to verify?

→ YES → ☐ Green: Trust it

→ NO → Could you verify the key facts?

→ YES → ☐ Yellow: Use it, then check

→ NO → ☐ Red: Human decides, AI assists

When in doubt, treat it as Yellow. Verify key points, then proceed.

The 19% Rule

A BCG study found teams **lost 19% accuracy** when they used AI on tasks outside its capability frontier (Red Light tasks treated as Green). Knowing which color your task is prevents this drop.

The skill isn't using AI — it's knowing WHEN to use AI.

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