

The Swap Test Checklist

Put someone else's name on the post. Did anything break?

If it survives a byline swap without losing anything, it was never yours, and the reach it earns builds nobody's reputation in particular. Twelve tells, in the order they cost you. Tick what applies, fix what you ticked.

THE RULE THAT OUTRANKS THE REST

The two substance tells cannot be fixed by editing. Clear rhythm and clean vocabulary do not rescue a post with no facts and nothing that happened. Check those two first.

Substance

DECISIVE · CHECK FIRST

- ☐ **The specificity void**
No numbers, names, places or dates. Nothing a reader could check or remember.
 - ✗ We saw significant improvement after the change.
 - ✓ Response time went from nine days to two, and the complaints stopped in about a month.
- ☐ **The missing incident**
Nothing happened. No moment, no decision, no consequence. Available from anyone with your title.
 - ✗ Hiring senior people requires patience and clarity.
 - ✓ I offered the job on a Thursday. By Monday he had taken a counter.

Rhythm

3 TELLS · THE CADENCE

- ☐ **The dash lattice**
Long dashes as a rhythm device. One is a choice. Two in a short post is a fingerprint.
 - ✗ The work was hard — harder than expected — and we shipped anyway.
 - ✓ The work was hard. Harder than expected. We shipped anyway.
- ☐ **The triad**
Three parallel items where two would do and one would be braver.
 - ✗ Curious, humble, and consistent.
 - ✓ Curious enough to be annoying about it.
- ☐ **The staccato run**
Three or more very short sentences in a row. Reads as urgency, then as a format.
 - ✗ We shipped. It failed. We learned.
 - ✓ We shipped it in March and pulled it in May, which cost us a quarter.

Structure

4 TELLS · BORROWED SHAPES

- ☐ **The negation reframe**
A straw position set up and pivoted off. Manufactures insight by inventing something to correct.
 - ✗ It's not about the tools. It's about the process.
 - ✓ We bought the tool first and spent four months finding the process problem.
- ☐ **The setup opener**
An opening that withholds rather than delivers. A loan against your credibility.
 - ✗ Most people get hiring completely wrong.
 - ✓ We hired four sales leaders in three years. Three were the same mistake.
- ☐ **The question hook**
A question hands the reader an exit. They answer in their head and leave.
 - ✗ What separates good leaders from great ones?
 - ✓ Great leaders delegate worse than good ones, and it costs them.
- ☐ **The lesson landing**
Ending by extracting a moral. Converts a specific story into a platitude in the last line.
 - ✗ The lesson? Trust is built in small moments.
 - ✓ She never mentioned it again, and I have thought about it every quarter since.

Vocabulary

3 TELLS · THE HOLLOW LEXICON

- ☐ **Hollow words**
Leverage, unlock, elevate, empower, journey, learnings, at scale. Sound like meaning, carry none.
 - ✗ We leveraged our learnings to unlock growth at scale.
 - ✓ We stopped doing outbound and revenue went up.
- ☐ **The announcement opener**
Humbled, thrilled, honored to announce. Readers skip the line automatically.
 - ✗ Humbled and thrilled to announce I've joined Acme as VP.
 - ✓ I start at Acme on Monday. Here is the problem I took the job to fix.
- ☐ **The engagement plea**
Thoughts? Agree? Repost if useful. Announces you did not expect the content to earn it.
 - ✗ Agree? Let me know in the comments.
 - ✓ Nothing. End on the last real sentence and let it sit.

- RUN IT IN THIS ORDER**
- 01** Substance first. If both fail, stop editing and start again from something that happened.
 - 02** Structure next. It carries the most weight of the three surface families.
 - 03** Vocabulary. Delete each hollow word and check whether the sentence lost anything.
 - 04** Rhythm last. It is the easiest to fix and the least important.

Five minutes a post. The catch is every post, forever, and rewriting what fails. You become your own editor indefinitely, and the tells creep back about four weeks after anyone decides they have got the hang of this. Every Agent Craft draft is screened against this exact list before you see it, because content that could have come from anyone is our definition of a defect.