Form design review checklist

20 rules from GOV.UK, the U.S. Web Design System and W3C. Tick each one your form passes.

Form: _____ Checked by: _____ Date: _____

Ask only what you need

☐ 1. Know why you are asking every question. Each question has a written reason and a known use for the answer. Cut the rest.
Source: GOV.UK Service Manual, Structuring forms, https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/design/form-structure

☐ 2. Ask for each piece of information once. The form asks for each answer only once.
Source: GOV.UK Design System, Question pages, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/patterns/question-pages/

☐ 3. Put the "is this for me?" questions first. Questions that rule people out come early, and logic skips questions that do not apply.
Source: GOV.UK Service Manual, Structuring forms, https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/design/form-structure

Layout

☐ 4. Use one column. Questions run top to bottom in a single column. Side-by-side fields are rare short pairs.
Source: U.S. Web Design System, Form, https://designsystem.digital.gov/components/form/

Labels

☐ 5. Put a short label above each field. Every field has a visible label above it, short and in sentence case, with no colon at the end.
Source: GOV.UK Design System, Text input, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/components/text-input/

☐ 6. Never use placeholder text as the label. No field relies on grey text inside the box to say what it wants.
Source: GOV.UK Design System, Text input, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/components/text-input/

☐ 7. Keep hint text to one short sentence. Help text sits under the label, helps most people, and fits in one simple sentence.
Source: GOV.UK Design System, Text input, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/components/text-input/

☐ 8. Mark optional questions, not required ones. Optional questions say "(optional)" in the label. Better still, remove them.
Source: GOV.UK Design System, Question pages, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/patterns/question-pages/

Structure

☐ 9. Group related questions under a heading. Related questions (address, contact details) sit together under a clear heading.
Source: W3C WAI Forms Tutorial, Grouping Controls, https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/forms/grouping/

☐ 10. Start with one thing per page. Each page asks one question or one small set of related questions.
Source: GOV.UK Service Manual, Structuring forms, https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/design/form-structure

☐ 11. Split long forms into logical steps. A long form runs in steps that each make sense on their own.
Source: W3C WAI Forms Tutorial, Multi-page Forms, https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/forms/multi-page/

☐ 12. Add a progress indicator only when people need it. You tried the form without one first. If you show one, it is simple and tells people where they are.
Source: GOV.UK Design System, Question pages, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/patterns/question-pages/

Controls

☐ 13. Use radio buttons, not a dropdown, for short lists. Dropdowns appear only for long lists. Short lists show every option.

Source: GOV.UK Design System, Select, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/components/select/

☐ 14. Label every option, including both ends of a scale. Every choice has words, and every rating scale names its low and high ends.

Source: WCAG 2.2, 3.3.2 Labels or Instructions (Level A), https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/#labels-or-instructions

Errors

☐ 15. Say what went wrong and how to fix it. Each error message is specific and plain, for example "Enter your email address".

Source: GOV.UK Design System, Error message, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/components/error-message/

☐ 16. Never show an error with colour alone. Every error has words next to the field, not just a red border.

Source: WCAG 2.2, 1.4.1 Use of Color (Level A), https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/#use-of-color

Mobile

☐ 17. Make tap targets at least 24 by 24 CSS pixels. Buttons, checkboxes and radio buttons are easy to tap on a phone and not crammed together.

Source: WCAG 2.2, 2.5.8 Target Size (Minimum) (Level AA), https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/#target-size-minimum

☐ 18. Match the field type to the answer. Emails use an email field and numbers a number field, so phones show the right keyboard and browsers can autofill.

Source: GOV.UK Design System, Text input, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/components/text-input/

Buttons

☐ 19. Write button text that says what happens. The button names its action, like "Send application" or "Pay".

Source: GOV.UK Design System, Button, https://design-system.service.gov.uk/components/button/

Testing

☐ 20. Watch real people fill it in before launch. A few likely users tried the form while you watched, and you fixed what tripped them up.

Source: GOV.UK Service Manual, Using moderated usability testing, https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/user-research/using-moderated-usability-testing

Score: _____ of 20 passed. Fix first: _____

Sources accessed 28 October 2026. Score several forms at once in the free form design scorecard (Excel) from the same post.