



WHY ARE AUDITS SO IMPORTANT?

Regular audits are key to improving business performance in all industries and can facilitate the achievement of many other goals that a particular organisation may have in their sights. One of the main reasons that audits should be carried out on a regular basis is to ensure that corporate quality management systems are ISO 9001 compliant. In fact, the audits themselves are a requirement of this international QMS standard, which means external audits must be carried out annually. It is a good idea to hold internal audits on a more frequent basis, to make sure that standards are maintained in between the external audits.

The Four Phases of an Internal Audit

There are four main phases to an internal audit: Preparation, Performance, Reporting, and Follow Up. The first two of these phases can be broken down into a series of smaller steps.



PREPARATION



PERFORMANCE



REPORTING



FOLLOW UP

PHASE 1 – PREPARATION

Preparing for an audit involves six key steps:



NOTIFICATION

Notifying the auditee and discussing the scope, objectives, criteria, and methods of the impending audit.



TEAM SELECTION

Selecting team members and appointing a lead auditor.



GATHERING OF DOCUMENTATION

Gathering all relevant audit documentation for review, in order to fully understand the activities and processes to be performed.



CREATE A TIMETABLE

Create an efficient audit timetable.



CREATE AN AUDIT PLAN

Create a practical audit plan if required.



CREATE A CHECKLIST

Put together a checklist for the subsequent performance phase.

PHASE 2 – PERFORMANCE

For the performance of the audit, there are four steps that need to be taken – including an opening meeting, conducting audit, an audit team meeting and ending in a closing meeting.



AN OPENING MEETING

Before the audit starts in earnest, the team should be introduced to the lead auditor, primary objectives discussed, and overall expectations agreed upon.



CONDUCTING AN AUDIT

The audit is performed with the help of a checklist that includes key factors such as questioning, listening, observing, and recording skills.



AUDIT TEAM MEETING

Findings are evaluated during this meeting, all relevant concerns discussed, solutions to any problems proposed, and any departure from approved procedure documented. Audit findings will also cover determined controls, documented requirements, and achievements of required outputs for the customers of the process.



CLOSING MEETING

An attendance list is created, after which key topics and questions relating to the audit are discussed. Finally, a summary of the audit is presented and the auditor is thanked for their cooperation and assistance.

PHASE 3 – AUDIT REPORTING

Several days after the audit completion, a report is finalised, signed by the auditor, and presented to the auditee. The report will include a summary sheet with the audit number, objectives, name of auditor, list of nonconformities and any relevant observations.



PHASE 4 – FOLLOW UP

Follow up audits are required to ascertain whether the auditee has taken appropriate action to rectify any nonconformities that were identified during the main audit. These follow up audits should of course be prepared, performed, and reported along the same lines as the original audit, to ensure their effectiveness.