Auditing a Service While It Is Happening

GUIDING QUESTION *Watch forty arrivals at your own front desk this afternoon, then pull the system record for the same forty. Does the record describe what you just saw?*

Property: _____ Completed by: _____ Date: _____

How to use this sheet: work through the four parts with the people who own the process. The left-hand text comes from the book; the empty columns are for what is true in your property.

1. Verification Pact: what the market says, what actually holds, and your property

What the market says	What actually holds	In our property
Audit evidence must be documented information.	No. Audit evidence can come from records, observation, interviews, data and other verifiable information.	
Observation is a weaker form of evidence than a record.	No. Reliability depends on source and circumstances; a direct observation can be stronger than a record for some questions.	
An auditor may not observe a process involving customers.	Not categorically. Observation can be used where it is lawful, ethical, safe and does not interfere improperly with customers or service.	
Interviewing staff during service is normal audit practice.	Not necessarily. Interviews should be timed and conducted so they do not disrupt the process or distort the evidence.	
A mystery guest exercise is an internal audit.	No. Mystery-guest work may provide evidence, but it is not automatically an ISO 9001 internal audit unless it is planned and conducted as one against defined criteria.	
Evidence must be re-performable to be reliable.	No. Evidence must be verifiable; that does not mean the event itself must be repeatable.	
An audit finding may name the individual observed.	Normally findings should describe the condition and evidence needed to support the conclusion, not personalize blame unless identity is genuinely necessary to the evidence.	

2. Objective evidence: what an auditor would examine

Line	What to examine	Found? (Yes / Partly / No)	Notes and location
Document	The audit plan for a service process, examined for the hour chosen, the stopping rule, and whether observation is named as a planned evidence source.		
Record	The observation sheet itself, with times and counts, and the subsequent comparison against system records for the same population.		
Read	The system record for a period the auditor observed. Where the property's data contains no trace of an event class the auditor watched repeatedly, the record is structurally blind and everything built on it inherits the blindness.		
Told	Ask the department head whether they were told in advance what would make the auditor leave. An audit of a live service conducted without that agreement was tolerated rather than supported.		
Seen	The auditor's position. Standing where the process can be seen and the guest is not obstructed is a practical skill, and a poor position produces a poor audit for entirely physical reasons.		
Absence	There will be no internal audit anywhere in the		

Line	What to examine	Found? (Yes / Partly / No)	Notes and location
	programme conducted during the property's peak service hour, and no comparison anywhere between what was observed and what was recorded.		

3. Common mistakes: self-check

Mistake	Why it matters	Present here? (Yes / Partly / No)
Auditing a service process from its records alone.	The record contains what the system was configured to capture, which is not the same as what happened.	
Observing without counting.	Four hours of impressions produce anecdotes that cannot be contested and cannot be used.	
Recording meaning instead of events.	An interpretation entangled with an observation destroys the observation for any reader who disagrees with the interpretation.	
Ignoring the observer effect.	A watched desk performs, and the auditor will honestly conclude that the performance is the process.	
Interviewing during service.	It is unfair to the staff, visible to the guest, and produces answers given under conditions nobody would choose.	
Having no stopping rule.	An audit that continues while an operation stops coping has cost the property more than any finding it could produce.	
Naming individuals.	A process fact is a count; a comment about a person is a performance appraisal, and it can end the department's cooperation for a long time.	
Treating the mystery guest programme as internal audit.	It reports an experience; an audit compares a process against criteria and against the property's own record of it.	

4. Action plan

Position from the book / gap found	Action in our property	Owner	Deadline
The audit happens at the hour the process is hard.			
The auditor counts.			
The opening of an observation is marked, not discarded.			
Every live observation is verified cold against the record.			
The stopping rule exists and is agreed in advance.			

In brief

A service cannot be stopped, repeated or examined afterwards, so the primary evidence available to a quality auditor in a hotel is observation, conducted at the hour the process is hard, from a position that does not obstruct, under a stopping rule agreed in advance, treating the opening period as possibly affected by the observer, and counting rather than characterising.

Source: The Helm and the Lens, Volume 2b: The Lens, subchapter 3.6. This sheet does not reproduce the text of any standard; work with your own copy of ISO 9001:2026 from an authorised source.