



EPISODE 1 · SITES I'VE NEVER SEEN

The plugin-author check-in checklist

FOR	anyone whose name is in the header of a WordPress plugin they haven't looked at in a while
FROM	<i>Sites I've Never Seen</i> , Episode 1 — "The Contract You Forgot You Made"
TIME REQUIRED	thirty minutes per plugin, on a staging environment

The idea behind this check-in is the one Iris named in the episode: *the code, when you went back to it, was working*. This isn't a code-quality check. It's a contract check — confirming the plugin you put your name on is still doing what the readme promises, on the WordPress version most of your install base is actually running.

Step 1 — Confirm the install base

Open the plugin's page on the WordPress.org directory. Note:

- **Active installs** (rounded to the nearest 10 / 100 / 1000)
- **Last updated date**
- **Tested up to WordPress version**

- Requires PHP

If "tested up to" is two major WordPress versions behind, your plugin is still installing on sites you have no idea about, on a stack you no longer claim to support. That gap is the contract issue.

Step 2 — Read the readme, then read the code

Side-by-side, on the same screen:

- Does the readme accurately describe what the plugin does?
- Are the screenshots current?
- Is the FAQ answering questions people actually ask, or questions you anticipated when you wrote it?
- Does the "upgrade notice" section say anything about the last change, even if it was years ago?

Then open the main plugin file. Read it the way a stranger would read code with your name in the header.

- Does the code do what the readme says it does?
 - Are there functions that exist but aren't called anywhere?
 - Are there links in the comments or admin notices that point to URLs that don't exist anymore?
 - Is there a settings page that loads dead links to third-party services?
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Step 3 — Functional check on current WordPress

On a staging environment running the current stable WordPress and current stable PHP:

- Activate the plugin
 - Visit each admin page the plugin adds
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- Trigger each user-facing feature the plugin provides
- Check the browser console and PHP error log for warnings, notices, deprecation messages

Three failure modes to look for specifically:

1. **PHP deprecation warnings** – the plugin uses something WordPress core has deprecated. Still works; about to stop working.
 2. **Dead third-party integrations** – social-sharing buttons that point to services that no longer exist, API endpoints that have changed, OAuth callbacks that don't authenticate anymore.
 3. **Silent failures** – features that the readme says work but don't actually do anything because some dependency has shifted under the plugin.
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Step 4 – The contract questions

These are the questions only you can answer:

- If I were installing this plugin today, for the first time, would I be okay with what it does?
- Would I be comfortable with my name in the header?
- If the answer is no, am I willing to either (a) rewrite it to a current standard, or (b) remove it from the directory?

The eleven-year answer in episode 1 was "rewrite." That's the harder path. Removing from the directory is also a valid answer – and a more honest one than letting the plugin keep installing under a name that isn't standing behind it.

Step 5 – Document the decision

In a `CONTRACT.md` file at the root of the plugin repo (or in a private note if the repo isn't public):

- Date of this check-in
- WordPress and PHP versions tested against
- Findings
- Decision: maintain / rewrite / remove
- Next check-in date

The check-in itself becomes the contract – a written record that you looked, what you saw, and what you decided to do about it.

When to do this

For most plugin authors with names in headers, once a year is enough. The major WordPress release cadence is roughly twice a year; a once-a-year check-in catches the gap before it widens.

If you have multiple plugins, alphabetize them and do one per month. After twelve months you've reviewed everything.

*Built to go with [episode 1](https://thisismyurl.com/podcast/the-contract-you-forgot-you-made/) (<https://thisismyurl.com/podcast/the-contract-you-forgot-you-made/>) of *Sites I've Never Seen*, and the source essay [What You Owe the People Still Running Your Old Code](https://thisismyurl.com/what-you-owe-the-people-still-running-your-old-code/) (<https://thisismyurl.com/what-you-owe-the-people-still-running-your-old-code/>).*

LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

The Contract You Forgot You Made

Built to go with episode one of *Sites I've Never Seen*. The episode is where the argument lands; this is what you take into the next meeting.

[Listen to the episode](#) [Read the source essay](#) [Send me a note](#)