The Blind Tally Method

An AI self check for tax returns, run with the tools your firm already has. From a tax director who signs 400 returns a year.

THREE RULES BEFORE ANY PROMPT

1. Pick the slow model.
In Copilot choose Think Deeper. An answer in seconds is a warning sign. Check the model and start over. If Copilot offers a Claude model, use it. If not, your IT admin can turn it on in minutes.

2. One step, one chat.
Step 1 gets its own chat. Steps 2 and 3 share a separate one. The model that lists the documents never sees the return. That is the control, the same reason a blind count is done without the ledger open.

3. Firm account only.
Client documents go only into the AI account your firm licenses and controls. Never a free account, never a personal one. Not sure which you have? Ask before you upload.

THE THREE STEP SELF CHECK

Run before the reviewer sees the return. Facts only. The model reports differences, the preparer decides. A difference is a question, not an error. Not every document amount is taxable.

Step 1. New chat. Attach last year's return and this year's source documents. Not this year's return.

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List every source document with its payer, recipient, and page count. Create an Excel file with one row per amount: document, page, form and box, description, amount, and type (wages, interest, dividends, and so on). Add a tab that totals the amounts by type using Excel formulas. Do not calculate any total yourself. Then add a tab called Expected. From last year's return, list every income source, K-1, business, rental, state return, and carryover, with last year's amount and the form and page, and state whether a document for it is in this year's file. Keep this year's document amounts and last year's expectations on separate tabs. If a page is unreadable, say so and do not guess.
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Step 2. New chat. Attach the Excel file from Step 1, unedited, and the draft return.

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Compare each total in the Excel file to the return. List every total that does not match, with both amounts and the difference. List anything on the return that no document supports, and any document that does not appear on the return. Then go down the Expected tab and state whether each item is on this year's return, with the amount. Cite the row and the return page for each item. Put differences that need attention first. Group routine or explainable differences separately. Do not repeat the same issue. State facts only. Do not say which side is right.
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Step 3. Same chat as Step 2.

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Answer each of these. For each W-2 and 1099, state whether the return assigns it to the correct person, taxpayer or spouse. For each state with income or withholding in the Excel file, state whether a return for that state is attached. Count the K-1s on the return and compare to the K-1s in the Excel file. For each current year K-1, state whether the final K-1 box is checked on the source document.
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This is the basic method. The full process adds a prebuilt workbook with control checks, detailed reader instructions, and additional checks refined through hundreds of actual tax return reviews. Wilhelm Automation Group runs it for firms, or teaches your team to run it. Learn to build it, or have it handed to you.

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Four Jobs for the Front Desk

The admin team touches every return first. These catch problems before they reach the preparer. Same three rules. Slow model, firm account, the model reports and you decide.

FIND IT IN THE INBOX

Needs a Microsoft 365 Copilot seat, in work mode. Add to each prompt: Say which mailbox and folders you searched. If you cannot search one, say so and do not report the results as complete.

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List every email from a client in the last 14 days with an attachment that looks like a tax document. Sender, date, attachment names.
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Which clients returned a signed engagement letter since [date]? Sender, date, subject, attachment name.
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```
List every email from DocuSign in the last 14 days with the client name, the document, and whether it shows completed or waiting.
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SCAN CHECK AT THE DESK

New chat. Attach the scanned file.

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For every page in this file, state whether the text is readable. List any page that is blank, upside down, cut off, or too faint to read, with its page number. Do not summarize the content.
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A bad scan costs the preparer an hour and the reviewer a miss. Catching it at the desk costs two minutes.

WHAT IS NOT FILED

Export your client list with e-file status from your tax software to Excel. Lacerte, CCH, UltraTax, Drake, and ProSeries all do this. New chat, attach the file.

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This is our client list with e-file status. Find the status column and tell me which one you used. List every return that does not show accepted, grouped by status, with client, return type, due date, and preparer. Then list every return due in the next 14 days. Then list every row with a missing status, date, or preparer.
```

Run it every Monday in season. Send the not accepted list to the partner.

PLANNING LETTERS

New chat per client. Attach last year's return. Admin runs it, a professional reads every letter against the return, then save as PDF and send with the meeting invite.

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From last year's return, produce two files. File 1, an Excel workbook for the firm. Detail tab, every item a planner needs with amount, form, and page. Opportunities tab, one row per opportunity, columns for the opportunity, the facts with form and page, any threshold or phase out with the amount and the threshold used, and considerations and next steps. Mark it For professional review. Projection tab at the Form 1040 line level, one net line per business, rental, and K-1, last year in one column and a blank column for this year, formulas for totals. File 2, a Word document for the client, plain language, no form references, no advice. Page one, a short summary of last year's return, where the income came from, what they paid, what drove the result, and two or three questions for the planning meeting. Page two, a form of eight to twelve lines, last year's amount next to a blank for what they expect this year. No formulas.
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THINGS THAT GO WRONG, AND THE FIX

- **The answer came back fast and looked thin.** Check which model ran. Rule one. Start the chat over.
- **The model said it read everything.** It will always say that. Check the page count it reports against the file, and open the Excel file.
- **The file is too large to upload.** Split it in two. Send the first half with the words Do not start yet, wait for part two. Then send the rest.
- **It told you what the right answer is.** Ignore that part. You asked for facts. The preparer and reviewer decide.

Tax Return Review Workshop. A working session with your preparers and reviewers on reviewing a return the same way every time, where AI fits and where it does not, and which model to use. For firms that want to build their own. Ask about dates.

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