CONTINUITY HUB • DR TEST DAY QUICK CARD

Disaster Recovery Plan Testing: Essential Verification Points, Controls & Stop Authority

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THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE OF DR PLAN TESTING

An untested DR plan is not a plan; it is a description of what you hope will happen. Testing converts documentation into verified capability. A test examines the plan, the systems, and the team at the same time: if any of the three is quietly carried by improvisation, the test's job is to expose that.

1. Objectives Written as Claims — PLAN SPECIFICATION

Objectives must be formulated as **verifiable claims to be proven**, not tasks to be started:

- **Wrong (Task):** "*Restore the order database.*"
- **Right (Claim):** "*The order database is serving transactions again within its recovery time objective.*"
- **Narrow scope:** State explicitly what is IN scope (systems, sites, teams) and what is OUT.
- **Pre-set criteria:** Decide pass/fail criteria before anyone touches a keyboard.

2. Run-From-The-Document Rule — EXECUTION STANDARD

Recovery is executed from documented procedures, never unrecorded memory:

- **Real performers:** The exact engineers and admins who would respond in an incident execute the test.
- **Strict fidelity:** Work strictly from written procedures and runbooks.
- **Hero defect rule:** "*A test the hero saves is a test the plan failed.*" If an expert must go off-script to succeed, the plan has a defect even if recovery worked.
- **Log departures:** Every deviation is recorded as an immediate repair finding.

3. RTO Clock to Verified Service — TIME OBJECTIVE

Recovery Time Objective is the maximum tolerable downtime set in the BIA:

- **The Stopwatch:** Runs from *declared failure* to *demonstrably usable service* — not when someone announces it should be up.
- **No Green Lights:** Green status lights have accompanied many a recovery to a system nobody could use.
- **Include Front Intervals:** Measure detection time and decision time ("is it really down?" stall), which routinely rival technical recovery time.
- **Variance:** Record Beating, Meeting, or Missing objective.

4. RPO Position & Data Wholeness — POINT OBJECTIVE

Recovery Point Objective is maximum tolerable data loss, expressed as time:

- **Data Position:** Calculate the exact time gap between failure declaration and the timestamp of the newest recovered data.
- **RPO Test:** A restore that works but returns data older than the agreed limit has failed the test that matters.
- **Data Wholeness:** Verify record counts, table integrity, checksums, and application-level transaction consistency.
- **Data Discipline:** In parallel tests, run on isolated snapshots; never write test data to production.

⚠ 5. AUTHORITY, ABORT CONDITIONS & STOP CONTROL

Named Stop Authority: A named test director or leader holds pre-agreed authority to pause or abort the test immediately if it threatens production, breaches safeguards, or exceeds bounded scope.

- **Test Director:** Controls scenario, clock, injects, and abort triggers.
- **Decision-Maker:** Senior leader reachable for whole test duration.
- **Safeguards & Rollback:** Documented steps to revert test state.
- **Production Blast Radius:** Hard boundary; test halts if breached.

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Section Protocols: Backup Restoration, Failover Sequence & Success Verification

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Backup Restoration 4-Point Checklist

RESTORATION CHECK

"A backup that has never been restored is a hope with a timestamp on it."

Check	Verification Requirement
1	**Readable & Restorable:** The backup media can be located, read, mounted, and restored at all without media errors.
2	**Inside RPO:** The restored data timestamp lands strictly inside the recovery point objective tolerated by the business.
3	**Data Wholeness:** Record counts match, integrity checks pass, application-level schema and records validate cleanly.
4	**System Actually Starts:** The system starts up successfully — no missing dependencies, wrong configuration, expired certificates, or host-locked licenses.

The Rotate Backups Rule: Testing the same convenient backup proves only that backup. Rotate backup dates and systems across every cycle. Time every restore: duration is the floor of recovery time.

Failover Sequence & Failback Protocol

FAILOVER PROTOCOL

"More than one organization has survived failover and injured itself on the return."

Step	Sequence & Verification Action
1	**Declare Failure:** Declare simulated outage per scenario specification.
2	**Detection & Decision:** Clock monitoring visibility; track team decision against plan criteria vs "is it really down?" stall.
3	**Measure Switch:** Time the transition to alternate capacity against RTO.
4	**Functional Verification:** Business users exercise actual end-to-end transactions.
5	**RPO Position:** Audit data currency and delta loss on alternate site.
6	**Deliberate Failback:** Return to primary with explicit data reconciliation.

Parallel Test Note: Proves workload capacity without production risk, but does NOT test DNS cutover, connection settings, or user redirection.

The DR Test Report: 7 Mandatory Sections

EVIDENCE & LINEAGE

Section	Required Content & Evidence Standard
1. Test Plan As Executed	Objectives stated as claims, explicit scope in/out, scenario simulated, pre-set success criteria, and any departures noted.
2. Precise Timeline	Exact timestamps for failure declaration, detection, decision, recovery steps start/complete, and verified usable service. Times, not impressions.
3. Results vs Criteria	Each objective marked Met or Not Met: measured recovery time against RTO, measured data position against RPO, functional checks passed/failed.
4. Deviations & Improvisations	Every instance where the team left the written procedure, bypassed a step, or called unlisted staff. This is the plan's repair list in embryo.
5. Issues & Corrective Actions	Prioritized findings table with owner, due date, and honest severity ranking (Critical, High, Medium, Low).
6. Artifact Evidence	Logs, screenshots, monitoring captures, and observer notes allowing independent audit verification of all claims.
7. Sign-off & Distribution	Formal acceptance by risk owner, distribution list, and entry into the corrective action tracking registry.

THE POST-TEST IMPROVEMENT LOOP

Triage findings while fresh: Fix the plan document first (stale contacts, unowned steps, missing dependencies). Then fix technical capability (procurement, engineering, architecture). If capability cannot be brought to objective at acceptable cost, leadership must re-set the objective with eyes open — never quietly leave a plan that promises what the test disproved. Re-test fixes in the next cycle.