

Design Debt Audit Checklist

A fast audit that surfaces drift, gaps, and risky UI areas

By Petri Lahdelma - 2026 Edition

What This Is

A checklist that makes design debt visible and measurable across teams. Use this to identify inconsistencies before they compound into operational risk.

Audit Categories

1. Component Inventory

- ☐ List all unique components in production
- ☐ Identify duplicate implementations (same function, different code)
- ☐ Flag components not in the design system
- ☐ Score: Total unique / Total in system = coverage %

2. Token Drift Analysis

- ☐ Scan for hard-coded colors (hex, rgb values)
- ☐ Find hard-coded spacing values
- ☐ Identify non-system typography
- ☐ Score each surface: 0 violations = green, 1-5 = yellow, 5+ = red

3. Pattern Consistency

- ☐ Compare similar workflows (forms, tables, navigation)
- ☐ Document variations in error handling
- ☐ Check empty state implementations
- ☐ Flag inconsistent loading states

4. Accessibility Baseline

- ☐ Run automated a11y scan (axe, Lighthouse)
- ☐ Check focus order on key flows
- ☐ Verify color contrast ratios
- ☐ Test keyboard navigation completeness

5. Technical Debt Signals

- ☐ Count !important overrides in CSS
- ☐ Find z-index values > 100
- ☐ Identify inline styles
- ☐ Flag abandoned/unused components

Debt Severity Scoring

- 1 - Minor: Cosmetic inconsistency, low visibility
- 2 - Moderate: Noticeable drift, affects brand perception
- 3 - Significant: Impacts usability or accessibility
- 4 - Critical: Blocks features or causes user errors
- 5 - Severe: Security, compliance, or major UX failure