

# The Senior Data Engineer Judgment Checklist

Check YES only when you can defend the answer with a recent, specific example.

## AI can write the code.

Senior engineers decide whether it should exist, how it should fail, and who owns the outcome.

### 01 BUSINESS CONTEXT

- ☐ I can name the business decision or workflow this system supports.
- ☐ I know the owner, consumers, service expectation, and acceptable failure.
- ☐ I define success in business outcomes - not rows processed or code shipped.

### 02 TRADEOFFS & ARCHITECTURE

- ☐ I can explain why this design beats a simpler alternative.
- ☐ I state the latency, reliability, cost, and complexity tradeoffs clearly.
- ☐ I could defend the decision six months from now with evidence.

### 03 PRODUCTION RISK

- ☐ I design for schema change, retries, duplicates, late data, and backfills.
- ☐ My quality checks validate business rules, not merely types and nulls.
- ☐ Failures alert the right people with enough context to act.

### 04 GOVERNANCE & SECURITY

- ☐ Ownership, sensitivity, allowed use, and retention are documented.
- ☐ Access follows least privilege and is enforced in the platform.
- ☐ Lineage, approvals, and material changes are traceable.

### 05 COST & OPERABILITY

- ☐ I forecast compute and storage cost - including failure and reprocessing.
- ☐ I choose the simplest architecture that meets the real SLA.
- ☐ The support team can operate, recover, and change it without me.

### 06 OWNERSHIP & COMMUNICATION

- ☐ I explain impact and risk in plain language to nontechnical leaders.
- ☐ I challenge bad scope even when the requested code is possible.
- ☐ I own the production outcome, escalation path, and follow-through.

## Score your judgment

Count your YES answers. Confidence without evidence does not count.

### 0-9 CODE-FIRST

Syntax is carrying too much of your value.  
Build decision reps.

### 10-14 EMERGING

Your judgment is visible, but inconsistent.  
Close the weakest category.

### 15-18 SENIOR SIGNAL

You can defend choices and own outcomes.  
Keep collecting evidence.

## Evidence beats self-confidence.

For every YES, point to an artifact: an ADR, runbook, cost comparison, data contract, incident review, or stakeholder outcome.

### Need a straight read on the gaps?

Book a coaching fit call: [gambilldata.com/coaching](https://gambilldata.com/coaching)

**STRATEGY > SYNTAX**