

Editorial Backlink Quality Checklist

A practical 100-point screening tool for publisher legitimacy, topical relevance, page context, indexing, link treatment and acquisition risk.

Criterion	Points	Checks
Publisher legitimacy	20	■ Named editorial identity and recent original content ■ Clear ownership, contact or masthead information ■ No obvious link-selling footprint or unrelated category sprawl
Topical relevance	20	■ Publication and article are relevant to the expert and target page ■ The audience has a credible reason to use the linked resource ■ Placement is not forced into an unrelated topic
Page context	15	■ Link supports a specific claim or useful next step ■ Surrounding paragraph is editorial rather than promotional ■ Destination page provides substantive value
Traffic and indexing	15	■ Domain and relevant section are indexed ■ Traffic claims are plausible and not based on a single vanity metric ■ Recent pages continue to appear in search
Link treatment and disclosure	15	■ Attribute matches the acquisition method ■ Paid relationships are disclosed and use sponsored or nofollow where appropriate ■ No redirect or script hides the final destination
Acquisition risk	15	■ Provider explains how the opportunity was sourced ■ No fabricated credentials or exact-match anchor requirement ■ Replacement terms and editorial-control limits are written down

Interpret the score

85-100	Strong candidate	The placement is relevant, explainable and low risk.
70-84	Proceed with conditions	Document any uncertainty before approval.
50-69	High review needed	Several quality or disclosure questions remain.
Below 50	Reject or investigate	The risk is likely greater than the expected value.

Red flags that override the score

Reject or escalate the placement even when other metrics look strong if any of these conditions apply:

- The publisher requires undisclosed payment for a ranking-passing link.
- The provider asks for fabricated experience, identity or credentials.
- The publication covers hundreds of unrelated categories with repeated commercial anchors.
- The target page is misleading, excessively promotional or unrelated to the article.
- The provider guarantees a named publication while claiming the placement is earned.
- Traffic screenshots cannot be reconciled with indexed pages or recent search visibility.
- The final link uses an unexpected redirect, tracking domain or attribute.

Link-attribute examples

`<a href="https://example.com/guide">Helpful guide</a>` - editorial link where no payment or ranking arrangement exists.

`<a href="https://example.com/offer" rel="sponsored">Partner offer</a>` - paid or sponsored placement.

`<a href="https://example.com/source" rel="nofollow">Source</a>` - publisher chooses not to pass ranking signals.

Questions to ask the provider

- Who controls publication?
- Does any payment reach the publisher?
- What link attribute is expected?
- Is publication guaranteed?
- What qualifies for replacement?
- What target-page and anchor rules apply?
- How will the live result be verified and reported?

Use this checklist with the full guide at editorialbacklinks.com/resources/how-to-evaluate-backlink-quality/