

# The 5-Query Autocomplete vs SERP Audit

**10 minutes. 5 queries. One honest answer: do your dropdown and your results page agree?**

Shoppers see one search. Behind the glass there are two systems. Autocomplete suggests queries; the results page ranks products. They feel like one experience, so when they disagree, you lose the highest-intent moment of the visit and nobody notices, because the leak falls between two configs. This worksheet finds the drift. Run five queries on your live store, score each one, and the grid tells you where, and why, your two surfaces don't match.

## How to run it

1. Open your live storefront search on a normal device, not an admin preview.
2. For each test, type the query and watch the dropdown. Note the top suggestions.
3. Press enter, or tap the suggestion, and look at the results page.
4. Mark whether the two surfaces agree. If they don't, write down the cause.
5. Total your disagreements and read the grid.

## The five tests

#	Test	Type this	What to compare
1	<b>Promise</b>	A head term for a core category	Do the top 3 suggestions each lead to a results page that delivers what they promised?
2	<b>Synonym</b>	A shopper term your catalog phrases differently ("trainers" vs "sneakers")	Does the dropdown suggest it, and does the results page deliver?
3	<b>Inventory</b>	A term in a category with recent sell-through	Do any suggestions lead to out-of-stock or empty results?
4	<b>Curation</b>	A product or collection you actively merchandise	Is the dropdown suggestion and its label consistent with

#	Test	Type this	What to compare
			how the results page ranks it?
5	<b>Governance</b>	A term covered by a merchandising rule you set (promote, demote, or Search Instruction)	Does the dropdown reflect the rule? If not, is that divergence intentional?

## Your scorecard

Fill one row per test. Add more rows if you run extra queries per test.

Query	Dropdown behavior	Results-page behavior	Agree? (Y/N)	Cause if N
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	_____
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	_____
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	_____
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	_____
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	_____

Disagreements total: \_\_\_\_ / 5

## What your score means

- **3 or more disagreements:** your two surfaces have drifted. The dropdown is making promises the results page isn't keeping, at the highest-intent moment in the session. This is a structural handoff problem, not a tuning nudge.
- **1 to 2 disagreements:** real drift on specific queries, and it grows with every launch, sell-through, and curation edit. Fix the named causes before they spread across the catalog.
- **0 disagreements:** either your handoff is sound, or you tested too few queries. Re-run with head terms from your newest collection and a category that sold through this week.

## Name the cause, find the fix

When two surfaces disagree, it's almost always one of four causes. Match each disagreement to its cause, then to the lever that fixes it.

- **Product-bearing dropdown with its own ranking.** The dropdown shows products ranked by a separate path from the results page. The fix is architectural: let the dropdown suggest the query, and let the same engine that builds the results page rank the products.
- **Curation suppressing what search surfaces.** Autocomplete curation hid a suggestion the results page still ranks well for, so shoppers never reach a product you have. Review the curation brand prompt for over-suppression.
- **Stale suggestion vs live inventory.** The dropdown keeps suggesting a term whose products sold through. The fix lives in suggestion freshness and the inventory signal, not in ranking rules.
- **Governance on one surface only.** A Search Instruction or ranking rule shapes the results page but not the dropdown, which has its own brand prompt. Decide whether the divergence is intentional, and align the two prompts if it isn't.

The test is simple. If the dropdown promised something the results page couldn't keep, that's a bug to fix. If the two just differ in depth, a short dropdown and a full results page, that's correct by design.

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## Run it again after you fix it

1. **Diagnose.** Run the five tests, fill the scorecard, name each cause.
  2. **Fix at the right layer.** Match each cause to its lever above. Don't edit the results page to fix a dropdown problem.
  3. **Re-run.** Run the same five queries and watch the disagreement count fall.
  4. **Re-check after every launch.** New collections and sell-through reintroduce drift, so make the five-query pass a recurring habit, not a one-time cleanup.
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## Want us to run this live on your catalog?

We'll take your own five queries, run them on a search engine built for Shopify Plus, where the chosen suggestion executes through the same engine that ranks every results page, and show you what each one returns. 30 minutes, your terms, your products.

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*Built by the Layers team. Enterprise search and merchandising for Shopify Plus. Last updated June 2026.*