



NUDGE OR SLUDGE?

AI Consumer Audit | Student Activity Packet

Name	Date	Service Auditing
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YOUR MISSION
Use AI to investigate how a company makes it possible or difficult to cancel a subscription. Treat the AI response as a set of claims. Verify important details, score the friction, and make a verdict supported by evidence.

THE BIG QUESTION
When does a company's attempt to retain a customer become unfair manipulation?

NUDGE A design choice that makes a helpful action easier without removing options.	SLUDGE Unnecessary friction that makes a process harder in a way that mainly benefits the company.	LEGITIMATE FRICTION A necessary step that protects, informs, or confirms the consumer's choice.
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1 CHOOSE	2 PROMPT	3 VERIFY	4 AUDIT	5 VERDICT
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Choose Your Service

Choose one teacher approved subscription or membership service. Do not log in, use a real account, enter personal information, or cancel anything.

☐ Streaming or media subscription	☐ Shopping or delivery membership
☐ Gaming subscription	☐ Software or app subscription
☐ Gym or fitness membership	☐ Another teacher approved service

My service: _____

What do you predict might make cancellation difficult?	What would make a step unfair rather than merely annoying?
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Prompt AI to Map the Cancellation Process

AI REALITY CHECK

AI produces claims, not proof. It may be wrong, outdated, or overly confident. Record uncertainty and verify any detail that could change your verdict.

STARTER PROMPT | COPY, PASTE, AND REPLACE [SERVICE NAME]

I'm doing a consumer research activity for school. Describe the online cancellation process for [SERVICE NAME] using the most current information available to you.

For each step:

1. Explain what the consumer may need to do.
2. Identify confirmation screens, delays, required information, or offers to stay.
3. Label the detail as SOURCE CITED, COMMONLY REPORTED, or UNCERTAIN.
4. If you cite a source, name it and give the date. Do not invent links, buttons, screens, or policies.
5. Tell me which detail would be most important to verify using a current company source.

If you cannot confirm current information, say so. At the end, list assumptions or details that may have changed.

FOLLOW UP PROMPT | USE WHEN A STEP IS VAGUE

Go deeper on step [NUMBER]. Separate what you can support from what is uncertain. Do not guess. Tell me which detail would be most important to verify before I classify or score the step.

Capture AI Claims Record the response in your own words. An AI evidence label does not count as verification.

#	What AI claims happens	AI evidence label	What needs verification?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			



AI Reality Check: Verify One Consequential Claim

Choose one claim that could change your final rating. Verify it using a current official help page, teacher provided evidence, a recent screenshot, or another reliable source.

AI claim to verify	
Why this claim matters	
Source used	
Verification status	☐ Verified ☐ Partially verified ☐ Unverified ☐ Contradicted
What did the evidence confirm, complicate, or contradict?	



Complete Your Audit: You Judge First

BEFORE ASKING AI TO CLASSIFY

Use your own reasoning to classify and score every step. AI can give a second opinion later, but your first judgment must be your own.

0	1	2	3
Legitimate / fair nudge	Questionable	Moderate sludge	Heavy sludge

Step or AI claim	Evidence status	My classification	Who benefits and why?	Score

COMPARE AND CALCULATE

Total friction points: _____	Number of verified or scorable steps: _____
Average friction score	Total points ÷ Number of steps = _____

Sludge Rating Scale

Score	What it means	Example
3 Heavy sludge	Friction mainly benefits the company and has little or no consumer purpose.	Repeated screens or required fields that block cancellation.
2 Moderate sludge	The step creates meaningful friction, but part of it may be justified.	A pause offer that requires several clicks to dismiss.
1 Questionable	Reasonable people could disagree. The purpose and beneficiary are mixed.	A processing delay or indirect menu label.
0 Legitimate / fair nudge	The step protects, informs, or clearly supports an informed choice.	A clear confirmation that shows the exact end date.

These rating bands support discussion, not a scientific measure. Evidence and reasoning matter more than the label.

0.00 to 0.49 Consumer First	0.50 to 1.24 Shady-ish	1.25 to 2.24 Classic Sludge	2.25 to 3.00 Hall of Shame
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BIAS CLUES

Status quo bias: preferring the current option. Loss aversion: losses feel stronger than equal gains. Default effect: a preselected choice shapes action. Present bias: an immediate reward can outweigh a future cost.



Ask AI for a Second Opinion

AI SECOND OPINION PROMPT | USE ONLY AFTER YOUR OWN AUDIT

Here is my completed audit of the cancellation process for [SERVICE NAME]. Review my classifications and scores as a second opinion.

For each disputed step:

1. Explain whether it is sludge, a nudge, or legitimate friction.
2. Identify any cognitive bias that may be involved.
3. State who benefits and why.
4. Flag any claim that still needs verification.

Do not replace my judgment or make the final verdict for me. Clearly explain where your interpretation differs from mine.

Where AI and I agreed	Where AI and I disagreed
What AI overlooked or oversimplified	What still needs verification

VERDICT AND REDESIGN

Choose an overall rating

☐ Consumer First	☐ Shady-ish	☐ Classic Sludge	☐ Hall of Shame
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1. Strongest example of sludge, who benefits, and any cognitive bias involved	2. Strongest example of legitimate friction or a fair nudge
3. Consequential AI claim I verified and how the evidence affected my analysis	4. Where I agreed or disagreed with AI's second opinion and why

YOUR FINAL CLAIM | Write a 2 to 3 sentence verdict that names the service, cites your strongest evidence, and acknowledges any uncertainty that remains.

Optional Extension: Redesign the Worst Step

REDESIGN PROMPT

Redesign step [NUMBER] of [SERVICE NAME]'s cancellation flow to remove unnecessary friction while still allowing the company to communicate honest options. Use transparent and equally visible choices. Do not hide or delay the cancellation choice. Explain how the redesign preserves informed choice and whether any cognitive bias is still present.

Sketch or describe the improved screen. Show the message, the choices or buttons, and what makes the design fairer.

AI helped me investigate the problem by... _____

The AI claim I most needed to question or verify was...

The thinking and judgment that remained my responsibility was...
