

DESIGN A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE STORY

Start with the population and its variants. If you start with the easiest evidence, the sample has already chosen itself.

PRACTITIONER POSITION

A defensible sample story identifies the intended population, reconciles it to authoritative sources, describes meaningful variants, records the assessor's selection logic and size rationale, and preserves the relationship between selected items, test results, exceptions, and the population-level conclusion.

THE FIELD PATTERN

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

An environment includes multiple business units, cloud accounts, operating systems, administrative models, acquired platforms, and change windows. The evidence team selects five familiar systems with complete records. Every selected item passes. The unanswered question is whether those five items represent the variation that exists across the full population.

SIGNALS DETECTED

WHAT SHOULD MAKE YOU STOP

- The sample list exists before the authoritative population is reconciled.
- Selections cluster around systems with the easiest owners or cleanest evidence.
- Locations, technologies, administrative models, time periods, and exceptions are not evaluated as possible variants.
- The rationale states a percentage but not why the selections represent the population.
- Failed or unavailable items are replaced without preserving the reason and impact.

WHY IT MATTERS

THE COST OF LEAVING IT UNEXPLAINED

PCI SSC states that assessors may test a representative sample or test the entire population. Sampling is optional, and when it is used the selection must represent the variants in the population and be sufficient to support assurance across that population. The assessor's methodology and judgment remain central.

This playbook does not prescribe sample sizes or require sampling. It prepares a coherent population and variation story so selection decisions can be made and explained without allowing evidence convenience to

define the assessment population.

QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS THAT EXPOSE THE WACK

01 What is the complete population for this testing procedure, and which authoritative sources establish it?

02 Which differences could materially change how the control is implemented or evidenced?

03 How does each selected item represent those variants, boundaries, and relevant periods?

04 What does a failure, unavailable item, or newly discovered variant do to the selection and conclusion?

THE CLUSTER OF WACK

FIND / MAP / EXPLAIN / REDUCE / PROVE

ESCAPE THE WACK

01 / FIND

Define and reconcile the intended population before identifying preferred evidence or candidate selections.

02 / MAP

Group meaningful variants and connect every selected item to the characteristics it represents.

03 / EXPLAIN

Record the assessor's methodology, selection logic, size rationale, substitutions, limitations, and exceptions.

04 / REDUCE

Standardize implementations and evidence where appropriate so real variation is visible instead of hidden by naming inconsistency.

05 / PROVE

Retain the population snapshot, variant analysis, selections, test results, failures, and conclusion as one reviewable package.

THE FIELD LAW

THE LINE WORTH REMEMBERING

A SAMPLE CANNOT REPRESENT A POPULATION NOBODY HAS DEFINED.

Which meaningful variant is missing from your cleanest sample set?

TECHNICAL GROUNDING

START WITH THE SOURCE MATERIAL

These references ground the practitioner interpretation. They do not turn the metaphor or method into official PCI DSS terminology.

- WACK-SOURCE-0001 / PCI DSS v4.0.1 / PCI Security Standards Council / [Open source](#)

- WACK-SOURCE-0003 / Is sampling allowed in PCI DSS v4.x? / PCI Security Standards Council / [Open source](#)

AUTHORITY CLASSIFICATION / PCI_SSC_SOURCE / PRACTITIONER_POSITION / PRACTITIONER_METHOD / AI_ASSISTED

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