Third-Party Logistics Provider Grading — Requirements

The 3PL Grade Standard

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3PL Grade Standard

OPEN STANDARD FOR THIRD-PARTY LOGISTICS GRADING

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Third-Party Logistics Provider Grading — Requirements

The 3PL Grade Standard v1.0 · Full normative text

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>
> The words **must**, **must not** and **may** are normative. Check IDs (C1…T4), point values, multipliers, bands, caps and red flags in this section are the official rules. Where any table on the website differs from `standard.json`, `standard.json` governs.

3.1 Purpose and principles

Normative

The 3PL Grade tells a buyer, in one line, how well-evidenced a provider's ability is to deliver a specific logistics capability at a specific facility.

Principle	What it means in practice
Evidence over claims	Each check is weighted by how its evidence was obtained (§3.7). Marketing claims alone cannot earn a grade.

Principle	What it means in practice
Capability and facility specific	A provider can be A in Ecommerce Fulfillment at one site and ungraded in Cold Chain at another.
Simple enough to apply consistently	6 pillars, 29 checks, 3 answers per check (Full / Partial / None) and 4 evidence levels. A trained grader with AI assistance can grade one capability at one facility from a prepared evidence pack in about 60-90 minutes (planning estimate, to be confirmed in pilot).
No public shaming	Low or thin evidence shows as “Not graded - insufficient evidence”, never as D or F (§3.10).
Payment never buys points	§3.11. One sentence, used everywhere.
Dated and expiring	Every grade shows its month and year and expires after 12 months (§3.13).
Contestable	Providers see the grade before publication and can dispute it with fixed response times (§3.14).

3.2 Definitions

Normative

Term	Definition
Provider	A company offering third-party warehousing, fulfillment or related logistics services to other businesses.
Facility	One physical site operated by the provider (or under its day-to-day operational control), identified by street address.
Capability	A service family defined in §3.4 (e.g., ECOM).
Grade record	The result of grading one provider x one facility x one capability under one Standard version.
Check	One of the 29 evidence questions in §3.6.
Achievement	How fully the check is met: Full = 1.0, Partial = 0.5, None = 0 (S1 uses tiers).
Evidence level	IV, DP, PC or NONE, with multipliers 1.0 / 0.75 / 0.4 / 0 (§3.7).
Applicable	A check that applies to the capability. Non-applicable checks are excluded and the pillar is re-scaled (§3.8).
Evidence coverage	Share of applicable points backed by IV or DP evidence (§3.9).
Grader / Reviewer	Trained staff who score a record / a second person who approves it. Neither may see the provider’s payment status (§3.11).

3.3 Eligibility

Normative

A grade record may be created when **all** of the following are true:

1. The facility is in the United States (v1.0 scope).
2. The provider has performed the capability at that facility for at least 6 months.

3. The provider serves third-party clients (in-house distribution centers are out of scope).
4. No red flag in §3.9.3 is active.

Providers do not have to apply or pay to be graded. 3PLGrade.com may open a record from public evidence; such records usually remain "Not graded - insufficient evidence" until the provider supplies documents or verification (see the worked example, §5.4).

3.4 Capabilities in v1.0

Normative

Eight capabilities launch in v1.0. Planned for later versions (not gradable in v1.0): Freight & Transportation Management, Bonded Warehousing & FTZ, Oversized & White-Glove, Cross-Border Fulfillment.

Capabilities and capability-specific requirements

Code	Capability	C2 requirements	O6 control	F2 infrastructure	F4 integrations
ECOM	Ecommerce & DTC Fulfillment	None (C2 = N/A)	Peak-season performance: on-time ship ≥97% during the most recent Nov-Dec peak, documented	Pack stations; daily pickups by ≥2 parcel carriers; same-day ship cutoff at or after 12:00 local; dimensional/weight capture	Native or certified connector to ≥1 storefront platform (e.g., Shopify, BigCommerce, WooCommerce, Adobe Commerce) and ≥1 marketplace
B2B	B2B & Retail Distribution	None (C2 = N/A)	Retailer compliance: chargebacks/deductions ≤1% of shipped invoice value over trailing 12 months, documented	Dock doors with scheduled LTL/TL appointments; pallet build/wrap; GS1-128 carton/pallet labeling	EDI 940/945/856 (or API equivalent) and experience with ≥1 retailer routing guide
FBA	Amazon FBA & Marketplace Prep	None (C2 = N/A)	Amazon inbound defects: prep/labeling non-compliance ≤1% of units over trailing 6 months, documented	FNSKU labeling; poly-bag/bubble wrap; case-pack and carton labeling; carton forwarding	Documented Amazon Seller Central / SP-API workflow; optional Walmart WFS prep
COLD	Cold Chain & Food-Grade — Regulated: verified credentials required	Facility holds a current GFSI-benchmarked certificate in a storage & distribution scope (e.g., SQF, BRCGS Storage & Distribution) AND FDA food facility registration (document accepted; FDA registration is not public)	Continuous temperature monitoring with alarms; excursion log reviewed with corrective actions; no unresolved excursion in 90 days	Temperature zones as offered (refrigerated 2-8 C and/or frozen ≤ -18 C); backup power; temperature mapping within 24 months; pest control program	Lot and expiry tracking with FEFO allocation in the WMS; temperature data visible to clients

Code	Capability	C2 requirements	O6 control	F2 infrastructure	F4 integrations
HAZ	Hazmat & Dangerous Goods — Regulated: verified credentials required	PHMSA hazmat registration current where the provider's activities require it (grader records the basis) AND documented DOT hazmat training for handling staff (49 CFR 172.704)	DG segregation by hazard class verified; incident log shows no reportable incident in 24 months	Segregated/compatible storage; fire protection appropriate to stored classes; spill response kits; DG-trained shipping staff	WMS records UN number and hazard class; carrier DG accounts; shipping-paper generation
PHARMA	Pharma, Medical & Healthcare — Regulated: verified credentials required	For Rx drug 3PL services: facility appears in FDA's Wholesale Distributor & 3PL licensure reporting database AND holds required state license(s). For medical devices: FDA establishment registration where applicable	DSCSA-compliant chain of custody / product tracing; controlled-room-temperature monitoring; deviations and CAPA closed within 30 days	Temperature-mapped storage (e.g., 20-25 C controlled room temperature); quarantine and returns cage; secure high-value area; restricted access	Lot/serial tracking; EDI/ASN with trading partners; recall management workflow
RET	Returns & Reverse Logistics	None (C2 = N/A)	Returns processing: median ≤3 business days from receipt to disposition, documented	Dedicated inspection/grading area; refurbishment/repackaging; disposition channels (restock, liquidate, recycle, destroy with certificate)	Returns platform or RMA integration; client-visible disposition reporting
KIT	Kitting & Value-Added Services	None (C2 = N/A)	Kitting accuracy ≥99.5% with documented QC sampling over trailing 6 months	Dedicated assembly lines; shrink-wrap/bagging; labeling and printing equipment	Bill-of-materials / kit management in the WMS; work-order tracking visible to clients

Rendered from standard.json; where they differ, the JSON governs.

3.5 Pillars and points

Normative

Six pillars, 100 points

Pillar	Name	Points	Checks	What it answers
P1	Verified Credentials & Compliance	20	C1 (3), C2 (6), C3 (4), C4 (2), C5 (3), C6 (2)	Is the provider legitimate, licensed, insured and compliant for this capability?
P2	Operational Proof	25	O1 (6), O2 (6), O3 (4), O4 (4), O5 (3), O6 (2)	Can it prove it performs, with real KPI data?
P3	Capability Fit	20	F1 (4), F2 (5), F3 (4), F4 (4), F5 (3)	Does this facility have what this capability needs?
P4	Customer Evidence	15	E1 (6), E2 (3), E3 (3), E4 (3)	Do real customers confirm it?
P5	Business Stability	10	S1 (3), S2 (2), S3 (2), S4 (3)	Will it still be there next year?
P6	Transparency & Freshness	10	T1 (3), T2 (3), T3 (2), T4 (2)	Is it clear on price and terms, and is the evidence current?

3.6 Checks

Normative

Each check has a maximum point value. Points earned = **max points x achievement x evidence multiplier**.

Checks, achievement rules and independent-verification sources

ID	Pillar	Points	Check	Full / Partial rule	Typical IV source
C1	P1	3	Legal entity active and matches trading name	Full: entity active in state registry, name/DBA matches. Partial: active but name mismatch unexplained.	State Secretary of State business search
C2	P1	6	Capability-required licenses / registrations current	Full: every required item for the capability is current. Partial: required items current but one is pending renewal (<60 days). N/A for capabilities with none.	FDA WDD/3PL database, state boards, PHMSA search, SQFI/BRCGS directories
C3	P1	4	Quality / safety management certification	Full: accredited certificate in scope for the facility (ISO 9001, GFSI scheme, ISO 13485, GDP audit). Partial: documented internal QMS (SOPs, CAPA log) without certification.	IAF CertSearch, SQFI/BRCGS directories, certification body letter
C4	P1	2	Security / trade compliance program	Full: C-TPAT certified, TAPA FSR, or CBP-bonded/FTZ status. Partial: written security program (access control, CCTV retention, background checks).	CBP SVI screenshot shared live, TAPA register, CBP/FTZ records
C5	P1	3	Insurance: warehouse legal liability + general liability	Full: current COI naming both coverages with stated limits. Partial: one coverage only or limits not stated.	COI confirmed with broker by email/phone
C6	P1	2	Clean regulatory record	Full: no OSHA serious/willful citations (36 mo), no FDA warning letters or PHMSA penalties (24 mo) for the facility. Partial: one resolved item with documented corrective action.	OSHA establishment search, FDA warning letters, PHMSA enforcement data
O1	P2	6	Order accuracy	Full: ≥99.5% trailing 6+ months. Partial: ≥99.0%.	Live WMS report observed by grader (timestamped capture)
O2	P2	6	On-time ship / SLA adherence	Full: ≥98% shipped within agreed cutoff. Partial: ≥95%.	Live WMS/OMS report observed by grader
O3	P2	4	Dock-to-stock time	Full: median ≤24 business hours receipt-to-available. Partial: ≤48 hours.	Live WMS report observed by grader
O4	P2	4	Inventory accuracy	Full: cycle-count accuracy ≥99.5%. Partial: ≥99.0%.	Live WMS report or cycle-count log observed by grader
O5	P2	3	Measurement maturity	Full: monthly KPI reports from the WMS for ≥12 months with written metric definitions. Partial: ≥6 months, or no written definitions.	KPI pack observed live
O6	P2	2	Capability-specific operational control	See capability table (e.g., temperature alarm logs, DG segregation, chargeback rate).	Capability-specific record observed live
F1	P3	4	Facility verified	Full: address, square footage, dock doors and operating hours confirmed. Partial: address confirmed only.	Address in 2+ independent sources + imagery + live/virtual walkthrough

ID	Pillar	Points	Check	Full / Partial rule	Typical IV source
F2	P3	5	Capability infrastructure	Full: all infrastructure items in the capability table present. Partial: at least half present.	Walkthrough, equipment list with photos dated <12 mo
F3	P3	4	WMS and client visibility	Full: named WMS with client portal showing real-time inventory and orders. Partial: named WMS, reports by email only.	Live portal demo
F4	P3	4	Integrations for the capability's channels	Full: all integration items in the capability table. Partial: at least one.	Live demo or integration list in vendor marketplace
F5	P3	3	Demonstrated experience in this capability	Full: ≥2 years AND ≥10 active clients in the capability at this facility. Partial: ≥1 year OR ≥3 clients.	Reference calls, client list under NDA
E1	P4	6	Verified customer references	Full: 2+ current clients reached by grader with the standard script. Partial: 1 reference.	Grader call/email with reference (script in Appendix)
E2	P4	3	Case studies with named clients and outcomes	Full: 1+ case study naming the client with quantified results for this capability. Partial: named client, no numbers (or numbers, no name).	Client confirms case study
E3	P4	3	Third-party review signal	Full: ≥10 reviews on recognized platforms, average ≥4.3, no suspicious spikes. Partial: 5-9 reviews or average 4.0-4.29.	Grader views platform directly (counts as independently verified)
E4	P4	3	Client retention	Full: average client tenure ≥3 years or annual logo retention ≥85%. Partial: tenure 2-3 years or retention 70-84%.	Anonymized client tenure list confirmed by one reference
S1	P5	3	Years operating	Tiered: ≥10 years 1.0; 5-9 years 0.75; 2-4 years 0.5; <2 years 0.	State registry formation date / facility opening record
S2	P5	2	Continuity and redundancy	Full: written business-continuity plan (backup power, IT recovery) or a second facility able to absorb volume. Partial: one of the elements.	Plan reviewed live
S3	P5	2	Ownership and leadership transparency	Full: named leadership and ultimate owner/parent disclosed. Partial: leadership named only.	Registry, press releases, LinkedIn cross-check
S4	P5	3	Financial and legal flags	Full: no bankruptcy (5 yr), no material judgments/liens, no pattern of customer suits. Partial: one resolved item, explained.	Bankruptcy, court and lien searches
T1	P6	3	Pricing model transparency	Full: published or standard rate card covering receiving, storage, pick/pack, minimums and account fees. Partial: fee categories listed without rates.	Rate card on website (counts as independently verified when public)
T2	P6	3	Written SLAs with remedies	Full: standard contract has SLAs with credits or remedies. Partial: SLAs without remedies.	Contract template reviewed
T3	P6	2	Evidence recency	Full: ≥80% of evidence items dated within 12 months. Partial: 50-79%.	Computed by grading system
T4	P6	2	Responsiveness and data upkeep	Full: questionnaire answered within 15 business days and profile data current. Partial: answered late or partially.	Computed by grading system

Rendered from standard.json; where they differ, the JSON governs.

3.7 Evidence levels

Normative

Evidence levels and multipliers

Code	Level	Multiplier	Definition
IV	Independently verified	1.00	The grader confirmed the fact directly at the source: issuing registry lookup; certificate confirmed with the issuer or in its public database; a live WMS/portal report observed on screen-share (timestamped capture saved); a reference call; a third-party review platform viewed directly; a public court/bankruptcy/OSHA/FDA record; a live or virtual facility walkthrough.
DP	Document provided	0.75	The provider submitted a document the grader reviewed for authenticity and relevance (certificate PDF, COI, exported KPI report, contract template, policy, equipment list with dated photos) but did not confirm at the source.
PC	Public claim	0.40	The fact is stated by the provider publicly (website, marketing, directory profile, press release) with no supporting document.
NONE	No evidence	0.00	Nothing found or provided.

Rendered from standard.json; where they differ, the JSON governs.

Rules

1. Record the evidence level for every applicable check, even when achievement is None.
2. **Multi-item checks** (C2, F2, F4): achievement is based on the items present; the evidence level is the **lowest** level among the items relied on.
3. **Registry exception:** where no public registry exists for a required item (currently FDA food facility registration under COLD, and DOT hazmat training records under HAZ), a reviewed document (DP) is treated as IV **for that item only**.
4. **Public facts viewed directly count as IV:** a public rate card (T1), a third-party review platform (E3), and public court, OSHA, FDA or registry records are independently verified when the grader views them at the source.
5. Evidence older than 24 months counts as NONE. Evidence 12-24 months old is allowed but lowers T3.
6. Each evidence item stores: type, source, URL or file reference, date of the underlying fact, date checked, and checker ID.
7. **AI assistance** may find sources, extract values and propose achievement and evidence levels with citations. A human grader must confirm every check. AI output alone is never evidence.

3.8 Calculation

Normative

```
for each applicable check c:
    earned(c) = max_points(c) x achievement(c) x multiplier(evidence_level(c))

for each pillar p:
    applicable_max(p) = sum of max_points of applicable checks in p
    pillar_score(p)   = (sum of earned in p) / applicable_max(p) x pillar_points(p)
                        (a pillar with no applicable checks keeps its full points - not used in v1.0)

raw_score   = sum of pillar_score(p) over the six pillars
score       = round_half_up(raw_score)              # integer 0-100
score       = min(score, every cap that applies)     # §3.9.2
status/band = §3.9 and §3.10
```

Store pillar scores to 2 decimals; publish only the integer score, the band and the pillar breakdown.

What the multipliers imply (design property): a provider whose evidence is all documents (DP) can reach at most about 76 (B), because only the system-computed checks T3 and T4 are IV by default. A and A+ require independent verification of the most important facts. A provider with only public claims typically scores 30-45 (Not graded).

3.9 Publication rules

Normative

3.9.1 Minimum evidence coverage

Normative

A grade (letter + number) may be published only if **both**:

- Evidence coverage is at least 50%, where coverage = (applicable max points of checks with evidence IV or DP) / (total applicable max points); and
- Every pillar has at least one applicable check with evidence at PC or better.

Otherwise the status is **Not graded - insufficient evidence**.

3.9.2 Caps

Normative

Publication caps

ID	Condition	Rule
CAP-1	No independently verified operational metric	If none of O1-O4 has evidence level IV, the score is capped at 81 (B).
CAP-2	No independently verified facility	If F1 is not IV, the score is capped at 87 (B+). A and A+ require a verified facility.
CAP-3	No customer verification	If E1 is not IV with full achievement (2+ references), the score is capped at 94 (A). A+ requires verified customers.
CAP-4	Regulated capability without verified credentials	For COLD, HAZ and PHARMA, if C2 is not at full achievement with IV evidence (see the exception in 3.7), the status is Not graded regardless of score.

Rendered from standard.json; where they differ, the JSON governs.

Caps are applied after rounding. A record shows which caps applied (e.g., “Capped at B: no independently verified operational metric”).

3.9.3 Red-flag overrides

Normative

Red-flag overrides

ID	Red flag	Effect
RF-1	Required license or registration lapsed, suspended or revoked	Hold
RF-2	Open regulatory enforcement at the facility: FDA warning letter (24 mo, unresolved), OSHA willful or repeat citation (36 mo), PHMSA civil penalty (24 mo, unresolved)	Hold
RF-3	Bankruptcy filing, receivership or assignment for benefit of creditors (active or within 24 mo)	Hold
RF-4	Facility closed, sold, or no longer operated by the provider	Withdrawn
RF-5	Falsified, altered or misattributed evidence	Withdrawn + 24-month ineligibility
RF-6	Two or more active lawsuits by customers alleging loss or non-performance, or one alleging fraud, filed within 24 months	Hold

Rendered from standard.json; where they differ, the JSON governs.

- **Hold:** no grade is displayed; the record shows “Grade on hold - under review since [date]”. Review must finish within 30 days, ending in reinstatement, re-grade, or withdrawal.
- **Withdrawn:** the record and seal are removed; under RF-5 the provider is ineligible for 24 months.
- Graders must run the red-flag searches (registries, OSHA, FDA, PHMSA, bankruptcy, court) for every record and at least every 6 months during validity.

3.9.4 Statuses

Normative

Grade-record statuses

Status	Shown publicly as
graded	Letter + number + capability + facility + "Graded by 3PLGrade · MON YYYY"
not_graded	Not graded - insufficient evidence
hold	Grade on hold - under review since [date]
under_appeal	Current grade stays visible with a note "Under appeal" (or "Not graded" if the appeal concerns the first publication)
expired	Grade expired [date] for 30 days, then removed
withdrawn	Not shown

Rendered from standard.json; where they differ, the JSON governs.

3.10 Grade bands

Normative

Grade bands

Band	Score	Public display
A+	95-100	Letter + number, e.g. "A+ · 100"
A	88-94	Letter + number, e.g. "A · 94"
B+	82-87	Letter + number, e.g. "B+ · 87"
B	75-81	Letter + number, e.g. "B · 81"
C+	68-74	Letter + number, e.g. "C+ · 74"
C	60-67	Letter + number, e.g. "C · 67"

Band	Score	Public display
Not graded	0-59	"Not graded - insufficient evidence" (no number shown publicly)

Rendered from standard.json; where they differ, the JSON governs.

Why there is no D or F. Because the 3PL Grade weights evidence, a low score usually means “we could not verify enough”, not “this provider performs badly”. Publishing D or F would mislabel providers whose operations may be fine, invite disputes and legal risk, and discourage providers from participating. The full score is always shared privately with the provider, with a list of missing evidence.

3.11 Independence and payment policy

Normative

The one sentence (use verbatim everywhere payment is mentioned):

> **“Payment can buy verification speed and profile services. It never buys points, grades, rankings, or a place on a shortlist.”**

Supporting rules:

1. **Free standard verification:** every eligible provider can have its evidence independently verified at no charge in the standard queue (target: within 60 business days of a complete evidence pack). Paid expedited verification changes only *when* verification happens, never the rules applied. (This is what keeps the policy true: IV evidence raises scores, so verification itself must not be pay-only.)
2. **Blind grading:** graders and reviewers do not see whether a provider pays for anything. Sales staff cannot create, edit, or approve grade records.
3. **Same rules for all:** paying and non-paying providers are graded with the same checks, multipliers, caps and timelines (except expedited queue position).
4. **Featured placements** on 3PLGrade.com are paid, always labelled “Featured”, shown outside ranked lists, and never change a grade.
5. **Conflicts of interest:** graders, reviewers and council members must disclose financial or employment ties to any provider and recuse from

records involving it. Disclosures are kept on file; council disclosures are published.

6. **Audit trail:** every change to a grade record is logged (who, when, what, why) and retained for at least 3 years.

3.12 Grading process and quality control

Normative

Step	Who	Output	Target time
1. Open record	System / grader	Provider, facility, capability; eligibility confirmed	-
2. Public sweep (AI-assisted)	Grader	Registry, OSHA/FDA/PHMSA, court and review searches with citations	15-20 min
3. Provider evidence pack	Provider	Questionnaire + documents (template on .com)	Provider-paced
4. Verification session	Grader + provider	30-45 min screen-share: WMS KPI reports, client portal demo, virtual walkthrough; reference contacts collected	45 min
5. Reference calls	Grader	Standard script (§3.17), 2+ references	2 x 15 min
6. Score	Grader	Checks, evidence levels, caps, red flags; draft record	15 min
7. Review	Reviewer	Approves 100% of A/A+ and all COLD/HAZ/PHARMA records; 10% random sample of others	10 min
8. Provider preview	Provider	Sees draft grade + missing-evidence list; 10 business days to respond	10 business days
9. Publish	System	Grade record JSON, seal, verification URL on .com	-

Calibration: each month, 5 records are graded independently by two graders. A difference over 3 points on any record triggers rubric clarification in the next PATCH or MINOR release.

3.13 Validity and re-grading

Normative

- A grade is valid for **12 months** from the grade date shown on the seal.
- **Re-grade triggers** (any one starts a re-grade within 30 days): facility relocation or major expansion; change of ownership or control; change in a required license; a red flag; material credible complaint; provider request with new evidence (at most once per quarter); a

MAJOR version change of the Standard (re-grade at the next renewal, no later than 12 months after the new version takes effect).

- A grade stays under the Standard version it was issued with until it is re-graded.

3.14 Disputes and appeals

Normative

Stage	Who can file	Window	Response SLA
Pre-publication response	Provider	10 business days after preview	Grader replies within 5 business days
Dispute (published grade)	Provider	Within 30 days of publication or of a change	Acknowledged within 2 business days; decision within 15 business days
Appeal	Provider	Within 15 business days of the dispute decision	Decided within 30 days by a reviewer not involved in the original record; a summary is shared with the Advisory Council each quarter
Accuracy report	Anyone (buyers, public)	Any time	Acknowledged within 2 business days; triaged within 10 business days

Disputes must cite a specific check ID and supply evidence. Disputes can change achievement or evidence levels only; they cannot change rules. Outcomes are recorded in the grade record's history.

3.15 Seal and citation rules

Normative

- Only grade records published by 3PLGrade.com under this Standard may use the 3PL Grade seal or the phrase "3PL Grade" for a specific provider.
- The seal must show letter, number, capability, "Graded by 3PLGrade · MON YYYY", and link to the record's verification URL (`https://www.3plgrade.com/verify/[GRADE_ID]` - placeholder path on .com).
- Providers must not display an expired, withdrawn or on-hold grade, or present a self-assessment estimate as a grade.
- Recommended citation: see §10.4.

3.16 Versioning, changelog and review

Normative

Version change	Examples	Effect on existing grades
MAJOR (2.0)	Pillar weights, check points, multipliers, bands, caps	Re-grade at next renewal (within 12 months)
MINOR (1.1)	New capability, new accepted evidence source, threshold clarification that does not move points	None; new records use the new version
PATCH (1.0.1)	Wording, typos, examples	None

- Every version is published at a permanent URL (`/standard/v1-0`, `/standard/v1-1`…) and never edited after publication except for PATCH notes.
- The changelog records date, version, change, reason and whether council review occurred.
- **Annual review:** each Q4 the Advisory Council reviews the Standard. Proposed changes are published for a 30-day public comment period before adoption.

3.17 Appendix: reference call script (E1)

Informative

Ask the reference (a current client using this capability at this facility for at least 6 months):

1. Confirm you are a current client, which services you use, and since when.
2. On a 1-5 scale, how accurate are your orders? Any recurring problems?
3. How reliably do they meet the agreed ship cutoffs and SLAs?
4. How do they handle problems (communication, credits, root-cause fixes)?
5. Would you choose them again for this service? Why or why not?

Record date, reference role (not name in public output), answers and the grader. A reference that cannot confirm it is a current client does not count.

▼ Worked example — fictional provider, full calculation

“Example Fulfillment Co.” - Reno, NV - Capability: ECOM (Ecommerce & DTC Fulfillment). This provider, its data and its sources are **invented for illustration**. Use this example unchanged in the website’s Standard page and as the reference unit test.

5.1 Check-by-check

Fictional worked example — checks

Check	Max	Achievement	Evidence	Points earned	Note
C1	3	1	IV	3	Active in Nevada registry; DBA matches
C2	6	N/A	-	-	Not applicable to ECOM (excluded from P1)
C3	4	0.5	DP	1.5	Internal QMS binder (SOPs, CAPA log); no ISO certificate
C4	2	0	NONE	0	No security program evidence
C5	3	1	DP	2.25	COI with both coverages and limits; broker not yet contacted
C6	2	1	IV	2	OSHA, FDA, PHMSA searches clean
O1	6	1	IV	6	99.7% (12 mo), WMS report observed on screen-share
O2	6	1	DP	4.5	98.6% from exported KPI pack
O3	4	0.5	DP	1.5	Median 36 h from exported KPI pack
O4	4	1	DP	3	99.6% cycle-count accuracy, exported log
O5	3	1	DP	2.25	12 monthly KPI reports with definitions
O6	2	0.5	PC	0.4	Website claims 'peak-ready'; peak data not provided
F1	4	1	IV	4	Virtual walkthrough + 2 address sources + imagery
F2	5	1	DP	3.75	Equipment list with dated photos
F3	4	1	IV	4	Live client-portal demo
F4	4	1	DP	3	Integration list (Shopify, Amazon) document
F5	3	1	DP	2.25	Client count list under NDA (14 ECOM clients, 4 yrs)
E1	6	1	IV	6	2 reference calls completed
E2	3	0.5	PC	0.6	Named client on website, no numbers
E3	3	1	IV	3	Google Business Profile: 23 reviews, 4.5 avg
E4	3	1	DP	2.25	Average tenure 3.4 years (anonymized list)
S1	3	0.75	IV	2.25	Formed 2019 (7 years) per registry
S2	2	0.5	DP	0.75	Backup generator; no written IT recovery plan
S3	2	1	PC	0.8	Leadership and owner named on website only
S4	3	1	IV	3	Bankruptcy/court/lien searches clean
T1	3	1	DP	2.25	Standard rate card provided (not public)
T2	3	0.5	DP	1.125	SLAs in contract, no credits
T3	2	1	IV	2	88% of evidence dated within 12 months

Check	Max	Achievement	Evidence	Points earned	Note
T4	2	1	IV	2	Answered in 9 business days

Rules from standard.json; inputs and illustrative notes from the supplied worked example.

5.2 Result

Fictional worked example — pillars

Pillar	Applicable max	Earned	Pillar points	Pillar score = earned / applicable x points
P1 Verified Credentials & Compliance	14	8.75	20	12.5
P2 Operational Proof	25	17.65	25	17.65
P3 Capability Fit	20	17	20	17
P4 Customer Evidence	15	11.85	15	11.85
P5 Business Stability	10	6.8	10	6.8
P6 Transparency & Freshness	10	7.375	10	7.375
Total (raw)	94		100	73.175

Rules from standard.json; inputs and illustrative notes from the supplied worked example.

- Raw score 73.175 -> rounded **73.**
- Coverage: 85 of 94 applicable points backed by IV or DP = **90%** (passes the 50% minimum); every pillar has evidence.
- Caps: CAP-1 not triggered (O1 is IV); CAP-2 not triggered (F1 is IV); CAP-3 not relevant below 95. No red flags.
- **Result: 3PL Grade C+ · 73 · Ecommerce & DTC Fulfillment · Reno, NV · Graded by 3PLGrade · [MON YYYY] · Standard v1.0**

5.3 How the same provider improves (scenarios)

Fictional worked example — scenarios

Scenario	What changes vs 5.1	Score	Result
A. As graded (5.1)	-	73	C+
B. Quick wins	O2, O4, O5 observed live (IV); COI confirmed with broker (C5 IV); case study with numbers (E2 full, DP)	79	B
C. Fully verified	B plus: walkthrough confirms F2; live integration demo (F4); experience confirmed by references (F5, E4); public rate card (T1); ISO 9001 found in IAF CertSearch (C3); O3 median 20 h and O6 peak report observed; client-confirmed case study; SLA credits; written BCP	95	A+

Scenario	What changes vs 5.1	Score	Result
D. Public information only	Provider does not participate; only registries, searches, reviews and website claims	33	Not graded - insufficient evidence (coverage 21%)

Rules from standard.json; inputs and illustrative notes from the supplied worked example.

Takeaway for site copy: better evidence, not better marketing, moves a grade. A and A+ are only reachable when the key facts are independently verified. Most providers who publish only marketing claims will show “Not graded - insufficient evidence”; the site must explain this neutrally (“not yet graded” is not a negative finding).

CITE THIS DOCUMENT

3PL Grade Standard, Version 1.0 (3PLGS 1:2026). [LEGAL ENTITY NAME], 2026. https://www.3plgrade.org/standard/v1-0
