

WHAT IF I MISS SOMETHING?

A safer way to think about the fear underneath every exam

You cannot build a career around a promise that you will never miss anything. You can build a process that makes missing information harder to ignore.



THIS FEAR IS NOT RIDICULOUS. IT IS ALSO NOT A PLAN.

Many graduating dentists are less afraid of what they know they do not know than of what they might fail to notice at all.

That fear can make you overcheck everything, rush toward certainty, overdiagnose to protect yourself, or avoid a decision you are responsible for making. None of those reactions automatically makes the patient safer.

The answer is not perfect certainty. It is a process you do not abandon when the schedule is loud.

WHAT THIS RESOURCE WILL NOT DO

It will not give you a complete clinical, legal, or workplace protocol. It will help you recognize the decision in front of you, identify the information or support that is missing, and choose a safer next step without pretending certainty.

DO NOT CONFUSE INCOMPLETE INFORMATION WITH A COMPLETE EXAM

The quality of the conclusion cannot exceed the quality of the information supporting it.

1

THE IMAGE

A non-diagnostic image is not evidence that the area is fine. It is evidence that the image cannot answer the question.

2

THE HISTORY

If the history is unclear, clarification is part of the exam—not an optional extra.

3

THE LIMIT

If you cannot adequately see or assess an area, do not quietly treat it as evaluated.

4

THE MISMATCH

When symptoms, records, and findings do not agree, the disagreement deserves attention before the conclusion does.

5

THE RECORD

A limitation that affects your decision belongs in the record, along with the plan for resolving it.

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THE EXAM

Ask questions that expose the gap before reassurance covers it.

- ☐ What evidence am I actually relying on?

- ☐ What could I not see, verify, or complete today?

- ☐ Do the available records support the conclusion—or am I filling in a gap?

- ☐ Is there one finding that does not fit the rest of the picture?

- ☐ Does anything need another image, appointment, consultation, or referral before I decide?

- ☐ Could I clearly explain my reasoning and limitations later without rewriting the story in hindsight?

A MISS IS NOT PREVENTED BY PRETENDING CERTAINTY

1

RESPECT THE EVIDENCE

Do not ask weak information to support a strong conclusion.

2

NAME THE LIMIT

If an area was not adequately assessed, make the limitation visible instead of mentally erasing it.

3

PROTECT THE PROCESS

Time pressure should not convert an unanswered question into a confident answer.

**The answer is not perfect certainty. It is a process you do not abandon
when the schedule is loud.**

A short guide can give you language and a place to start. It cannot see your schedule, hear your conversations, or weigh the trade-offs in your position. Without context, even good advice stays generic.

For a deeper dive, explore the New DDS Unfiltered Digital Library or work directly with Dr. K.

NewDDSUnfiltered.com

Professional note: This guide is not a diagnostic checklist. It does not replace patient-specific examination, clinical judgment, consultation, documentation requirements, or applicable standards of care.