Data Tides
The DEPTH model



AI can build a Power BI report in minutes. If we publish it, we own the design we put in front of people.

DEPTH looks at five layers of every report:
D: Dress: colour and branding
E: Elements: visuals and layout
P: Patterns: contrast, typography and design systems
T: Trust: hierarchy, chart honesty, assistive technology and testing
H: Humans: users, accessibility, interaction and navigation

Like an iceberg, Dress and Elements sit above the water, where people notice them first. Below are the decisions that make a report work for real people.

Use this checklist to move up and down the layers as you design, test and get feedback.

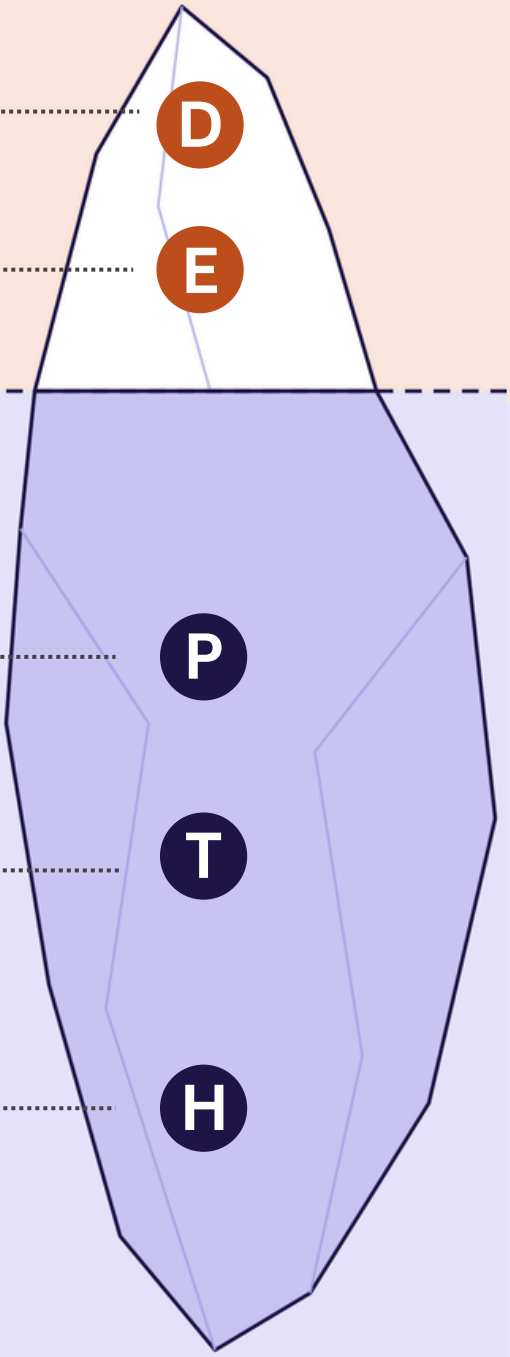
From the article “AI Builds It, You Own It” at data-tides.com

Data Tides
The DEPTH model

WHAT PEOPLE SEE

D: DRESS (COLOUR & BRANDING)
Does it look on-brand and consistent?

E: ELEMENTS (VISUALS & LAYOUT)
Does every visual earn its place?



WHAT PEOPLE EXPERIENCE

P: PATTERNS
Can everyone read and tell it apart?

T: TRUST
Does it give an honest, clear message?

H: HUMANS
Does it work for the people who use it?

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Above the water: what people see

D: DRESS · COLOUR & BRANDING

☐ **The report uses the organisation's agreed palette and theme**


Use a Power BI theme file (JSON) rather than formatting visuals one by one. It's faster, and the colours stay consistent when someone else edits the report.

☐ **Colours mean the same thing on every page**


If "Actual" is blue on page 1, it should be blue everywhere. Set fixed data colours for key categories. If AI built the page, check it applied the palette consistently.

☐ **Colour is used with purpose, not as decoration**


Start with neutral greys and add colour only to highlight what matters. If everything is bright, nothing stands out.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Above the water: what people see

E: ELEMENTS · VISUALS & LAYOUT

☐ **Visuals are aligned, evenly spaced and consistently sized**


Use View > Snap to grid and the Align and Distribute options in the Format ribbon. Keep the same gap (e.g. 16px) between all visuals.

☐ **Related items are grouped together**


Use white space or a subtle background shape to group visuals that answer the same question. Avoid heavy borders around everything.

☐ **Each page is uncluttered**


Aim for no more than 6–7 visuals per page. If a visual doesn't help answer the page's main question, move it to a drill-through or remove it.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Above the water: what people see

E: ELEMENTS · VISUALS & LAYOUT

☐ **No visual repeats information shown elsewhere**

AI often shows a total in a KPI card, then again in a chart. Every visual, including the ones AI suggests, needs a reason to be there.

☐ **Each chart answers a specific question**

Try writing the question as the chart title. If we can't, the chart may not need to be there.

☐ **The chart type suits the data and the comparison**

Bars for comparing categories, lines for trends over time, tables for exact values. Avoid pie charts with more than 3–4 slices.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

P: PATTERNS

P1 · COLOUR & CONTRAST

- [ ] **Text contrast is at least 4.5:1 (3:1 for large text)**

Large text means 18pt or above, or 14pt bold. Check pairs with the PBIX A11y Colour Contrast Checker

- [ ] **Meaningful graphics reach at least 3:1 against background and neighbouring colours**

This covers lines, bars, icons and slicer borders. Pale pastels on a white background are the most common failure.

- [ ] **Information isn't shown by colour alone**

Add data labels, direct legend labels, icons or patterns. A quick test: print the page in greyscale. Can we still read it?

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

P: PATTERNS

P2 · TYPOGRAPHY & READABILITY

- [ ] **Font size is legible (e.g. titles 28–32pt, body 14–16pt)**



We can use 28–32pt for titles, 14–16pt for body text and 12–14pt for labels. Increase font size proportionally to your canvas. Use PBIX A11y Minimum Font Size Calculator

- [ ] **Text is readable on the smallest screen people use**



Open the report on a 13" laptop at 100% zoom, not just on a large monitor. If we have to lean in to read it, so will our users.

- [ ] **Labels stay readable when someone zooms in**



Zoom in with Ctrl + Plus in the Power BI service. Check that axis labels don't get cut off or turn into "…".

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

P: PATTERNS

P2 · TYPOGRAPHY & READABILITY

- [ ] **Fonts, icons and title styles match across all pages**



Stick to one font family and no more than three text sizes per page. Set title styles in the theme so every visual matches.

- [ ] **Wording is plain and jargon-free**



Use the words your users use, not database or team jargon. Rename fields like “Rev_Act_YTD” and spell out acronyms the first time.

- [ ] **Claude dashboards: content reflows at 200% zoom and phone width**



Zoom the browser to 200% and narrow the window to about 320px wide. There should be no sideways scrolling, overlapping text or hidden content.

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Below the water: what people experience

P: PATTERNS

P3 · DESIGN SYSTEMS

☐ **Standards for colour, typography and naming are written down**

One page is enough to start: palette with contrast ratios, font sizes, title style and naming rules. Store it where the whole team can find it.

☐ **Exceptions to the standards are deliberate and recorded**

If a report needs a different palette, write down why. Undocumented exceptions slowly become the new, accidental standard.

☐ **Claude dashboards: Claude was given our standards**

Paste the palette, fonts and accessibility rules into the prompt, or save them as reusable instructions so every dashboard starts from the same base.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

T: TRUST

T1 · HIERARCHY

☐ **The most important information is seen first**

People usually scan from the top left. Put the key KPI or main message there, and supporting detail below or to the right.

☐ **The main question can be answered without jumping around**

Ask a colleague to find one specific answer and watch where their eyes and mouse go. Long journeys across the page point to a hierarchy problem.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

T: TRUST

T1 · HIERARCHY

☐ **The reading order makes sense for keyboard users**



Press Tab through the page. The focus should follow the same order as the visual layout, usually left to right and top to bottom.

☐ **Claude dashboards: the most important content still comes first on a small screen**



Narrow the browser window and see how the cards stack. Ask Claude to set the order explicitly if the key KPI ends up at the bottom.

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Below the water: what people experience

T: TRUST

T2 · CHART HONESTY

- [ ] **Axes start at sensible values**

Bar charts should almost always start at zero. If a line chart's axis doesn't start at zero, make that obvious so small changes don't look huge.

- [ ] **Time periods, filters and missing data are clear**

Show the date range and active filters in a subtitle, e.g. "Jan–Mar 2025, Project P01". Say so when data is incomplete.

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Below the water: what people experience

T: TRUST

T2 · CHART HONESTY

☐ **AI-chosen calculations and headline numbers have been checked**

Pick two or three numbers and recalculate them from the source data. Check that sums, averages and distinct counts are the ones we meant.

☐ **AI-written titles, summaries and insights match the data**

Once AI starts interpreting the data, review what it says, not just that it exists. Check the direction of every change it describes.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

T: TRUST

T3 · ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

☐ **Every meaningful visual has alt text**

Use dynamic alt text: in Format > General > Alt text, click the fx button and point it to a DAX measure. The description then updates with slicers and data refresh.

☐ **Decorative elements are hidden from screen readers**

Background shapes, images and dividers add nothing for a screen reader. Hide them from the tab order in the Selection pane.

☐ **Alt text is short, clear and leads with the insight**

Aim for one or two sentences: what the chart shows, the key insight, then the current filter context, e.g. “Milestone forecast dates for Project P01. Build Complete has slipped 23 days across three schedule versions.”

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

T: TRUST

T3 · ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- [ ] **Dynamic alt text has been tested across different filter selections**

  Change the slicers and read the alt text each time. Check the direction of every trend, how it handles blanks and single values, and that numbers and dates are formatted.

- [ ] **AI-generated DAX for alt text has been reviewed by a person**

  AI can write the measure quickly, but the measure working doesn't mean the description is right.

- [ ] **Claude dashboards: every chart has a text summary or data table a screen reader can reach**

  Ask Claude to add a visually hidden data table or a text summary under each chart, then check it with a screen reader.

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Below the water: what people experience

T: TRUST

T4 · TESTING & MAINTENANCE

- [ ] **An automated accessibility check has been run**

  Use PBIX A11y for .pbix files, pbir-a11y for PBIP projects, or the axe DevTools or WAVE browser extensions for web dashboards.

- [ ] **Automated checks are followed by manual testing**

  Automated tools catch only some issues. Spend ten minutes on keyboard-only navigation and a quick screen reader pass with NVDA (free) or Narrator.

- [ ] **Checks run again whenever the report changes**

  With PBIP, run pbir-a11y check ./MyReport --fail-on warn as a pre-commit hook or CI step, so new issues block the change.

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Below the water: what people experience

T: TRUST

T4 · TESTING & MAINTENANCE

- [ ] **Someone is responsible for accessibility after go-live**



Name an owner and add accessibility to the report's regular review, for example every quarter or with each major release.

- [ ] **Claude dashboards: checks are repeated after every regeneration**



Every time we ask Claude to change the dashboard, it may rewrite large parts of the page. Run axe or WAVE again, even for small changes.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

H: HUMANS

H1 · USERS & CONTEXT

☐ **We know who uses the report and what decisions they make**


Write one sentence per audience: “Project managers use this weekly to spot milestones at risk.” If we can’t, we need to talk to users first.

☐ **We know where and how they open it**


Ask whether they use a desktop, laptop, phone or shared screen in meetings. Design for the most common one, and test on the most difficult one.

☐ **AI was given the users’ context, not just what to build**


Tell AI what people need to understand and decide, not only which chart to add. It can’t know about access needs unless we tell it.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

H: HUMANS

H2 · ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

☐ **Accessibility needs were captured during requirements gathering**



Ask about access needs at the start, alongside other requirements. Accessibility isn't something we bolt onto the finished report.

☐ **We've considered different access needs**



Run through five quick personas: low vision, colour blindness, screen reader user, keyboard-only user and cognitive overload. What would each struggle with?

☐ **A report is the right format for everyone who needs it**



Sometimes a dashboard isn't the best way to get information to someone. Agree another accessible format or route where needed.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

H: HUMANS

H2 · ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

- [ ] **People with different access needs have given feedback**

Ask for volunteers through internal networks or accessibility groups, and make it easy to give feedback.

- [ ] **We've confirmed our fixes actually help**

After making changes, go back to the person who raised the issue. A fix that passes a checker might still not solve their problem.

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DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

H: HUMANS

H3 · INTERACTION & NAVIGATION

- [ ] **The whole report can be used with only a keyboard**



Put the mouse away. Use Ctrl + F6 to move into the report canvas, Tab to move between visuals and Esc to step back out.

- [ ] **Keyboard focus is always visible**



As we tab through, we should always be able to see where we are. If the focus disappears behind a shape or image, check the layer order.

- [ ] **Slicers, filters and buttons are clearly labelled**



Give each slicer a visible header and each button text or a tooltip. A plain icon with no label can be a mystery to screen reader users.

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Below the water: what people experience

H: HUMANS

H3 · INTERACTION & NAVIGATION

- [ ] **Tooltip information is also available somewhere else**



Tooltips need a mouse hover. If they hold essential information, add it to a data label, table or the alt text as well.

- [ ] **We've watched someone use the report with a keyboard or screen reader**



Watching is better than asking. Give them a real task and note where they hesitate, get lost or give up.

- [ ] **Claude dashboards: hover content also appears on keyboard focus**



Tab to each chart and filter. If a tooltip only appears on mouse hover, ask Claude to make it appear on focus too.

Data Tides
DEPTH: Power BI design checklist

Below the water: what people experience

H: HUMANS

SIGN-OFF: YOU OWN IT

- [ ] **Every finding has been traced back to its DEPTH layer**



A lost insight sends us back to Trust, a colour problem back to Patterns. Fix it in the layer where it belongs, then test again.

- [ ] **Every “no” is either fixed or has an owner and a date**



Keep a simple log of issue, layer, owner and due date. It shows progress and makes the next review faster.

- [ ] **A person, not a tool, has confirmed the report is ready to publish**



Automated checks and AI reviews are evidence, not approval. AI builds it, we own it, so someone puts their name to the sign-off.

Stay Connected

If this checklist helped you look beneath the surface of your reports, I'd love to stay in touch.

On my website, Data Tides, you'll find the full article behind DEPTH, "AI Builds It, You Own It", plus resources, upcoming sessions and new articles on inclusive data design and Power BI.

To put the checklist into action, try PBIX A11y, my free browser-based accessibility checker, or pbir-a11y on my GitHub for PBIP projects, pipelines and AI agents.
Prefer video? My YouTube channel Data-Tides has practical tutorials on accessible design, DAX, visual calculations, data modelling and project controls analytics.

I'm also on LinkedIn, where I share tips, events and behind-the-scenes insights as a community speaker. Come and say hello, and tell me which DEPTH layer surprised you most!



Juliana Smith