

HI-LOW STUDIO LLC

# The Quiet Standards Framework

An Auditable Certification Standard for Attention-  
Respecting Software

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**Version 1.0**

104 criteria · 7 domains · 27 must-pass gates · 143 scorable points

Published openly. A standard you can't read isn't a standard.

[hilotstudio.dev/standards](https://hilotstudio.dev/standards)

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# Attention

*"Design for the smallest possible amount of your attention"*

**23** criteria    **6** must-pass    **26** available points

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## 1A. Notification Architecture

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ATT-01	<b>MUST-PASS</b>	No push notifications unless user-configured trigger. Marketing and re-engagement notifications are an automatic fail.
ATT-02	<b>MUST-PASS</b>	Single, accessible control to disable ALL non-critical notifications in one action.
ATT-03	<b>MUST-PASS</b>	Default notification settings are the minimum permission state. User opts in, not out.
ATT-04	2 PTS	User-defined quiet hours during which notifications are queued and held, not just muted.
ATT-05	2 PTS	Notifications contain enough context to be actionable without opening the app.
ATT-06	2 PTS	Non-urgent notifications batched into digest form rather than delivered individually.
ATT-07	1 PT	User-accessible notification log showing count and content of notifications sent in the last 30 days.
ATT-08	1 PT	Respects OS-level notification settings (Do Not Disturb, Focus modes) without circumventing them.

## 1B. Engagement Pattern Prohibition

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ATT-09	<b>MUST-PASS</b>	No infinite scroll. Content feeds must terminate or paginate with a clear endpoint.
ATT-10	<b>MUST-PASS</b>	No streak mechanics, loss-aversion timers, or any mechanism that penalizes the user for not using the product.
ATT-11	<b>MUST-PASS</b>	No gamification (points, badges, leaderboards, levels, XP) unless the product is explicitly a game.
ATT-12	2 PTS	No auto-play media without explicit user initiation on each piece of content.
ATT-13	2 PTS	No variable-ratio reinforcement schedules (pull-to-refresh revealing new content, randomized rewards).
ATT-14	2 PTS	Session length is transparent to the user through a visible timer, session summary, or periodic check-in.

ATT-15 1 PT No social comparison metrics (follower counts, like counts, view counts) unless the product's explicit purpose requires it.

## 1C. Interface Restraint

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ATT-16 2 PTS Primary task flow completable in 3 or fewer screens from launch.

ATT-17 2 PTS No interstitial screens or splash animations exceeding 2 seconds when content is available.

ATT-18 2 PTS Modal dialogs used only for destructive actions or critical confirmations, not for promotions, upsells, or announcements.

ATT-19 2 PTS Supports prefers-reduced-motion at the OS level and reduces or eliminates animations accordingly.

ATT-20 1 PT Visual hierarchy clearly distinguishes primary from secondary actions. No competing calls-to-action of equal weight.

ATT-21 1 PT Empty states are informative and calm. Not used for upselling, cross-promotion, or creating anxiety.

ATT-22 1 PT No use of color red, urgency language, or pulsing/animating elements to manufacture false urgency.

ATT-23 1 PT Typography and layout maintain a readable measure (line length 45–80 characters for body text).

# Data Sovereignty

*"Your data belongs to you"*

18 criteria    5 must-pass    30 available points

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## 2A. Data Portability

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|--------|------------------|--|
| DAT-01 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | Full data export in at least one open, machine-readable format (JSON, CSV, XML, or domain-appropriate open standard).          |
| DAT-02 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | Data export is complete — includes ALL user-generated content, metadata, configuration, and history.                           |
| DAT-03 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | Export accessible within 3 clicks from settings. No support ticket, waiting period exceeding 24 hours, or discouragement flow. |
| DAT-04 | 3 PTS            | API or webhook system for real-time or near-real-time data sync with external systems chosen by the user.                      |
| DAT-05 | 2 PTS            | Exported data structured and documented sufficiently for import into a competing product or custom system.                     |
| DAT-06 | 2 PTS            | Supports import of data from at least one competing product or common format in its category.                                  |

## 2B. Data Collection Minimalism

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|--------|------------------|---|
| DAT-07 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | No data collected, stored, or transmitted beyond what is required for features the user is actively using.                            |
| DAT-08 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | Never sells, shares, or provides user data to third-party advertisers, data brokers, or ad networks.                                  |
| DAT-09 | 3 PTS            | Real-time, user-accessible inventory of all data held about the user — not just privacy policy categories, but an actual data viewer. |
| DAT-10 | 2 PTS            | Analytics and telemetry, if present, are opt-in (not opt-out) and clearly explain what is collected and why.                          |
| DAT-11 | 2 PTS            | Core features function with all optional data collection declined.  |
| DAT-12 | 1 PT             | Stated data retention periods with automatic purge when purpose expires.  |

## 2C. Data Security & Deletion

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DAT-13	3 PTS	Sensitive user data encrypted at rest using industry-standard encryption (AES-256 or equivalent).
DAT-14	3 PTS	Account deletion is complete, permanent, and accessible within the application. No "contact support to delete."
DAT-15	2 PTS	Clear distinction between "deactivation" (data retained) and "deletion" (data destroyed), with both offered.
DAT-16	2 PTS	Backups of user data purged within 30 days of deletion request.
DAT-17	1 PT	Supports industry-standard authentication (OAuth 2.0, passkeys); phone number not mandatory.
DAT-18	1 PT	Data transmission uses TLS 1.2 or higher exclusively.

# Honesty

*"Amplify the best of people and technology without confusing the two"*

16 criteria    5 must-pass    24 available points

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## 3A. Dark Pattern Prohibition

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|--------|------------------|---|
| HON-01 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | No confirmshaming (guilt-laden language on decline buttons).  |
| HON-02 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | No roach motel patterns (easy to sign up, deliberately difficult to cancel or delete).                      |
| HON-03 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | No bait-and-switch (advertising one feature, price, or capability and delivering another after commitment). |
| HON-04 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | Cancellation or downgrade flow contains no more steps than the signup or upgrade flow.                      |
| HON-05 | 2 PTS            | No pre-checked optional consent boxes, newsletter signups, or add-on purchases.                             |
| HON-06 | 2 PTS            | Price presented clearly at point of decision. No hidden fees, no "starting at" pricing that escalates.      |
| HON-07 | 2 PTS            | No false urgency (fake countdown timers, "only 3 left!" when inventory is not genuinely scarce).            |
| HON-08 | 1 PT             | No visual misdirection toward company-preferred option and away from user-preferred option.                 |

## 3B. Algorithmic Transparency

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|--------|-------|---|
| HON-09 | 3 PTS | If algorithmic curation is used, primary ranking factors disclosed in plain language accessible from the interface. |
| HON-10 | 2 PTS | At least one non-algorithmic view of content (chronological, alphabetical, or user-defined sort) available.         |
| HON-11 | 2 PTS | AI-generated content clearly labeled as such and distinguishable from human-authored content.                       |
| HON-12 | 1 PT  | No dynamic pricing personalized by user behavior or inferred willingness to pay.                                    |

## 3C. Business Model Transparency

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- |        |                  |   |
|--------|------------------|---|
| HON-13 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | Monetization model stated plainly on marketing site and within the application. |
|--------|------------------|---|

- HON-14 3 PTS If the product is free, the application explains how it is funded.
- HON-15 2 PTS No degrading existing features to upsell paid tiers without advance notice and data export option.
- HON-16 2 PTS Terms of service available in a plain-language summary at maximum 8th-grade reading level.

# Departure

*"Solve the problem, then get out of your way"*

12 criteria    4 must-pass    18 available points

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## 4A. Session Closure

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- DEP-01    2 PTS    No retention dialogs, "Are you sure?" prompts, or emotional appeals when closing (unsaved-work warnings permitted).
- DEP-02    2 PTS    Auto-saves state so user can close at any moment without loss of work.
- DEP-03    1 PT    No re-engagement emails within 72 hours of a user's last session.
- DEP-04    1 PT    No ads, surveys, or promotional content displayed at the closing or logout moment.

## 4B. Account Offboarding

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- DEP-05    **MUST-PASS**    Subscription cancellable entirely within the application or web interface. No phone calls, retention agents, or mailed letters.
- DEP-06    **MUST-PASS**    After cancellation, previously paid-for data remains accessible and exportable for a minimum of 30 days.
- DEP-07    **MUST-PASS**    Cancellation confirmation is clear and immediate with the effective date and what happens to user data.
- DEP-08    2 PTS    Transfer ownership capability for shared accounts, teams, or family plans.

## 4C. Graceful Degradation

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- DEP-09    **MUST-PASS**    If internet required for primary functionality, clearly stated before signup and on marketing materials.
- DEP-10    3 PTS    Meaningful offline functionality. Core features degrade gracefully rather than failing completely.
- DEP-11    2 PTS    Documented plan for user data if company shuts down, referenced in Terms of Service.
- DEP-12    2 PTS    No mandatory updates that remove features, change the interface substantially, or reset preferences without choice.

# Respect

*"Respect your time and social norms"*

14 criteria    3 must-pass    20 available points

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## 5A. Temporal Respect

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- RES-01    3 PTS    User-defined schedules governing when the application may send notifications, sync data, or perform background activities.
- RES-02    2 PTS    Default notification times restricted to 8:00 AM – 9:00 PM in the user's timezone unless explicitly configured otherwise.
- RES-03    2 PTS    No time-of-day or day-of-week urgency messaging ("Weekend sale ends tonight!").
- RES-04    1 PT    Recurring scheduled actions respect user calendar integrations or quiet periods if offered.
- RES-05    1 PT    Anniversary, milestone, or commemorative notifications are opt-in only.

## 5B. Contextual Intelligence

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- RES-06    MUST-PASS    No device sensor access (camera, microphone, location, contacts, health data) without explicit, per-use or per-session consent revocable at any time.
- RES-07    MUST-PASS    No sensor use for purposes beyond stated functionality.
- RES-08    2 PTS    Respects OS-level Focus or Do Not Disturb states and adjusts behavior accordingly.
- RES-09    2 PTS    If location data is used, provides "only while using" option. No core degradation if background location is denied.
- RES-10    1 PT    Just-in-time permission requests only. No requesting permissions at first launch for features not yet attempted.

## 5C. Resource Respect

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- RES-11    MUST-PASS    No cryptocurrency mining, distributed computation, or use of device resources for purposes unrelated to stated functionality.
- RES-12    2 PTS    Background resource usage (CPU, memory, battery) proportionate to functionality.
- RES-13    2 PTS    No keeping device awake or maintaining persistent background connections when user is not actively using the application.

RES-14

1 PT

Installation size and ongoing storage usage documented and reasonable for the product's category.

# Durability

*"Software degrades gracefully"*

12 criteria    3 must-pass    16 available points

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## 6A. Accessibility

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|--------|------------------|---|
| DUR-01 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | WCAG 2.1 Level AA compliance for all primary user flows.  |
| DUR-02 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | All interactive elements have minimum 44×44 CSS pixel touch targets (mobile) or equivalent keyboard-navigable focus states (desktop). |
| DUR-03 | 3 PTS            | Fully navigable via keyboard alone. No mouse or touch-only interactions for primary functionality.                                    |
| DUR-04 | 2 PTS            | Screen reader support with appropriate ARIA labels, roles, and live regions for dynamic content.                                      |
| DUR-05 | 2 PTS            | Color is never the sole means of conveying information (error states, status indicators, form validation).                            |
| DUR-06 | 1 PT             | Supports user-configurable text size scaling up to 200% without loss of content or functionality.                                     |

## 6B. Standards & Interoperability

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- |        |                  |   |
|--------|------------------|---|
| DUR-07 | <b>MUST-PASS</b> | Uses open web standards. No proprietary plugins, browser-specific features, or single-vendor runtimes for core functionality. |
| DUR-08 | 2 PTS            | Supports or implements relevant open protocols for its domain (CalDAV, RSS/Atom, SMTP, ActivityPub, etc.).                    |
| DUR-09 | 2 PTS            | Data format publicly documented, enabling third-party tools to read and process exported data.                                |

## 6C. Longevity

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- |        |       |  |
|--------|-------|--|
| DUR-10 | 2 PTS | Publicly accessible changelog documenting changes, removals, and additions.  |
| DUR-11 | 2 PTS | Stated support policy: how long the current version will receive security updates and what happens at end-of-life. |
| DUR-12 | 1 PT  | Runs on OS versions within 2 major releases. No unreasonably recent hardware requirements.                         |

# Governance

*"Transparent and verifiable"*

9 criteria    1 must-pass    16 available points

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## 7A. Privacy & Legal Clarity

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- GOV-01 **MUST-PASS** Privacy policy exists, is accessible within the application, and was updated within the last 12 months.
- GOV-02 3 PTS Privacy policy contains a plain-language summary (maximum 500 words, 8th-grade reading level) covering what data is collected, why, who can see it, how long it is kept, and how to delete it.
- GOV-03 2 PTS Users notified of material changes to privacy policy or terms of service before they take effect, with a clear summary of what changed.
- GOV-04 2 PTS All third-party services, SDKs, and trackers identified with their data practices disclosed.

## 7B. User Communication

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- GOV-05 2 PTS Publicly accessible way to report bugs, request features, or provide feedback without requiring a social media account.
- GOV-06 2 PTS Actual user documentation covering all primary features (not just marketing copy).
- GOV-07 1 PT Estimated response time for support requests, met at least 80% of the time.

## 7C. Ethical Commitments

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- GOV-08 2 PTS Funding sources publicly disclosed, including any investors or board members with interests in advertising, data brokerage, or attention-extraction industries.
- GOV-09 2 PTS Published statement of design principles or ethical commitments that predates and is independent of the QSF certification.

# Scoring & Certification

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## Must-Pass Gate

There are 27 must-pass criteria across all domains. A product that fails any single must-pass criterion cannot receive certification at any tier, regardless of total score. Must-pass criteria represent absolute ethical minimums.

## Point Scoring

The 77 scored criteria total 143 possible points. Points are allocated by difficulty and impact: 3 points for criteria requiring significant investment or representing industry-leading practice, 2 points for strong practice achievable with moderate effort, 1 point for good hygiene achievable with minimal effort.

## Domain Minimums

QSF Certified and QSF Exemplary tiers require a minimum of 40% of available scored points in every domain. A product cannot compensate for poor data practices with excellent notification design.

## Certification Tiers

<p><b>QSF Verified</b></p> <p>57+ of 143 points (40%)</p> <p>Meets baseline ethical standards. No exploitative patterns. All 27 must-pass criteria satisfied.</p>	<p><b>QSF Certified</b></p> <p>86+ of 143 points (60%)</p> <p>Active commitment to user respect across all domains. Requires domain minimums — cannot compensate weak areas with strong ones.</p>	<p><b>QSF Exemplary</b></p> <p>114+ of 143 points (80%)</p> <p>Industry-leading attention-respecting software. Suitable as a reference implementation for others building in this space.</p>
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## Audit Evidence Types

Each criterion specifies one of four evidence methods, ensuring two independent auditors reach the same conclusion.

**T** **Technical Inspection**  
Auditor examines the running application, source code, or network traffic.

**D** **Documentation Review**  
Auditor reviews published policies, changelogs, or support documentation.



### User Journey Walkthrough

Auditor completes a specific user flow and records the experience step by step.



### Declarative Attestation

Company attests to practices that cannot be externally verified. False attestation voids certification.

## Recertification

Certification is valid for 12 months. Recertification requires a delta audit covering criteria affected by product changes since last audit, plus a random sample of 20% of unchanged criteria. Material product changes — new monetization model, new data collection, or acquisition by another company — trigger mandatory re-audit of affected domains.

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The **Quiet Standards Framework** is published by Hi-Low Studio LLC. The specification is open. The self-audit toolkit is free. Certification is earned.

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Version 1.0 · 2026