

Expense Report Fix-It Guide

Goals: Audit-ready documentation, fewer returns, and faster approvals.

1) Business Purpose / UW Benefit (most common finding)

✓ Do this

- Write a **specific, complete** business purpose **including a benefit to research, teaching, outreach, or any other mission-driven activity at UW-Madison.**

✗ Avoid

- "Meeting," "Travel," "Lab supplies," "Conference" (**too vague**)
- Copying the same purpose everywhere without detail specific to actual expenses

Good examples

- **Header (Shared Liability/Out of Pocket):** "Presenting at Conference [Title] on [Subject/Research Area] to support UW research dissemination"
- **Line-level (P-Card) example:** "black lights - needed to setup a new project with black lights and special paint to help identify animals overnight, for an EEG experiment"
- **Line-level Expense Item detail:** "Uber—airport to conference hotel (ABC Conference travel)"

2) Receipts: Itemized + Correct Document Type

✓ Do this

- Attach **itemized receipts** (shows what was purchased), not just totals.
- **Hotel:** Upload the **finalized itemized folio** with a \$0 balance (not a confirmation). Obtain receipts for hotel deposits (may have to call/email to obtain deposit receipt).
- **Airfare:** Attach the **Fox World Travel invoice**, not the booking page/estimate.
- **Document type:** Ensure file is readable. Convert Outlook message (.msg) to PDFs prior to upload.

✗ Avoid

- Incomplete "snips", screenshots, or photos of receipts which are often lacking key information

- Credit card statements in lieu of receipts

Quick check: If it doesn't show line items, taxes/fees, dates, and proof of payment—it's probably not acceptable.

3) Travel Support Docs: Agenda + Conference Hotels

✅ Do this

- Attach the **agenda, announcement, or flyer** for conferences/meetings/events if available.
- If there is no agenda, announcement, or flyer, ensure the justification explains dates, location, and purpose of conference, meeting, or event.
- Provide **conference hotel proof** when required – PDF of conference hotel announcement or conference webpage listing recommended hotels.

❌ Avoid

- Submitting travel expenses with **no agenda** or unclear event details

4) Per Diem & Lodging Compliance (Limits, Dates, Exceptions)

✅ Do this

- Ensure **meal per diem claimed aligns with the agenda** (provided meals should be deduced).
- Double-check per diem **dates** and lodging **dates** before submitting.
 - **Departure Date** = First Day of Travel
 - **Arrival Date** = Last Day of Travel
- For **lodging over nightly maximums**, include **supporting documentation** (proof of conference hotel, PDF of hotels from Concur showing nothing cheaper in the area).

Item Details

Departure Date *

02/17/2026

Arrival Date *

02/22/2026

❌ Avoid

- "Booked in Concur so it's compliant" (not all rates in Concur are compliant)
 - "Conference hotel" with no supporting documentation
 - "Cheapest hotel in the area" with no supporting documentation
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5) Timeliness / Accountable Plan (90-Day Issues)

✓ Do this

- Submit expenses **within required timelines** per policy ([Expense Reimbursement](#), [P-Card](#)).
 - Recommendation: **Submit out-of-pocket expenses by 60 days.**
 - Recommendation: **Submit Shared Liability Card transactions by 30 days** to avoid past due payments or account closure due to payment delay.
 - Requirement: **P-card transactions must be submitted within 60 days.**
- If out of pocket/shared liability card transactions are older than 90 days, transactions cannot be paid/reimbursed without an exception approved by the Expense Operations Lead (Divisional Business Office) on file. Exception approval for late submission is not guaranteed. If an exception is approved, the expenses are tax-reportable and will appear on an upcoming paystub. [The exception form can be found here.](#)
- Pay attention to travel-related Expense Items that are now **calculated 90 days from the transaction date: Membership** (often paired with registration), **Abstract Submission Fee, CISI, Taxi/Uber/Lyft**



✗ Avoid

- Waiting until charges are old/late
- Assuming that all travel-related transactions are calculated at 90 days from the last date of travel (there are now many instances when it is from the *transaction date*)

6) Pcard: Attachments + Line-Level Justification

✓ Do this

- Add required attachments **and** a complete business purpose/UW benefit at the **expense line**.
- Use the correct expense type (e.g., **Meals-Hosted vs Catering**, as applicable).

✗ Avoid

- P-card lines with no attachments or minimal business purpose like "lab supplies."
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7) Hosted Meals: UW/UWF Split Billing Errors

✓ Do this

- Complete a [Business Meals Calculator](#) when any amount of the meal is billed to UW-Foundation so that calculations are correct and clearly documented.
- Ensure attendees are listed by name and affiliation in the expense report.

✗ Avoid

- Submitting without checking the math using the Business Meals Calculator (high error rate in dollar amount calculations)
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8) Mileage: HQ vs Home

✓ Do this

- Calculate mileage from **headquarters**, not home, unless policy allows it.
- If claiming from home, ensure mileage from home to destination is less than headquarters to destination.

✗ Avoid

- Mileage from home without confirming it is the "lesser of the two" when HQ ≠ home
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9) Tax Exemption & Sales Tax Handling

✓ Do this

- Request **Wisconsin state sales tax exemption** at restaurants/vendors in Wisconsin. Provide our [Sales Tax Exempt Certificate](#) to the vendor. If tax exemption is refused, document the attempt to obtain exemption in the justification.
- If sales tax was paid in Wisconsin by accident, document the request to obtain exemption after-the-fact and a refund.

✗ Avoid

- Submitting transactions with Wisconsin sales tax over \$20 with no explanation of attempt to obtain exemption or refund.

10) Special Situations (Often missed)

- ✓ **Foreign travel:** include **OANDA/Currency Conversion PDFs or Credit Card Statement** showing the transaction(s) in USD + **translated receipts**.
 - ✓ **Student lodging:** Utilize **Lodging-Student** Expense Item.
 - ✓ **System flags:** Don't ignore warnings (yellow icons with messages, e.g., "Duplicate"). **Investigate them prior to submission.**
 - ✓ **Airline fees:** Split out the **Fox World Travel agency fees** to the Expense Item **Travel Agency Service Fees**
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Pre-Submission Checklist

Before you click **Submit**, confirm you have the following, as applicable:

- ☐ Specific business purpose/UW benefit (header + line detail); ensure acronyms are defined
- ☐ Itemized receipts (hotel folio, Fox World Travel invoice, etc.)
- ☐ Agenda/meeting proof (or justification summary)
- ☐ Per diem dates correct + per diem deductions align with agenda provided meals
- ☐ Lodging over-limit documentation attached (proof of conference hotel, Concur for proof of nothing cheaper)
- ☐ Business Meals Calculator (if split billed to Foundation for meal overages, alcohol)
- ☐ Mileage from HQ (unless mileage from home is the lesser of the two when departing from home)
- ☐ Explanation for sales tax over \$20 on in-state transactions (documented attempt to obtain exemption or refund)
- ☐ Foreign travel: attach currency conversion documentation + translations of receipts
- ☐ Review any warnings (yellow exclamation point) prior to submission