CERTAINTY LADDER | CHECKLIST

Six rungs of user confidence

Walk one journey step at a time, from orientation through recovery. For each rung, work through the probes, then mark how the step feels today. The weakest rungs are where to design reassurance first.

PRODUCT / SURFACE	JOURNEY STEP	WHO IS THE USER?

1. Orientation

Where am I? What is this?

- [ ] Can a new user name what this screen or flow is within seconds?
- [ ] Is the headline specific, or does it rely on internal jargon?
- [ ] Is there a clear entry point and sense of place (breadcrumbs, context)?

REASSURANCE IDEAS
Specific heading that states the job to be done. One-line purpose under the title. Breadcrumbs or progress context.

- [ ] Feels solid
- [ ] Feels soft
- [ ] Not sure yet

2. Relevance

Does this apply to me?

- [ ] Does the copy speak to a concrete role or segment?
- [ ] Would the user silently answer "this is for someone like me"?
- [ ] Are contextual cues present (persona, product, vehicle, account type)?

REASSURANCE IDEAS
Segment-specific messaging. Contextual labels tied to the user's account or product. Examples that mirror the user's world.

- [ ] Feels solid
- [ ] Feels soft
- [ ] Not sure yet

3. Trust

Can I rely on this? Is it safe?

- [ ] Are security, privacy, or reliability signals visible where the risk is felt?
- [ ] Are processes transparent (what happens next, who sees the data)?
- [ ] Is there quiet abandonment risk from opaque steps?

REASSURANCE IDEAS
Reassurance copy at the moment of risk. Transparent step-by-step expectations. Policy links at decision points.

- [ ] Feels solid
- [ ] Feels soft
- [ ] Not sure yet

4. Action

What do I do next?

- [ ] Is there one primary call to action, or competing choices?
- [ ] Is hesitation caused by direction, not desire?
- [ ] Is decision complexity reduced enough to act?

REASSURANCE IDEAS

One primary call to action. Secondary actions demoted. A clear verb on the button that matches the outcome.

- [ ] Feels solid
- [ ] Feels soft
- [ ] Not sure yet

5. Feedback

Did it work? What happened?

- [ ] After the user acts, is success or progress explicit?
- [ ] Are status indicators visible (loading, saved, queued)?
- [ ] Is double-submit or refresh fatigue likely from silent states?

REASSURANCE IDEAS

Explicit confirmation messages. Visible status and progress indicators. Success states that name what changed.

- [ ] Feels solid
- [ ] Feels soft
- [ ] Not sure yet

6. Recovery

If something went wrong, how do I fix it?

- [ ] Are errors human-readable, with a path back?
- [ ] Do blank or dead-end states leave the user stranded?
- [ ] Can the user retry, undo, or contact support without losing context?

REASSURANCE IDEAS

Human-readable error messages. Clear retry and path-back options. Context preserved after a failure.

- [ ] Feels solid
- [ ] Feels soft
- [ ] Not sure yet

NEXT MOVE

Name the one rung that feels softest. Write the reassurance that would fix it before you write the ticket.

A structured starting point, not a live consulting engagement. Validate what you find with users and stakeholders.