

DEFAULT ROUTE, ESCALATION TRIGGER, VERIFIER AND HANDOFF RULE PER SUB-TASK

Task-Shape Routing Rubric

Take your most expensive recurring agent workflow and write one row per sub-task. Read each default as a position you must argue your way out of, not into.

BRING Your most expensive recurring agent workflow and its trace

Name the task shape first

Before any model is chosen, name the shape. It decides whether you are even allowed to split the work.

Question	Your answer
Is the work sequential, parallel or mixed?	
What is the scarce resource - continuity of context, or coverage of evidence?	
What does each handoff compress away, and is that loss affordable?	

One row per sub-task

Write the shape, default route, escalation trigger, verifier and human handoff rule for each sub-task. Then ask which row still says "frontier, full effort, separate agent" only because nobody changed the default.

Sub-task	Shape (sequential / parallel / mixed)	Default route (cheap code / cheap / medium / frontier)	Escalation trigger	Verifier	Human handoff rule

Route thresholds - argue out of the default

A decision-grade router needs thresholds, not instincts. Record the rule that moves a sub-task off its default.

Move	When it applies	Your threshold
Route down - cheap model or deterministic code		
Route across - split into capped parallel branches		
Route up - medium or frontier model		
Stop and hand to a person		

Branch return contract

Split only what can be returned. Before a branch runs, write what it must hand back. A branch with no clean contract is a paragraph in the spine mistaken for a separate job.

Contract field	Your answer
Fields the branch must return to the spine	
Evidence, confidence and what it did not inspect	
Budget and permissions for the branch	
How the spine verifies the branch independently	

Notes - the five fields the router should log

For every non-trivial escalation, the router should log shape, tier, effort, verifier and handoff condition. Record what your trace currently does and does not show.

Companion worksheet to **Essay 12 · The Cheapest Token**, in the series **Architecting the AI Coworker**. · Dr Peter McCann Strain · Fill this in against one real agent, action class or vendor. © 2026 Peter McCann Strain.

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