

***CONSTRUCTION RISK CHECKLIST > During-construction > Variations Approved
In Writing***

If It's Not in Writing, It's Probably a Dispute Waiting to Happen

Variations are one of the most common causes of disputes in residential construction. The problem is rarely the variation itself. Most clients understand that changing the scope of work may change the price. The real issue is that the builder and client often have different understandings of what was agreed.

A quick conversation on site can easily become a disagreement weeks or months later.

The simplest way to avoid this is to ensure every variation is agreed in writing before the work is carried out wherever practical. This does not need to be complicated. A formal variation document is ideal, but an email or text message exchange can also work provided it clearly records:

- What is changing.
- The additional cost (or credit).
- Any impact on the programme.
- The client's acknowledgement and approval.

The key is having evidence that both parties understood and agreed to the change.

Just as importantly, variations should be invoiced and paid for as they occur. One of the biggest mistakes builders make is allowing variation costs to accumulate until the end of the project. By that stage, the total may be far larger than the client expected, creating the perfect conditions for a payment dispute.

Instead, treat variations as separate commercial events. Agree the variation, document it, carry out the work, and include it in the next progress claim or invoice. This keeps the client informed of the project's true cost and prevents unpleasant surprises.

The variation process should also be discussed at the contract stage. Clients should understand from the outset how changes will be handled and that no one benefits from relying on memory or verbal agreements.

The most successful builders don't leave variations to chance. They create a simple, consistent process that protects both parties.

Because a variation agreed in writing before the work starts is usually a straightforward conversation. A variation discussed after the work has been completed is often an argument about who said what.