

1 AI A DAY · @JJWONG.AI

The Returns Digest

1 AI A Day · Day 09 · @jjwong.ai

JJ Wong · jjwong.ai

A weekly fifteen-minute routine that turns returns from admin into the cheapest product feedback you'll ever get: the classifier prompt, the cost sheet, and which fix goes with which cause.

The idea in one line

Classify every return by what actually went wrong — from the buyer's own words — cost each cause, and fix only the most expensive one each week.

Step 1 — Export with the free text

The platform's reason code is not enough. You need the buyer's own words: the free-text comment on the return, and any chat you had about it.

Why: buyers pick whichever reason gets them refunded fastest with the least argument. "Changed mind" is very often "it didn't look like the photo" — the buyer just didn't want a dispute. Build your fixes from the code and you'll fix the wrong thing.

Strip names, addresses and order IDs before anything else. (Patterns are in the Q&A Mining Pack.)

Step 2 — The five root causes

ROOT CAUSE	WHAT IT REALLY MEANS	WHERE THE FIX LIVES
Listing expectation gap	The listing promised something the product isn't — size, colour, feel, what's included	Photos, fit line, spec table
Variant confusion	They ordered the wrong option, or got one that didn't match its picture	Variant names and images
Product defect	It's actually faulty	Supplier, QC, or the product itself
Logistics damage	It broke in transit	Packaging
Genuine remorse	They just changed their mind	Nothing — accept it

Only the last one is outside your control. It's usually the smallest bucket, even though it feels like the biggest.

Step 3 — The classifier prompt

Below are anonymised return records from my shop. Each has the platform's reason code, the buyer's own free-text comment, and any chat about it.

Ignore the platform's reason code when deciding the cause — buyers choose whichever option refunds fastest, not the accurate one. Classify each return by its actual root cause using only these labels:

- LISTING GAP: the listing set an expectation the product didn't meet
- VARIANT CONFUSION: wrong option ordered, or option didn't match its image
- DEFECT: the product itself was faulty
- LOGISTICS: damaged in transit
- REMORSE: genuine change of mind, nothing wrong with product or listing

For each return: the label, and the exact phrase in the buyer's words that decided it. If there isn't enough information to tell, say UNCLEAR — don't guess.

Then: for each LISTING GAP, what specifically the listing got wrong, grouped if several returns point at the same thing.

RETURNS:

[paste the anonymised records]

"The exact phrase that decided it" keeps the classifier honest — and lets you check its work in seconds.

Step 4 — Cost each bucket

The sheet's Log tab takes one row per return. Pick the root cause from the dropdown and fill in:

- **Refund** — what you paid back
- **Return shipping** — if you bore it
- **Write-off** — the value of the stock if it can't be resold

The Digest tab adds each bucket up, shows its share of the week's return cost, and names the one to fix first.

It also counts how many returns were coded "Changed mind" versus how many were genuinely remorse. The gap between those two numbers is how much the dropdown is lying to you.

What the sheet can't cost is the rating hit. It's real, and it's the reason to treat listing gaps as urgent even when the refund amounts look small.

Step 5 — Fix one thing. Properly.

Take the top bucket and fix the single most common cause inside it:

IF THE TOP CAUSE IS...	THE FIX IS USUALLY...
Colour looks different	Re-shoot in daylight; add a note like "true colour: dark navy"
Smaller / bigger than expected	Add a photo with a size reference, and dimensions in the fit line
Doesn't fit my device	Put compatibility in the very first line of the description
Missing a feature in the photo	The photo shows a different version — replace it
Wrong variant received	Variant audit — see the Variant Pack
Damaged in transit	Change the packaging, not the courier
Defect	Pull a batch sample; talk to the supplier with the returns as evidence

One fix per week. Four half-fixes leave you unable to tell which one worked.

Next Monday, check the same bucket. If it hasn't moved, you fixed the wrong thing — or put the fix somewhere buyers don't look.

The one thing to remember

The expensive part of a return isn't the refund. It's that the same cause is still live on the listing, quietly generating the next one.

Questions? Reply to this email — I read them all. More at @jjwong.ai — one AI play for SEA sellers, daily.