

What Died.

Twelve trading ideas everyone repeats, tested on years of Nasdaq futures data. What killed each one, what it actually is, and the few things that survived the same test.

12

IDEAS KILLED IN FULL

1

RETRACTION OF OUR OWN

0

SIGNALS

A thing you can stop doing is worth more than one more thing to watch.

You are not short of ideas. You have a feed full of them: the gap that gets filled, the VWAP that rejects, the big order that tells you where price is going, the setup that wins 80% of the time. Every one of them sounds like it came from somebody who knows.

We are a small research desk that works one market, Nasdaq futures, from tick data. We take the ideas people repeat, state them the way their believers state them, and test them against the dumbest possible version of themselves. Most die. This guide is the ones that died, with the numbers, so you can stop paying for them with your attention and your account.

Why publish the failures? Because a desk that only shows you its winners is showing you a highlight reel, and nobody ever learned to trade off a highlight reel. Read the dead ones and you will know exactly how hard the surviving ones had to work.

HOW TO READ A PAGE

- **The claim** is stated the way people who believe it state it. No straw men.
- **The test** names the market, the window, the sample, and what it was compared against. A number without a sample is decoration.
- **What came back** is the result in plain English, then the numbers.
- **What to do instead** is the part you keep. Most dead ideas turn out to be something else, usually something smaller and more useful.

WORDS USED THROUGHOUT

- **R**: one unit of what you risked. $-0.25R$ means you lose a quarter of your stop, on average, every time you take it.
- **Placebo / control**: the same test run on a fake version, such as a random price, a random time or a shuffled day. If the fake does as well as the real thing, the real thing was never about the market.
- **After costs**: commission and slippage included. An idea that only works before costs does not work.

How an idea gets killed here.

Five tests. An idea has to survive all of them before we call it anything. You can run every one of them yourself, with a spreadsheet and some patience, on anything anyone sells you.

1 · EVERY NUMBER COMES WITH ITS SAMPLE

How many sessions, which ones, which years. "It works most of the time" is a feeling, not a claim.

2 · BEAT THE DUMB VERSION

Before anything is called an edge it has to beat the laziest version of itself: a random entry, a random level, the plain base rate. On Nasdaq futures, the day simply continuing is right about 60% of the time if you do nothing clever at all. That is the bar.

3 · SHUFFLE IT

Take a day's moves, keep every one of them, and shuffle the order. Volatility survives. The arithmetic survives. Only the sequence dies. If your effect is still there on the shuffled day, it was arithmetic all along, not the market. This one test killed more ideas in this guide than any other.

4 · EXPECTANCY, NOT HIT RATE

A setup can win most of the time and lose money. Hit rate gets quoted everywhere because it flatters and it screenshots well. The only number that pays is what you make per trade after costs, across all of them.

5 · WRITTEN DOWN FIRST, TESTED ON DATA IT HAS NOT SEEN

The rule and the pass mark get written down *before* the test runs. Then it is tested on years it was not built on. Tune a rule on the same data you test it on and you will always find something. That is fitting, not discovery.

THE POINT

Nothing here asks you to trust us. Each page gives you enough to check it, and the card at the back puts all five tests on one page you can point at the next thing someone sells you.

Twelve ideas, one retraction.

01 · "That's the high." Calling the extreme by how long it has held	KILLED
02 · The setup that wins 81% of the time	KILLED
03 · Fair value gaps get filled	KILLED
04 · Fade the first touch of VWAP	KILLED
05 · A slow drift into a level means the level holds	KILLED
06 · Price is pulled back to fair value	KILLED
07 · Buy the pullback in a trend	KILLED
08 · Big orders tell you where price is going	KILLED
09 · The 200 EMA cloud tells you the trend	KILLED
10 · Low-volume nodes are where price turns	KILLED
11 · Relative volume tells you how far it will go	KILLED
12 · The order-flow playbook, followed to the letter	KILLED
Four more, in brief	KILLED
A number we published, and took back	RETRACTED
What survived	KEPT
The Claim Card: tear it out	T00L

"Killed" is narrow on purpose. It means the idea, tested the way it is usually stated, on this market, in this window, did not beat its control. It does not mean a skilled discretionary trader can never use the location. Each page says exactly where its boundary is.

"That's the high. It's held for an hour."

The longer an extreme has stood, the more likely it is the high of the day.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, regular session
SAMPLE	1,403 sessions, 100,990 observations, Nov 2020 – Jul 2026
AGAINST	The plain base rate, then the shuffled day

WHAT CAME BACK

We built the curve properly: an extreme that has held under 15 minutes survives as the day's high 16% of the time, one that has held three hours or more survives 89% of the time. It was calibrated, walk-forward validated, and beat the base rate by 27%. It looked like the best thing we had ever made.

Then we shuffled the days. The same curve came out of random noise almost unchanged.

72.7

points of curve on real days

70.6

points of curve on shuffled noise

+1.5%

skill left after the shuffle

An extreme that has held a long time is likely to stay the extreme for one reason: there is less day left to break it. That is geometry, not the market. About 97% of the curve was arithmetic.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Distrust any "it held, so it holds" claim until it has been compared against a shuffled day. A weak baseline manufactures skill. This is the kill we are proudest of, because it is the reason to believe the ones that survived.

The setup that wins 81% of the time.

An early high, then a deep give-back by 10:20. The high is in. Fade it.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, regular session
SAMPLE	284 qualifying sessions out of 1,403, Dec 2020 – Jul 2026
AGAINST	The base rate of a new high, then the same trade after costs

WHAT CAME BACK

The observation is real. When the session prints an early high and gives back 70% of the move by 10:20, it goes on to make a new high only 29.9% of the time, against 63.8% on an ordinary day. That is a big, honest difference.

So we traded it the obvious way, short with the target at the morning low. It won 81% of the time.

81%

of trades won

-0.6

points per trade after costs

130

points: the typical risk to own it

The wins were small and the losses were not. Reaching the target needed a stop above the morning high, and the occasional day that went back through it paid for every win and more.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Before you believe a win rate, ask for the payoff shape: the average win, the average loss, and how often the loss comes. A true fact about the market (the high usually is in) and a bad trade on it can be the same thing. Use it as context for how big to be, not as an entry.

"Fair value gaps get filled, and the candle that made the gap is your stop."

A three-candle imbalance is unfinished business. Enter on the return to it, stop beyond the candle that displaced price.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, 1, 5, 15 and 60-minute charts
SAMPLE	432,962 gaps on the 1-minute chart alone, Jan 2021 – Jul 2026
AGAINST	Random zones of the same size, the opposite trade, and every stop placement

WHAT CAME BACK

Gaps are everywhere: 22% of all one-minute bars make one. Entered on the return with the stop beyond the displacement candle, the trade lost half its risk every time, and it was negative in every year, both halves of the sample and every one of 54 variations. A random zone of the same size held about as often as a real gap.

–0.50R

per trade, 1-minute entries

45.8%

held, real gaps

45.3%

held, random zones

The "protected" candle is not protected. Its extreme was eventually broken after the touch in 93–97% of cases, and within two hours it was broken more often than a random level's (87.7% against 83.3%), typically four bars after entry. Higher timeframes lose less (5-minute –0.16R, 15-minute –0.08R) but none of them turn positive.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Read a one-minute gap being refilled as "the impulse is over", which is information about the move, not an entry. If you trade near one, your stop belongs at the origin of the move, not behind the candle everyone else is using.

"Fade the first touch of VWAP."

The session VWAP is where the big money's average sits. The first time price comes back to it, it rejects.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, VWAP anchored at the 6pm session open, first touch in the day session
SAMPLE	Built on 2013–2019, checked on 2020 onward. 72 variations
AGAINST	A random entry at the same times, before and after costs

WHAT CAME BACK

We tried the plain fade, the fade only when order flow agrees, and the break through it instead. Seventy-two versions in all, built on seven years and checked on six more.

0 / 72

versions positive after costs

±0.1R

distance from a random entry

5 – 15

wins to stops, its worst shape in 2026

Every version landed within a tenth of an R of a random entry before costs, and below zero after. The worst shape, the open sitting right on VWAP and touching it in the first minute, came up 20 times this year: 5 wins, 15 stops.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

VWAP tells you where you are relative to the session's average price. It does not tell you what happens there. The only lane left untested is a skilled read of the tape at the moment of the touch, which no historical file can see. If you trade it, that read is the trade, not the line.

"A slow drift into a level means the level holds."

When price drifts quietly into yesterday's high, low or value, the level holds about 70% of the time. Violent arrivals break; slow ones bounce.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures. Prior-day high, low, close, value edges and point of control; overnight high and low
SAMPLE	Built on Dec 2020 – Oct 2022, confirmed on Nov 2022 – Jul 2026
AGAINST	A made-up price at the same distance, with the same approach

WHAT CAME BACK

The levels held less than half the time, and a made-up price at the same distance held slightly *more* often. Slow versus violent arrivals differed by two or three points, which was not significant.

45.0%

held, real levels

47.7%

held, made-up levels

-0.12R

per trade, the fade after costs

The confirmation years said the same thing: 49.0% against 51.6% for the made-up price. The famous "70%" is very likely a measuring convention, counting from the bar that touched rather than the price you could actually fill, not a fact about the market.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

When someone quotes a hold rate, ask what a random price at the same distance does. It is the cheapest test there is and it kills most level claims on sight.

"Price is always pulled back to fair value."

The open, the VWAPs, the point of control: price is drawn back to where value is, or rejects off it like a wall. Trade the reversion.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, morning session
SAMPLE	1,439 mornings, Dec 2020 – Sep 2026; 5,388 trades for the named reversion method
AGAINST	Phantom levels: prices with no meaning, at the same distance

WHAT CAME BACK

From any distance, at any time, with any kind of order flow on the way in, price came back to fair value exactly as often as it came back to a phantom price. At the level itself, it rejected 49–51% of the time: a coin. The phantoms rejected 49–51% of the time too.

49–51%

rejection at fair value

49–51%

rejection at phantom levels

–0.035R

the published reversion method, 5,388 trades

A well-known "fair value" reversion method, traded as its author states it, lost money in every year from 2022 to 2026. Its own published proof was 80 trades, which is noise.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Levels are where to watch, never a pull. Credit the tape, not the line: what price does when it gets there tells you something; the fact that it got there tells you almost nothing.

"Buy the pullback in a trend."

After a swing retraces, the trend resumes. The deeper the pullback, the better the entry.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, swings on a 60-minute frame, four pullback depths
SAMPLE	9,428 pullbacks over 419 days
AGAINST	Pure geometry, the opposite trade, and a random entry

WHAT CAME BACK

There is a number you can work out without any data: if your target is twice as far as your stop, you should hit the target first about a third of the time on a random walk. Pullback entries hit it first 34.0% of the time, against 33.3% for pure geometry. Every depth sat right on the line.

0.340

target first, real pullbacks

0.333

target first, pure geometry

6 / 6

brackets negative after costs, both ways

Here is the tell. Buying the pullback lost money, and so did fading it. When both sides of a signal lose, the signal carries no direction at all, and you are paying costs to flip a coin.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Run any setup backwards. If the opposite trade loses about as much, the setup is not telling you anything. Also: compare against a control matched on the move, not on the clock. A clock-matched control in this study entered 7–8 points worse and manufactured an edge out of thin air.

"Big orders tell you where price is going."

When a huge aggressive order hits the tape, follow it. Smart money dips to get filled, then delivers.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures tick data, 23 contracts
SAMPLE	3.68 million sweeps, 56,401 of 100 lots or more, 1,472 sessions, Nov 2020 – Aug 2026
AGAINST	Tiny 1–3 lot prints at the same moments

WHAT CAME BACK

Big orders move price, and the move sticks: 100–199 lots shift the market about 10 ticks, 500 or more about 33. That part is real. After that, nothing. The average forward move is zero at every horizon out to 30 minutes.

10–33

ticks of impact, kept

≈ 0

average move afterwards, to 30 min

44 pts

spread of the 15-min outcome

"Dip, then deliver" happens, but it is the order book refilling in about a second, not a plan. Buy and sell sweeps behave the same. Time of day, volatility and trend change how far the next 15 minutes swing, not which way.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Treat a big print as a fact about location and liquidity: someone needed size here. Not as a direction. And notice the busy-open versus quiet-midday difference: it tells you how wide to expect the next move, which is useful on its own.

"The 200 EMA cloud tells you the trend."

Above the cloud you're long, below it you're short, inside it you wait.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, daily, the three-state cloud built from two 200-period EMAs
SAMPLE	3,847 daily sessions, ten-session horizon
AGAINST	A coin, a copy of the signal a week stale, and the signal turned upside down

WHAT CAME BACK

It picked the winning side 49.4% of the time. The benchmark of doing nothing was 50.2%. Above the cloud did better than below, but that is just the long uptrend in the sample, not the indicator.

49.4%

right side, the cloud

1 / 4

test periods passed, the real signal

2 / 4

test periods passed, the signal flipped

The failure is the revealing part: **turning the signal upside down passed more test periods than the signal did.** A copy frozen a week in the past scored the same as the live one.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

The cloud tells you where you are. It does not tell you what is next. This is narrow: it was not tested at longer horizons, on other markets or as a filter on someone's discretion. But if you sized trades off it, a stale copy would have served you just as well.

"Low-volume nodes are where price turns."

The thin spots in the volume profile are rejection zones. Price either turns there or runs straight to the other side.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, regular session, hollows known at the time
SAMPLE	5,743 hollows (4,390 touched), 1,408 sessions, Nov 2020 – Jul 2026
AGAINST	A thick, well-traded price at the same distance

WHAT CAME BACK

For direction and for how far price runs, the hollow was indistinguishable from a thick price. It beat its control in one calendar year out of seven.

0.272

typical run up, from a hollow

0.276

typical run up, from a thick price

1 / 7

years the hollow won

One thing about hollows is real, and it is not a trade: price moves through the thinnest areas about five times faster per visit than through the thickest. That is how the hollow gets made. It is a description of speed, not a turning point.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Use a thin area to expect speed, which matters for where a stop can be filled and how fast a move travels. Do not use it to pick a direction.

"Relative volume tells you how far it will go."

High RVOL means participation, participation means range. Check RVOL to know whether the move has legs.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, intraday, 30 and 60-minute horizons
SAMPLE	385,618 readings across 1,454 sessions, Dec 2020 – Jul 2026, walk-forward
AGAINST	The same forecast with no volume, and with the volume shuffled

WHAT CAME BACK

We added relative volume, trade size and price impact to a plain forecast of how far price would reach. Every one of them made the forecast slightly *worse* on unseen data, in every test period.

0 / 4

test periods improved, any volume
measure

+0.0004

forecast error, worse with RVOL added

0.455

overlap between RVOL and volatility
you already see

The reason is simple. The volatility you can already see on the chart is mostly trade count times how far each trade moves. RVOL is a noisier way of measuring something the price has already told you.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

For how far price will reach, use the range price has actually been printing. RVOL is on every educator's screen, and for this question it is worth nothing on top of that.

The order-flow playbook, followed to the letter.

Sweep-and-reclaim at key levels. Fade the failed auction above value. Short absorption at the highs. The fixed bracket. The trend model.

MARKET	Nasdaq futures, 2021–2026, tick-derived
SAMPLE	About 60 variations of the mechanics published by six well-known order-flow educators
AGAINST	Zero, with honest stops checked inside the minute and costs included

WHAT CAME BACK

- **Sweep and reclaim** of yesterday's and overnight highs and lows: 24 versions, all negative, $-0.03R$ to $-0.27R$.
- **Fading a failed auction above value:** $-0.27R$ a trade, negative in both halves of the sample. On this market, strength above value is not something to fade mechanically.
- **Absorption at the highs, short:** $-0.15R$. **A fixed bracket** taken literally: $-0.26R$.
- **Acceptance breakouts, absorption longs, delta divergence:** nothing, or too thin to call.

≈ 60

versions tested

0

survived

≈ 2×

how much checking stops on the close
inflates results

THE LESSON YOU CAN USE TOMORROW

Most backtests check the stop against the one-minute *close*. Price often traded through your stop inside the minute and came back. Checking it honestly roughly halved the results of every tight-stop strategy we ran, our own included. Whatever these educators have, it is in their discretion, and their rules as written do not carry it.

Four more, in brief.

"The algorithm runs on the minute of the hour."

Specific minutes form a path, with :29 as the turning point and the :29 to :47 window as the action. Tested on 3,089 sessions, including seven years the claim was never built on. All four claims dead in both samples. The busiest turning minute was not :29.

What is real: turns cluster on minutes divisible by five, about 1.3× their neighbours. It tells you when a turn is likely, never how big, and it does not make a trade.

"The halfway extension is where a breakout turns."

After price breaks out of a balance area, the first touch half a box-height beyond the edge is the turning level. Tested on 298 breakouts: a fade there did no better than a placebo level, and the day's extremes do not cluster at it. Half a box-height is where breakouts tend to *reach*, not where they stop. Fibonacci multiples are not special.

"A tight box tells you which way it breaks."

A compression box with order-flow divergence or footprint absorption inside it predicts the break. The first version looked real in four out of four test periods. It was 100% explained by where in the box price sat when the reading was taken. With that one fact controlled, zero out of four. The footprint data made it worse.

"A shorter opening range gives a better breakout."

Tested on stocks, using a zero-edge simulated market first. In a market with no edge at all, the win rate still rises as the opening window gets longer, because that is arithmetic. On the real stocks, both setups lost (−0.14R, −0.25R). **Entering on a random other day did better than entering when the setup fired.**

THE ONE THREAD THROUGH ALL SIXTEEN

Almost none of these ideas are invented. Each one comes from a real observation: gaps do get revisited, highs do usually hold, big orders do move price. The mistake is the next step, turning an observation into a trade without asking what a random price, a random time or a shuffled day would have done.



RETRACTED

A number we published, and took back.

The breakout at 10:30 follows through seven times more often on busy days than quiet ones.

We published that. Quietest fifth of days, the opening-range breakout followed through 5.8% of the time. Busiest fifth, 40.9%. Same setup, seven times the result, and it looked like the cleanest thing on the page.

WHAT WAS WRONG

A leak. The breakouts were scored from 10:00, but the days were sorted by how far price had travelled by 10:30. So a breakout that ran from 10:05 to 10:25 was counted inside the very number used to sort it. The day looked "busy" partly *because* the breakout had already happened.

THE HONEST VERSION

Scored strictly after 10:30, follow-through still rises from quiet days to busy ones, about 14% to 42%. But on the shuffled days it rises *more*, 15% to 47%. In every bucket the real market did slightly worse than its own shuffled copy.

5.8 → 40.9%

what we published

14 → 42%

real, scored correctly

15 → 47%

shuffled days

Busy days carry breakouts further because busy days move further, full stop. That is heat, not structure. And across all days together, the breakout follows through 18.0% of the time against 15.8% on shuffled days. Close to nothing.

WHY THIS PAGE IS HERE

Because every desk makes this mistake and almost none of them print the correction. If you find a number on our site that this page contradicts, this page wins, and we are fixing the site. Judge us on whether we publish this kind of page, not on whether we ever need to.



SURVIVED

What survived the same tests.

Fewer things, smaller things, and none of them a signal. Every one is about knowing what kind of day you are in.

1 · MOST DAYS GO NOWHERE

Across 1,382 sessions since January 2021, about **two days in three** compressed: open, wander, close near where they started. If you arrive every morning hunting the big move, you are wrong two days in three. Not unlucky. Wrong.

2 · YOU KNOW MORE AT 9:29 THAN AT 9:45

We scored how much a session reveals about its own eventual character, minute by minute. Before the open the read is worth **+0.101**. Fifteen minutes in it is down to **+0.005**, effectively nothing, and it does not recover until about 10:30. The opening burst feels like information and mostly is not.

3 · ONE NUMBER AT 10:30 TELLS YOU WHAT KIND OF DAY IT IS

Distance from the open divided by the average daily range, read once at 10:30. On 987 sessions it had never seen, it sorted balance days from directional days with **+7.0% skill after the shuffled-day test**. Quietest fifth: directional 16.7% of the time. Busiest fifth: 61.6%. It says nothing about direction. It tells you which kind of day to play.

4 · THE DAY SESSION GOT QUIET IN A WAY THE NIGHT DID NOT

In late summer 2026, on **53%** of sessions the whole New York range fit inside the overnight range, against an 18% base rate over sixteen years. The three usual explanations, expiry week, the contract roll and September, were each tested and each was dead.

NOTICE WHAT IS MISSING

No entries, no levels to fade, no direction. What survives honest testing on this market is mostly about *context*: what kind of day, when to wait, how big to be. That is the work. It is less exciting than a signal, and it is the part that holds up.

The Claim Card.

Point it at the next thing anyone sells you, including us. If they cannot answer all five, you have your answer.

1 **How many, and which ones?**

Sessions, years, market. If there is no sample, there is no claim.

2 **What does the dumb version do?**

A random entry, a random price at the same distance, the base rate. Does it beat that after costs?

3 **Does it survive a shuffled day?**

Same moves, random order. If the effect is still there, it was arithmetic.

4 **What is the payoff shape?**

Average win, average loss, how often each. A win rate on its own is a screenshot, not a result.

5 **Written first, tested on unseen data?**

Was the rule fixed before the test, and does it hold on years it was not built on? Does the opposite trade lose?

Five yeses and you have something worth watching. Not something worth trading. That takes your own forward log.

You just got your attention back. Here is what to point it at.

Sixteen ideas you can stop watching. The obvious next question is the one this guide was built to make you ask: *so what does work?* That is what the rest of the desk is for.

The 9 O'Clock: free, every trading day

A short brief before the open: where overnight left you, how it compares to a normal night, what is on the calendar. Facts, no calls.

discord.gg/Kxj7PhZVp5

The drops: every study, in full

The long versions of the pages in this guide, with the method, and new ones as they are tested.

axisdesk.org/desk/drops

AXIS Studies: the desk's instruments on your chart

The studies and the dashboard the desk reads every morning, on your own chart, with the context they were built for.

axisdesk.org