THE AUTO DECODER

The 10-Minute Pre-Purchase Parts Checklist

Run through this list before ordering any vehicle upgrade or replacement part. Ten minutes now saves hours of returns, wrong-fit headaches, and wasted money later.

1 Fitment Verification

- ☐ **Confirm exact vehicle details** — year, make, model, trim, engine, and drivetrain. "Close enough" is how wrong parts happen.
- ☐ **Cross-check the part number** against the OEM number and at least one fitment database.
- ☐ **Verify compatibility with existing modifications** — lifts, tunes, aftermarket exhaust, and wheel spacers all change what fits.
- ☐ **Measure for "universal fit" parts** — universal means "fits with effort." Confirm dimensions against the actual mounting location.

2 Quality Check

- ☐ **Research the brand's reputation** among owners of the same vehicle — not just star ratings, but long-term reviews.
- ☐ **Watch for counterfeits** on high-margin parts (sensors, filters, plugs): check packaging, holograms, and seller authorization.
- ☐ **Decide the tier deliberately** — OEM, quality aftermarket, budget, or used. Match the tier to how long the vehicle will be kept and how critical the part is.
- ☐ **Apply the buy-once rule:** a cheap part replaced twice costs more than a quality part bought once — especially with labor.

3 Price Verification

- ☐ **Get at least three quotes** — dealer, reputable online retailer, and a trusted independent source.
- ☐ **Add shipping, core charges, and tax** before comparing. The cheapest list price is rarely the cheapest delivered price.
- ☐ **Price the total installed cost** — part + labor + alignment/recalibration if required. A $90 part with a $300 install is a $390 decision.

4 Seller Verification

- ☐ **Check seller ratings and history** — established sellers with auto-parts track records, not fly-by-night storefronts.
- ☐ **Read the return policy before buying** — restocking fees, return shipping responsibility, and time limits.
- ☐ **Confirm the warranty in writing** — duration, what it covers, and who honors it (manufacturer vs. seller).
- ☐ **Match shipping time to the project timeline** — a part arriving after the shop appointment is a part that waits.

5 Installation Reality Check

- ☐ **List every tool and supply needed** — specialty tools, torque specs, threadlocker, gaskets, fluids.
- ☐ **Be honest about DIY vs. shop** — if special equipment or calibration is required, get the labor quote now, not mid-project.
- ☐ **Check for "while you're in there" items** — gaskets, seals, or hardware that are cheap now and expensive to revisit later.

> **The Auto Decoder rule:** If any box above can't be checked with confidence, pause the order. An unverified part is a gamble — and the house usually wins on fitment.

Bonus resource from The Auto Decoder • thedecodernetwork.com