



Home Inspection Preparation Guide

*A room-by-room walkthrough to help your Southern Middle
Tennessee home show its best on inspection day*

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Faith Nance, REALTOR® — FN Home Group

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Reading Time

~10 minutes

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1 What Home Inspectors Actually Look For

A home inspection is a visual, non-invasive review of a property's major systems and structure at a single point in time.

When a licensed home inspector arrives, they are not grading your housekeeping or your décor. They are systematically evaluating the systems that keep a house safe, dry, and functioning: the roof, foundation, structure, exterior, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, attic, crawlspace or basement, and interior components like doors, windows, and stairs. Most inspectors work from a standardized checklist based on state licensing standards, so the process tends to follow a predictable path from the roofline down to the foundation.

- Structural components: foundation, framing, and visible signs of movement or settling
- Exterior: siding, grading, drainage, walkways, and trim
- Roofing: covering, flashing, gutters, and visible penetrations
- HVAC: heating and cooling equipment, ductwork, and thermostats
- Plumbing: visible pipes, fixtures, water heater, and drainage
- Electrical: panel, wiring type, outlets, and grounding
- Interior: walls, ceilings, floors, doors, windows, and stairs
- Attic and crawlspace or basement: insulation, ventilation, and moisture

Faith's Tip

Think of the inspection as a health checkup for the home, not a pass/fail exam. Almost every home, new or old, ends up with something noted on the report — that's normal and expected.

2 Common Issues Inspectors Find

Certain findings show up on inspection reports again and again, and many of them are minor and inexpensive to address.

While every home is different, inspectors tend to flag a similar set of items across most properties. Understanding these ahead of time can help you decide what to tackle before the inspector's visit and what may simply become a talking point during negotiations.

- Minor roof wear, such as worn shingles or debris in gutters
- Small plumbing leaks or slow drains
- Outdated or missing GFCI outlets in wet areas

- Poor attic or crawlspace ventilation
- Signs of past or minor moisture intrusion
- Cracked caulking around windows, tubs, or showers
- Overdue HVAC filter changes or servicing
- Minor grading issues that direct water toward the foundation

Area	Common Finding	Typically Simple to Address?
Kitchen	Loose faucet or slow drain	Yes
Bathrooms	Missing GFCI outlet or worn caulk	Yes
Exterior	Gutters full of debris	Yes
Attic	Low insulation or blocked vents	Sometimes
Crawlspace	Minor moisture or debris	Sometimes
Electrical panel	Double-tapped breakers or missing labels	Depends — may need an electrician

Did You Know?

Many inspection reports include items that are considered normal wear for the home's age. A finding on the report does not automatically mean something is broken — it often simply means it's worth monitoring or maintaining.

3 Easy Repairs You Can Handle Before the Inspection

A weekend of light maintenance can go a long way toward a smoother inspection.

You don't need to renovate the house before an inspector arrives. Focus on visible, low-cost maintenance items that make the home easier to access and evaluate. Clearing pathways and addressing small nuisances also signals to buyers that the home has been cared for.

- Replace burned-out light bulbs throughout the house
- Change or clean HVAC filters
- Tighten loose door handles, hinges, and cabinet hardware
- Re-caulk around tubs, sinks, and windows where caulk is cracked or missing
- Clear gutters and downspouts of leaves and debris
- Trim vegetation away from the foundation, siding, and HVAC unit

- Test and replace batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors
- Clear access to the attic hatch, crawlspace opening, water heater, and electrical panel

Faith's Tip

Make sure the inspector can physically reach every access point — the electrical panel, attic hatch, crawlspace door, and water heater closet. If it's blocked by storage boxes or furniture, it may get noted as 'unable to access,' which can lead to follow-up questions later.

4 HVAC

Heating and cooling systems are among the most frequently discussed items on an inspection report.

Inspectors typically test that heating and cooling systems respond to the thermostat and produce a reasonable temperature difference between the air going in and the air coming out. They'll also look at the age, condition, and visible maintenance of the equipment, along with ductwork and filters where visible.

- Replace the air filter before the inspection so it isn't visibly clogged
- Make sure the thermostat has working batteries and is set to a mode that allows the system to run
- Clear furniture, boxes, or debris away from indoor and outdoor units
- Keep any recent service records handy in case a buyer or agent asks about maintenance history

Did You Know?

Many HVAC manufacturers recommend seasonal filter changes and annual professional servicing. A well-maintained system with documented service history can be a reassuring detail for buyers reviewing the report.

5 Roof

The roof is one of the first things an inspector evaluates, often from the ground, a ladder, or a drone.

Inspectors look at the general condition of the roof covering, flashing around chimneys and vents, gutter attachment, and any visible signs of past leaks such as staining on ceilings or in the attic. They typically note the apparent age and remaining life of the roofing material based on visible wear.

- Clear gutters and downspouts so water can drain freely away from the home
- Look for and remove any tree limbs resting on or overhanging the roof
- Note any recent roof repairs or replacement so you can share the history if asked

- Check for visible ceiling stains inside the home, which may prompt closer roof review

Faith's Tip

If your roof has had any repairs, patches, or a full replacement, keep receipts or contractor information available. Documented roof work can help answer buyer questions quickly during the option period.

6 Foundation

Foundation review focuses on visible signs of movement, moisture, and proper drainage around the home.

Inspectors examine the foundation for visible cracking, signs of settling, and how well the ground around the home is graded to move water away from it. In our region's mix of clay and rocky soils, drainage and grading are often just as important to note as the foundation material itself.

- Make sure soil and mulch slope away from the foundation rather than toward it
- Keep downspouts extended so water discharges away from the foundation walls
- Trim back landscaping and vines that are growing directly against foundation walls
- Note any prior foundation repair work and have documentation available if applicable

Did You Know?

Hairline cracks in a foundation are common and often related to normal curing and settling rather than a structural problem. An inspector will typically note the crack's size, direction, and location so it can be evaluated appropriately.

7 Electrical

The electrical system is reviewed for safety, capacity, and code-related basics visible without opening walls.

Inspectors typically open the electrical panel to check labeling, wiring, and breaker condition, then test a sample of outlets and switches throughout the home. They also check for GFCI (ground-fault) protection in areas like kitchens, bathrooms, garages, and exterior outlets, since these are common safety upgrades in homes of varying ages.

- Make sure the electrical panel is easy to access and not blocked by storage
- Replace any outlet covers or switch plates that are cracked or missing
- Test outlets you know about that have previously tripped or seemed inactive

- Label the panel if breaker labels are missing or unclear, where you're able to do so safely

 Faith's Tip

If you notice flickering lights, warm outlet covers, or breakers that trip repeatedly, it's worth having a licensed electrician take a look before your listing goes live rather than waiting for the report to flag it.

8 Plumbing

Plumbing checks focus on visible leaks, water pressure, drainage, and the condition of the water heater.

Inspectors run water at sinks, tubs, and showers, flush toilets, and check under-sink areas and around the water heater for signs of past or active leaks. They'll also note the age and condition of the water heater and look for a properly installed temperature and pressure relief valve.

- Fix any dripping faucets or running toilets before the inspection
- Check under sinks for moisture, staining, or musty odors and address the source if found
- Clear items stored around the water heater so it's fully accessible
- Make sure all water shut-off valves are reachable, not painted or rusted shut if possible

Slow drains are one of the most common plumbing notes on inspection reports. If a drain has been sluggish, addressing it ahead of time can prevent an unnecessary callout on the report.

9 Attic

The attic offers a window into roof condition, insulation levels, and ventilation from the inside.

From the attic, an inspector can often see the underside of the roof decking, evidence of past leaks, insulation coverage, and whether ventilation (such as soffit and ridge vents) appears to be functioning as intended. Proper attic ventilation helps regulate temperature and moisture, which can affect both the roof and the home's energy efficiency.

- Clear a path to the attic access point so it can be reached safely
- Remove excess stored items blocking insulation or vents, where possible
- Note any areas of thin or missing insulation you're aware of
- Watch for signs of pests, which inspectors may also note if visible

Did You Know?

Attics are one of the few places where you can visually trace the underside of the roof. Dark staining on the decking doesn't always mean an active leak — it can also be residue from a repaired issue — but it's worth pointing out to your inspector if you know the history.

10 Crawlspaces

For homes with a crawlspace, inspectors look closely at moisture, ventilation, and the condition of framing and insulation.

Crawlspaces in our region can be prone to humidity given the local climate, so inspectors typically check for standing water, excess moisture, vapor barrier condition, and any visible wood damage or pest activity on framing members. Good access matters here too, since a cramped or blocked entry can limit what can be observed.

- Clear the crawlspace entrance of debris, storage, or landscaping overgrowth
- Remove any trash or leftover building materials from inside the crawlspace
- Check that the vapor barrier, if present, is intact and not torn or bunched
- Address any obvious standing water or drainage issues near the entrance

Faith's Tip

If your crawlspace has a dehumidifier or sump pump, leave it running and make sure it's easy for the inspector to see that it's operating. A working moisture-control system is a helpful detail to have documented.

11 Safety Items

Life-safety features are some of the quickest and most affordable items to check before an inspection.

Inspectors pay close attention to basic safety features because they directly affect the well-being of the people living in the home. Many of these items are inexpensive to correct and can be handled in an afternoon.

- Smoke detectors installed in required locations and working with fresh batteries
- Carbon monoxide detectors near sleeping areas, especially if there's a fuel-burning appliance or attached garage
- Secure handrails on any staircase with three or more steps

- GFCI-protected outlets in kitchens, bathrooms, garages, and exterior areas
- Window locks and screens in place and functioning
- Clear, unobstructed egress from bedrooms, including working window operation
- Deck and porch railings that are stable and securely attached

 Faith's Tip

Safety items are often quick, low-cost fixes — a handful of smoke detector batteries and a few GFCI outlets can address several report items at once. These small details also give buyers real peace of mind when they read the report.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Do I need to be present during the inspection?

It's usually recommended that the seller not attend, since it allows the inspector to work efficiently and gives the buyer space to ask questions freely. Your agent can help coordinate access.

Q. How long does a typical home inspection take?

The time varies based on the size, age, and condition of the home, along with any additional inspections (like well, septic, or termite) scheduled alongside it. Your agent can give you a general expectation based on your property.

Q. Will every issue on the report need to be fixed?

Not necessarily. Inspection reports often include a mix of major and minor observations, and which items get addressed is typically part of the negotiation process between buyer and seller.

Q. Should I fix everything before listing, or wait to see the report?

This depends on your goals and timeline. Addressing obvious safety items and easy maintenance ahead of time can reduce surprises, while larger items are often better discussed after you see what a professional inspector actually notes.

Q. What if the inspector can't access an area of the home?

If access is blocked — such as a locked panel, stored items in front of the water heater, or an obstructed crawlspace entrance — the inspector will typically note it as 'not accessible,' which can prompt follow-up questions later. Clearing access ahead of time helps avoid this.

Q. Can I use a general inspection instead of separate specialty inspections?

A general home inspection covers major systems, but certain items — like wells, septic systems, termites, or pools — often require separate specialized inspections. Ask your inspector or agent what's recommended for your specific property.

Q. Does a newer home still need an inspection?

Yes. Even new construction can have installation errors, missed connections, or finishing issues that a fresh set of professional eyes can catch before closing.

Inspection Prep Checklist

- ☐ Replace HVAC filter and test thermostat operation
- ☐ Test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and replace batteries
- ☐ Clear access to the electrical panel, attic hatch, crawlspace, and water heater
- ☐ Clean out gutters and downspouts
- ☐ Trim landscaping away from the foundation, siding, and HVAC unit
- ☐ Fix dripping faucets and running toilets
- ☐ Check under sinks for leaks or moisture
- ☐ Re-caulk around tubs, sinks, and windows where needed
- ☐ Confirm GFCI outlets are present and working in kitchens, bathrooms, and garage
- ☐ Secure any loose handrails or deck railings
- ☐ Replace burned-out light bulbs throughout the home
- ☐ Clear debris and standing water near the crawlspace entrance
- ☐ Ensure exterior grading directs water away from the foundation
- ☐ Gather documentation for any recent roof, HVAC, plumbing, or electrical work
- ☐ Unlock any gates, sheds, or outbuildings the inspector may need to access
- ☐ Confirm pets are secured or offsite during the inspection window

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