

Dream Home Mastery

BY BUILDAVIA

Phase Checklists

Know exactly what to look for at every construction phase: foundation, framing, pre-drywall, blue tape, and closing. Printable and field-ready.

Arrive prepared, not exposed.

[FOUNDATION](#)[FRAMING](#)[PRE-DRYWALL](#)[BLUE TAPE](#)[CLOSING](#)[11-MONTH](#)

By Gary Duncan, builder & home inspector · 30+ years in residential construction

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How to Use These Checklists

Production builders move fast. Each phase of your home gets covered up by the next one, and once concrete is poured or drywall is hung, whatever is underneath is out of sight for good. Most problems I find aren't dramatic. They're small things nobody stopped to check before the next crew showed up.

These checklists follow the order I walk a house in the field. You don't need to be a builder to use them. You need to show up at the right time, look carefully, take photos, and put your questions in writing.

- 1 Ask for the schedule early.** Ask your superintendent to notify you before each milestone: footing/slab pour, framing complete, pre-drywall, and final walkthrough. Get the notice period in writing if you can.
- 2 Follow site rules.** Visit only when the builder allows it, wear closed-toe shoes, and never walk under active work. Many builders require you to be escorted. Respect that.
- 3 Photograph everything.** Take wide shots of each room and wall first, then close-ups. Write the photo numbers in the Notes / Photo # column so you can find them later.
- 4 Mark each item.** Check the box when it looks right. Circle the item and add a note when it doesn't, or when you aren't sure. 'Not sure' is a good reason to ask.
- 5 Put concerns in writing.** Send a short, polite email with photos to your superintendent and ask how and when each item will be addressed. Keep a copy.
- 6 Bring in a professional.** A checklist doesn't replace a licensed, independent inspector. Use it to stay engaged between professional inspections and to know which questions to ask.

Field Kit

- Phone with a charged battery (photos and video)
- Painter's blue tape (final walkthrough)
- Flashlight
- 25-ft tape measure
- Small torpedo level
- Plug-in outlet tester with GFCI button
- Clipboard and pen
- A copy of your plans and selections sheet

When to visit: Ask for notice before (1) the footing or slab pour, (2) framing complete, (3) pre-drywall, after rough-ins and before insulation and drywall, (4) the blue tape / final walkthrough, and (5) the final re-walk before closing. Then put a reminder on your calendar for month 10–11 after closing.

About Gary Duncan. Gary Duncan is a builder and home inspector with 30+ years in residential construction. Through The Duncan Group he performs buyer-side new-construction inspections across Middle Tennessee, and through Dream Home Mastery and BuildaVia he helps homeowners nationwide walk into every phase of their build knowing what to look for and what to ask.

Disclaimer: General educational guidance for U.S. homeowners, not legal, engineering, or financial advice. Building codes and requirements vary by jurisdiction; confirm details with your local building department, your contract, and qualified professionals.

PHASE 1

Foundation

Part A: Footings, Pre-Pour & Under-Slab Plumbing

Date: _____ Lot # / Address: _____ Builder / Superintendent: _____

Concrete is permanent. The best time to raise a concern is before the trucks arrive, so ask for notice of the pour date and get there when the forms, steel, and plumbing are in place.

LAYOUT & FOOTINGS	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ House placement matches the site/plot plan. Ask to see the plot plan. Check orientation, setbacks, and driveway side against what you approved.	
☐ Footing trenches are clean. No standing water, mud, loose fill, roots, or construction trash in the trenches.	
☐ Footings bear on firm soil. Depth and width should match the plans and local frost-depth requirements. Ask the super what depth is required.	
☐ Reinforcing steel is supported. Rebar sits on chairs or supports, not lying in the dirt. Splices are lapped and tied. Size and spacing should follow the plans.	
☐ Forms are straight and braced. Look for bowed or loose forms that could shift during the pour. Rough dimensions match the plans.	
☐ Required inspection is done. Ask whether the municipal (or engineer) footing inspection has passed before concrete is placed.	
PLUMBING UNDER THE SLAB	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Drain lines sloped and supported. Pipes should run downhill toward the exit, sit on bedding, and not be crushed or kinked.	
☐ Stub-up locations match the plan. Check kitchen sink and island, each bath, laundry, and any wet bar. Moving a drain later means cutting concrete.	
☐ System is under a test. Ask whether the drain system is under a water or air test and whether you can see the gauge or standpipe.	
☐ Pipes protected through concrete. Look for sleeves or wrapping where pipes pass through concrete, as the plans call for.	
☐ Other under-slab items placed. Check floor-outlet conduit, gas or water lines, and radon piping if your area requires it. Ask for the termite pretreatment certificate if one is applied.	

Gary's field note: Stand where your kitchen island and bathroom vanities will go and look down. If a drain stub isn't where your plans show it, this is the cheapest moment it will ever be to fix.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUILDER / FOLLOW-UP

PHASE 1

Foundation

Part B: Vapor Barrier, Slab, Post-Pour & Grading

Date: _____ Lot # / Address: _____ Builder / Superintendent: _____

Moisture problems often start at the foundation. A torn vapor barrier or a lot that drains toward the house won't show up on move-in day, but over time it can.

BASE & VAPOR BARRIER		NOTES / PHOTO #
☐	Base material is level and compacted. Gravel or base fill should be even, with no soft spots, ruts, or debris.	
☐	Vapor retarder is continuous. Seams are overlapped and taped. It runs to the slab edges, with no tears or punctures from foot traffic or rebar.	
☐	Penetrations are sealed. Look at every pipe that comes up through the plastic. It should be taped or bootied tight.	
☐	Slab reinforcement positioned. Wire mesh is lifted into the slab, not stepped flat onto the ground. Post-tension cables, if used, are supported and undamaged.	
☐	Anchor bolts & hold-downs in place. Bolts, straps, and hold-downs are set at the locations and spacing shown on the plans before the pour.	
AFTER THE POUR		NOTES / PHOTO #
☐	Surface and edges. Note any large cracks, honeycombing (voids), or broken edges. Photograph them with a tape measure for scale.	
☐	Embedded items survived the pour. Anchor bolts are plumb and in place. Plumbing stubs aren't damaged or filled with concrete.	
GRADING, DRAINAGE & BELOW-GRADE WALLS		NOTES / PHOTO #
☐	Soil slopes away from the house. Look for low spots or soil sloping back toward the foundation, especially at corners and under future downspouts.	
☐	Downspout plan. Ask where gutters will drain: splash blocks, extensions, or underground lines, and where that water will go.	
☐	Basement or crawlspace walls. Damp-proofing or waterproofing and foundation drains, if specified, are installed before backfill. Crawlspace access and vents or encapsulation match the plans.	
☐	Drainage swales and neighbors. Note how water moves between your lot and adjacent lots. Ask about the subdivision drainage plan if it looks unclear.	

Gary's field note: Walk the lot after a good rain if you can. Water tells you more about grading than any drawing does.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUILDER / FOLLOW-UP

PHASE 2

Framing

Structure, Openings & Layout

Date: _____ Lot # / Address: _____ Builder / Superintendent: _____

Framing is when your house becomes three-dimensional, and it's the best time to confirm that rooms, windows, and doors are where you agreed they'd be. It's also when a lot of things get cut that shouldn't be.

SILL, WALLS & FLOORS	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Sill plate is protected and anchored. Treated lumber where wood meets concrete, sill gasket under the plate, and nuts and washers tightened on anchor bolts.	
☐ Walls are plumb and straight. Sight down long walls and check a few with a level. Look for bowed studs, especially in kitchens and baths where cabinets and tile go.	
☐ Headers and openings. Headers sit over windows and doors with proper supports underneath. Rough openings match the plan sizes.	
☐ Floor joists and I-joists undamaged. No cut or notched flanges on engineered joists, and holes only where the manufacturer allows. Look for squeaky or springy areas.	
☐ Loads carried to the foundation. Posts and beams line up, with solid blocking under point loads all the way down. No beams resting on nothing.	
ROOF & CONNECTIONS	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Trusses intact. No cut, broken, or modified truss members unless there's an engineer's repair detail. Ask to see it if you find one.	
☐ Truss and rafter bracing installed. Permanent bracing per the truss package. Hangers and hurricane or uplift ties are installed and fully nailed.	
☐ Sheathing and wrap. Wall and roof sheathing are nailed with no blowouts. House wrap is lapped shingle-style and taped, and not left torn.	
YOUR LAYOUT	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Room sizes and ceiling heights. Measure key rooms against the plans. Confirm ceiling heights, trays, and vaulted areas you selected.	
☐ Stairs feel consistent. Rise and run look uniform. An uneven step is a trip hazard and should be questioned now.	
☐ Blocking for future items. Ask about backing for grab bars, TV mounts, heavy mirrors, towel bars, shelving, and fan-rated ceiling boxes.	
☐ Lumber condition. Note heavy mold growth, excessive moisture, or rain-soaked materials, and ask how they'll be addressed before close-in.	

Gary's field note: Bring your plan sheet and stand in each room. If a window, door, or wall is in the wrong place, this is your last chance before it costs real money.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUILDER / FOLLOW-UP

PHASE 3

Pre-Drywall

Part A: Windows, Flashing, Plumbing & Electrical

Date: _____ Lot # / Address: _____ Builder / Superintendent: _____

This is the most important walkthrough in the whole build. Everything that makes the house work is visible now and hidden for good next week. Ask for at least several days' notice before insulation and drywall.

WINDOWS, DOORS & FLASHING		NOTES / PHOTO #
☐	Windows flashed correctly. Flashing tape is lapped like shingles, so water runs out and over the layer below. Head flashing is over the top and the sill is protected. Follow the manufacturer's sequence.	
☐	Exterior doors flashed and pan-protected. Sill pan or flashing under exterior doors, with no gaps in the wrap around the frame.	
☐	Roof-to-wall intersections. Kick-out and step flashing where roofs meet walls, so water can't run down behind siding.	
ROUGH PLUMBING		NOTES / PHOTO #
☐	Supply lines secured and protected. Pipes are strapped and supported, with nail plates where they pass close to the edge of studs.	
☐	Drain and vent lines. Drains slope correctly and vents are run. No crushed pipe and no bored joists outside allowed zones.	
☐	Fixture locations. Tub and shower valves are at the height you expect, and the shower head and niches are placed where you want them.	
☐	Water lines under pressure test. Ask whether the supply system is under test, and check for drips at every fitting.	
ROUGH ELECTRICAL		NOTES / PHOTO #
☐	Boxes where you expect them. Walk every room: outlets, switches, island receptacles, under-cabinet lights, exterior outlets, and smoke/CO detector locations.	
☐	Wiring protected and secured. Cables are stapled and supported, with nail plates where they're near stud edges. No wire stretched tight across framing.	
☐	Ceiling fan and fixture boxes. Fan-rated boxes are installed where you selected fans. Recessed light locations match your plan.	
☐	Low-voltage and data. Network, coax, doorbell, security, and speaker wiring are run to the locations you paid for.	

Gary's field note: Take a slow video of every wall in every room before drywall, and narrate it out loud: "north wall, master bath." That video becomes your X-ray of the house for years.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUILDER / FOLLOW-UP

PHASE 3

Pre-Drywall

Part B: HVAC, Insulation, Fire Blocking & Air Sealing

Date: _____ Lot # / Address: _____ Builder / Superintendent: _____

The details on this page affect comfort, energy bills, and safety. Most of them can't be checked after drywall without cutting holes.

HVAC ROUGH-IN	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Ducts connected and supported. Flex duct is pulled reasonably tight and supported, not kinked, crushed, or sagging. Joints are sealed and connections are secure.	
☐ Register locations make sense. Every room has supply air, and the return locations match the plan. Bathrooms and the laundry have exhaust fans.	
☐ Exhaust vents go outside. Bath fans, range hood, and dryer vent terminate outdoors, not in the attic or a wall cavity.	
☐ Condensate and equipment access. Condensate lines are routed with a safe drain path. There's room to service the air handler, furnace, and water heater.	

FIRE BLOCKING & AIR SEALING	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Fire blocking installed. Openings between floors and into the attic (around flues, chases, and soffits) are blocked with approved material as your jurisdiction requires.	
☐ Penetrations sealed. Holes for pipes, wires, and ducts through top plates and exterior walls are sealed. Gaps at the attic and garage are a priority.	
☐ Garage-to-house separation. Walls and ceilings between the garage and living space are detailed per the plans. Ask what your local code requires.	

INSULATION (IF INSTALLED BEFORE YOUR VISIT)	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Wall insulation fills cavities. No gaps, voids, or compressed batts. Insulation is cut neatly around boxes and pipes, not stuffed behind them.	
☐ Tubs, showers and tricky spots. Exterior walls behind tubs and showers are insulated and air-sealed before the tub goes in. Check corners and headers too.	
☐ Attic and ceiling plan. Ask the planned attic insulation depth or R-value, and confirm baffles at the eaves so soffit vents aren't blocked.	

Gary's field note: Many municipal and builder inspections happen right at this stage, and an independent inspector can catch what a busy schedule misses. Pre-drywall is the inspection I'd never skip.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUILDER / FOLLOW-UP

PHASE 4

Blue Tape / Final Walkthrough

Interior Finishes, Systems & Function

Date: _____ Lot # / Address: _____ Builder / Superintendent: _____

The blue tape walkthrough is your formal chance to document cosmetic and functional issues before closing. Go slowly, room by room, top to bottom. Tape each item and write it down. Tape alone gets peeled off.

INTERIOR FINISHES	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Walls and ceilings. Look with a flashlight held flat to the wall for nail pops, seams, dents, and paint misses. Check ceilings in good light.	
☐ Floors. Look for scratches, chips, gaps, lippage in tile, loose transitions, and squeaks. Walk every room.	
☐ Trim, doors and hardware. Doors open, close, and latch without rubbing. Stops are installed and gaps are even. Caulk and paint at the trim are complete.	
☐ Cabinets and counters. Doors and drawers are aligned and soft-closes work. Countertops have no chips, and seams and backsplash caulk are clean.	
PLUMBING & ELECTRICAL	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Run every fixture. Turn on every faucet and shower (hot and cold), flush every toilet, and look under every sink for drips while water runs.	
☐ Test every outlet. Use a plug-in tester. Press GFCI test/reset buttons and confirm what they protect. Try every switch and note any that do nothing.	
☐ Lights, fans and doorbell. Every fixture works, fans don't wobble, and the doorbell, garage door openers, and safety reverse function.	
HVAC & APPLIANCES	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Air from every register. Turn on the system and feel each supply register. Confirm the thermostat controls heat and cool.	
☐ Appliances operate. Run the range, oven, dishwasher, disposal, microwave, and fridge/ice maker if installed. Note dents and scratches.	
EXTERIOR, GARAGE & ATTIC	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Exterior envelope. Siding, trim, paint, caulking, brick and mortar, and the visible roof. Gutters and downspouts are connected and drain away.	
☐ Concrete and grading. Look for driveway, walk, and patio cracks or settlement, and soil sloping toward the house. Note any erosion.	
☐ Garage and attic. Garage door seals and the fire-rated entry door close properly. If it's safe and permitted, look in the attic for insulation coverage and disconnected ducts.	

Gary's field note: Ask the builder for a written punch list with completion dates, signed by both of you, before you leave the walkthrough.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUILDER / FOLLOW-UP

Closing

Before You Sign & Take the Keys

Date: _____ Lot # / Address: _____ Builder / Superintendent: _____

Closing day is busy and emotional, and it's not the moment to discover unfinished work. Do a final re-walk before you sign and confirm every punch item was completed, not just marked done.

BEFORE CLOSING	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Re-walk the punch list. Verify every blue tape item in person. Photograph the corrected work.	
☐ Certificate of occupancy (or local equivalent). Ask whether final inspections have passed and occupancy has been granted where your jurisdiction requires it.	
☐ Unfinished items in writing. Anything not complete is listed in writing with a completion date. Ask your lender or closing agent about options for unfinished work.	
☐ Final utility check. Water, power, gas, and HVAC are on and working. Note the meter readings and the date of utility transfer.	
☐ Final statement reviewed. Compare your closing figures to your contract, change orders, and incentive commitments. Ask about anything that doesn't match.	
DOCUMENTS & HANDOFF	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Warranty paperwork. Written warranty, coverage periods, the claim process, and who to contact. Know your warranty start date.	
☐ Manuals and product info. Appliance, HVAC, water heater, and window manuals and registrations. Paint colors, brands, and finish selections list.	
☐ Keys, codes and remotes. All door keys, mailbox key, garage remotes, keypad codes, and any smart-home or security system accounts.	
☐ Plans and survey. Final survey or plat, and as-built notes if available. Locations of the main water shutoff, gas shutoff, and electrical panel.	
☐ Inspection reports. Keep copies of municipal and independent inspection reports with your home records.	

Gary's field note: Ask your closing attorney or title agent whether lien releases from subcontractors and suppliers apply in your state. It's a fair question, and they can tell you what's customary.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUILDER / FOLLOW-UP

AFTER MOVE-IN

11-Month Warranty Reminder

Your Last Best Look Before Year One Ends

Closing Date: _____ Lot # / Address: _____ Builder / Warranty Contact: _____

Many builders provide a one-year workmanship warranty, though terms vary, so read yours. Houses move as they go through their first seasons. Schedule a thorough look around month 10 or 11 so you can submit requests in writing before the coverage window closes.

INTERIOR	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Drywall cracks and nail pops. Common at corners of doors and windows and at ceiling seams as framing dries. Photograph and list them.	
☐ Doors and windows. Doors that stick or won't latch, and windows that bind, fog between panes, or show drafts or leaks.	
☐ Caulk, grout and floors. Gaps at tubs, showers, counters, and trim. Cracked grout, floor squeaks, or separations in flooring.	
SYSTEMS	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Plumbing. Look under every sink, behind toilets, and around the water heater for drips or stains. Check water pressure and drain speed.	
☐ HVAC. Uneven room temperatures, noisy ducts, condensate issues. Look at the filter and equipment area for water.	
☐ Electrical. Test GFCIs and smoke/CO alarms. Note flickering lights, dead outlets, or tripping breakers.	
EXTERIOR & STRUCTURE	NOTES / PHOTO #
☐ Grading and settlement. Soil that has settled against the foundation, low spots that hold water, and erosion at downspouts.	
☐ Concrete. New or widening cracks in the driveway, garage slab, walks, and patio. Use a coin or ruler for scale in photos.	
☐ Roof, gutters and siding. Visible damaged shingles, loose gutters, gaps in siding and trim, and peeling caulk or paint.	
☐ Attic (if safe and accessible). Signs of leaks, disturbed or thin insulation, and disconnected bath fan or duct lines.	

Gary's field note: Submit your list in writing, keep copies with dates, and follow the builder's claim process exactly. An independent 11-month inspection report can carry real weight with a warranty department.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUILDER / FOLLOW-UP

Warranty expires: _____ Inspection scheduled: _____ Request submitted: _____