

JENNIFER CAIN REALTY, LLC · LPT REALTY

RALEIGH & CARY SELLERS

Listing Preparation Checklist

Ten areas, in the order I work through them. Including the things I would tell you not to bother with.

Jennifer Cain

Listing Specialist · Raleigh, Cary, and the Triangle

REALTOR® · NC License #317628 · LPT Realty

How to use this

This is the companion to the Listing Preparation Planner on my website. The planner tells you where you stand. This tells you what to do about it.

Ten sections, in the order I actually work through them with a seller. Each one starts with why it matters, because a checklist you do not understand is a chore, and a checklist you do understand is a strategy.

Two rules before you begin

You will not do all of this. Nobody does. Some items will not apply to your home and some are not worth the money for your situation. Items marked with a dashed box are ones I frequently tell sellers to skip.

Do not start with the hardest thing. The sellers who stall out are almost always the ones who opened the garage first. Start with Section 4. It is the fastest visible progress and it makes everything after it feel possible.

Rough sequence

When	What
8 to 12 weeks out	Pre-listing inspection. Decide what gets repaired. Book contractors, since good ones are booked out.
4 to 8 weeks out	Repairs and paint. Declutter and depersonalize. Begin sorting what moves with you.
2 to 4 weeks out	Staging walkthrough. Furniture placement. Deep clean. Exterior and landscaping.
1 week out	Final touch-ups, then professional photography. Nothing changes after photos.
Launch	Active midweek, building into the weekend.

Timeline assumes an average amount of preparation. A home that needs significant work runs longer. A well-maintained home that is already edited can move faster. We set your real timeline together after I walk the property.

01 Condition and the pre-listing inspection

I would much rather discover a material issue ourselves and decide how we want to handle it than have a buyer discover it after we are under contract and use it to renegotiate.

- ☐ Order a pre-listing home inspection
- ☐ Review the report with me before deciding anything
- ☐ Separate findings into: repair, disclose, or price for
- ☐ Service the HVAC and keep the receipt
- ☐ Check for active water intrusion, roof issues, and grading problems
- ☐ Gather warranties, permits, and records for major work you have done
- ☐ Preemptively replacing a roof or HVAC that is aging but functional. **Usually not worth it.** Disclose and price for it instead.

02 Paint

Neutral does not mean beige and boring. It means the buyer can picture their own things in the room instead of studying yours.

- ☐ Repaint any strongly colored or personalized room
- ☐ Touch up scuffs, nail holes, and high-traffic walls
- ☐ Paint trim and doors if they read dingy against fresh walls
- ☐ Check ceilings for water stains, even old ones
- ☐ Keep one consistent palette through connected spaces
- ☐ Repainting a whole house that is already neutral and in good condition. **Skip it.**

03 Flooring and major surfaces

Buyers do not subtract the cost of replacing carpet. They subtract the cost, the inconvenience, and the fact that they did not want another project.

- ☐ Professionally clean all carpet
- ☐ Replace carpet that is stained, worn, or dated beyond cleaning
- ☐ Repair damaged hardwood boards, squeaks, and transitions
- ☐ Re-caulk and re-grout tile in bathrooms and the kitchen
- ☐ Address any countertop chips, burns, or seam separation
- ☐ A full kitchen or bath renovation before listing. **Almost never returns what it costs.** Talk to me first.

04 Depersonalizing

We are no longer decorating the home for the people who live there. We are preparing it for the people we want to buy it.

- ☐ Remove family photographs from walls and surfaces
- ☐ Pack away collections, trophies, diplomas, and memorabilia
- ☐ Remove religious and political items
- ☐ Clear refrigerator doors completely
- ☐ Remove monogrammed and personalized decor
- ☐ Secure medications, financial documents, mail, and valuables
- ☐ Reduce items on every horizontal surface by about half

05 Room purpose

A bedroom being used for storage reads as a storage room in photographs, and buyers count rooms.

- ☐ Give every bedroom a bed, or stage it as a clear guest room or office
- ☐ Return the dining room to a dining room
- ☐ Empty and reclaim any room being used as overflow storage
- ☐ Remove exercise equipment from rooms that are not gyms
- ☐ Consolidate hobby and craft areas into one defined space
- ☐ Open up traffic flow. Remove furniture that blocks a natural path

06 Storage, closets, and the garage

Buyers open every door. Full storage reads as not enough storage, no matter the square footage.

- ☐ Reduce closet contents by roughly a third and space the hangers
- ☐ Clear the floor of every closet
- ☐ Empty the garage enough to show a car actually fits
- ☐ Organize the pantry and remove expired items
- ☐ Clear the attic, basement, and crawl space access points
- ☐ Rent a storage unit if needed. It is cheaper than a price reduction
- ☐ Clear space under every sink

07 The exterior

The buyer has already started forming an opinion before they ever walk through the front door.

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| ☐ Fresh mulch in all beds | ☐ Polish or replace door hardware |
| ☐ Trim shrubs back from windows and walls | ☐ New doormat |
| ☐ Edge the lawn and walkways | ☐ Repair fencing, gates, and railings |
| ☐ Remove dead plants and bare patches | ☐ Clean and stage the patio or deck |
| ☐ Pressure wash siding, walks, and the driveway | ☐ Store hoses, tools, and trash bins out of sight |
| ☐ Clean the gutters and check downspouts | ☐ Replace burned-out exterior bulbs |
| ☐ Wash exterior windows | ☐ Clean or replace faded house numbers |
| ☐ Paint or replace the front door | ☐ Remove seasonal decor |

08 Everything that should work, working

A buyer who finds three small broken things starts wondering what else was not maintained.

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|---|--|
| ☐ Every light bulb, matched in color temperature | ☐ Garage door and remotes |
| ☐ All switches and outlets | ☐ Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors |
| ☐ Every faucet, no drips | ☐ All appliances that convey |
| ☐ Toilets that run or rock | ☐ Ceiling fans, balanced and quiet |
| ☐ Doors that stick, drag, or will not latch | ☐ Exhaust fans in every bath |
| ☐ Cabinet doors and drawer glides | ☐ Doorbell |
| ☐ Windows that open, close, and lock | ☐ Irrigation and outdoor spigots |

09 Where you are going next

This affects timing, negotiating position, and how we structure the transaction. It is one of the first things I want to understand.

- ☐ Decide whether you are buying, renting, or moving in with family
- ☐ If buying, talk to a lender before you list so you know your position
- ☐ Identify your earliest and latest acceptable closing dates
- ☐ Decide whether you would need a rent-back after closing
- ☐ If downsizing, start deciding what actually fits in the next place
- ☐ Get quotes from movers early. Good ones book out
- ☐ If a senior transition specialist would help, tell me and I will connect you
- ☐ Make a plan for pets during showings

10 Understanding your number

An online estimate is a starting point. It is not a pricing strategy, and it is not something to plan a move around.

- ☐ Request a pricing analysis built from actual comparable sales
- ☐ Look at the photographs of those comparables, not just the numbers
- ☐ Ask about days on market and concessions, not only the sale price
- ☐ Identify your mortgage payoff amount
- ☐ Ask for a seller net sheet before you list, and again with every offer
- ☐ Agree on what we do if showings come without offers
- ☐ Be honest with me about your bottom line so I can negotiate to it

The last week

Once photography is done, nothing changes. No new furniture, no seasonal decor, no rearranging. The home a buyer sees online has to be the home they walk into, or you have created a disappointment before they reach the front door.

BEFORE YOU SPEND A DOLLAR

Let me walk it with you first.

This list is thorough on purpose, but it is not your list. Your home does not need all of it, and some of it would be money you do not get back.

I walk every property in person with a professional stager and tell you what will actually change how a buyer responds, and what I would skip. I am not interested in having sellers spend money for the sake of spending money.

One conversation before you start will save you more than this checklist will.

Jennifer Cain

(860) 794-6099

Jennifer.Cain@lptrealty.com

jennifercainrealty.com

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