# CHECKLIST: DNS HYGIENE 2026

## Stop Your Inbox Collapse in 15 Minutes

*"Panic is for amateurs. For us, it's just a reason to get our digital house in order."*

[ ] **1. Header "Sniff" Test (Alignment Check)** Send a test email to a personal Gmail account. Click "Show Original" and find the `Authentication-Results` line. If you see `dkim=pass` but with a third-party domain (like *sendgrid.net*), your **Alignment is broken**. Fix it now.

[ ] **2. Kill 1024-bit Keys** Check your DKIM key length in your ESP settings. If it's still 1024-bit, delete it without hesitation. In 2026, this is a security hole. **Generate a new 2048-bit key immediately.**

[ ] **3. Setup Custom DKIM (The Bond)** Go to your DNS settings and add the CNAME records provided by your email service. The signing domain (`d=`) **MUST** match your "From" domain. This is the Alignment that Google demands.

[ ] **4. SPF Flattening** Open your SPF record. If you have more than 10 "include" mechanisms, mail servers will give up halfway through reading it. Use **SPF Flattening** or remove unnecessary intermediaries. Keep it lean.

[ ] **5. SPF & Return-Path Matching** Ensure your technical return address (Return-Path) uses your domain or a custom subdomain (e.g., *bounce.yourdomain.com*). This closes the Alignment gap for SPF.

[ ] **6. The Move to DMARC `p=quarantine`** If you are still on `p=none`, you are just a spectator. Switch to **quarantine**. Let suspicious emails go to spam while you calibrate your settings.

[ ] **7. Final Strike: DMARC `p=reject`** Once your logs confirm that all legitimate mail matches perfectly—turn on **reject**. Now, any unauthorized spoofing of your brand will be killed at the gate.

[ ] **8. RBL Blacklist Scan** Run your IP and domain through RBL checkers (Spamhaus, etc.). If you're blacklisted, no amount of settings will save you until you dig yourself out of that hole.

[ ] **9. Postmaster Validation** Check **Google Postmaster Tools**. If your domain reputation graph is turning red, your 550 errors are already snowballing. It's time for an emergency audit.

[ ] **10. The Last Resort** Settings are perfect, logs are clean, but Open Rates are still dead? Stop guessing. **Book a deep deliverability audit with Elena.** We'll strip your technical setup to the bone and find the leak.