The Challenge to write the Book of Mormon

1. You must be 23-24 years of age.

2. You cannot be a college graduate, in fact, you can have only three years of schooling.

3. You must write a book with 239 Chapters, 54 of them about wars, 21 about history, 55 about prophecy, 71 about doctrine, 17 about missionaries, and 21 about the mission of Jesus Christ.

4. Whatever you write must be on the basis of what you now know; no research can be done.

5. You must write a history of an ancient country, such as Tibet, covering a period from 600 BC to 421 AD. Why? Cause you know nothing about Tibet.

6. You must include in your writings the history of two distinct and separate nations, along with histories of different contemporary nations or groups of people, of which no one ever knew existed.

7. Your writings must describe the religious, economic, social, and political cultures and institutions of these two nations.

8. You must weave into your history the religion of Jesus Christ and the pattern of Christian living.

9. When you start to produce this record, covering a period of over 1,000 years, you must finish it in approximately 90 working days.

10. When you have finished you must not make any major changes in the text. The first edition must stand forever.

11. After pauses for sleep and food, if you are dictating to a stenographer you must never ask to have the last paragraph or last sentence read back to you.

12. Your record must be about 522 pages with over 510 words per page. You must add 180 proper nouns to the English language. William Shakespeare only added 20.

13. You must announce that your "smooth narrative" is not fiction, but truth, yes, even that it is a sacred record of history.

14. In fact, your book must fulfill Bible prophecies; even in the exact manner in which it shall come forth, to whom given, its purpose and accomplishments (Respectively-Psalms 85:10-11, Isaiah 29:11-14, Ezekiel 37:18-21, etc.)

15. You must publish it to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, declaring it to be the Word of God.
16. You must include with the record itself, the marvellous promise; "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, He will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost" -Mor 3:5

17. Tens and hundreds of thousands must bear record to the world for the next 145 years that they know the record to be true, because they put the "promise" to the test and found it to be true, the truth manifested to them by the power of the Holy Ghost.

18. Thousands of great men, intellectual giants, and scholars must subscribe discipleship to the record and its movement even to the point of laying down their own lives for it.

19. Your descriptions of the culture and people in these civilizations of which you will write include, the manner of their written and spoken languages, type of buildings, geographic locations, governmental types, monetary system, types of tools and materials used, and many other facts completely unknown to the rest of the world.

20. There can be no flaw whatsoever in the entire record.

21. Yet, you must not make an absurd, impossible, or contradictory statement.

22. Even so, many of the facts, ideas, and statements given us as truth in your record must be entirely inconsistent, even the direct opposite of the prevailing beliefs of the world where very little is claimed to be known about these civilizations and their 1000 years of history.

23. You must invite the ablest scholars and experts to examine the text with care. You must strive diligently to see that your book gets into the hands of all those most eager to prove it a forgery and who are most competent to expose and flaw in it.

24. Through investigation, scientific evidence, and archaeological discoveries for the next 150+ years must verify your claims and prove even the minutest details of your history to be perfectly true, even to the types of roads they built.

25. After 150+ years of analysis, no claim or fact in the book is disproven, but all is vindicated. Other theories and ideas as to its origin, rise, and fall, leaving your claims as the only possible ones.

26. Internal and external prophecies must be confirmed and fulfilled in the next 150 years.

27. Three honest, accreditable witnesses must testify to the whole world that an angel from heaven appeared to them and showed them the ancient records from which you claim your record is translated. These three witnesses must never deny their testimony, not even upon their death bed.

28. You must call out of heaven the voice of the Redeemer to declare to the three witnesses that your record is true and that it is their responsibility to hear the testimony. They must handle and feel the engravings on the plates, and bear record of it. Again, they can never deny their testimony.
29. Eight other witnesses must testify to the world that they saw the ancient records in broad daylight and they that handled them and felt the engravings on the record.

30. The first three and the second eight witnesses must bear their testimony not for profit or gain, but under great personal sacrifice and severe persecution, even to their death.

31. You must find someone to finance your book with the understanding that neither he nor you will ever receive and monetary remuneration from it. You must sell the book at the cost of, or less than the cost of, its production value.

32. You must tell the world that the written record you have translated from was engraved gold plates, even though up until the time you make the claim, no one has ever found anywhere in past history any civilization using gold as a method of keeping records, and not until about 100 years later were any similar engraved gold plates found.

33. Finally, after suffering persecution and revilement for 20 years after you finish the book, you must willingly give your own life for your testimony that the record is from God. All the time you never make a profit or any other type of personal gain save it be your testimony of the work you brought forth.

Surely, no one without God's help could produce a similar record and comply with all of the above conditions. Wouldn't you say that Joseph Smith was indeed a man of good and that he was an instrument in God's hands to bring forth such a record?

In the Prophetic Book of Mormon: New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study, Hugh Nibley makes an excellent observation about the indirect, circumstantial evidence for Book of Mormon authenticity (p. 71):

Entirely apart from the contents of the Book of Mormon and the external evidences that might support it, there are certain circumstances attending its production which cannot be explained on grounds other than those given by Joseph Smith. These may be listed briefly:

1. There is the testimony of the witnesses.

2. The youth and inexperience of Joseph Smith at the time when he took full responsibility for the publication of the book - proof (a) that he could not have produced it himself and (b) that he was not acting for someone else, for his behavior at all times displayed astounding independence.

3. The absence of notes and sources.

4. The short time of production.

5. The fact that there was only one version of the book ever published (with minor changes in each printing). This is most significant. It is now known that the Koran, the only book
claiming an equal amount of divine inspiration and accuracy, was completely re-edited at least three times during the lifetime of Mohammed. This brings up:

6. The unhesitating and unchanging position of Joseph Smith regarding his revelations, a position that amazed Eduard Meyer more than anything else [1]. From the day the Book of Mormon came from the press, Joseph Smith never ceased to spread it abroad, and he never changed his attitude toward it. What creative writer would not blush for the production of such youth and inexperience twenty years after? What impostor would not lie awake nights worrying about the slips and errors of this massive and pretentious product of his youthful indiscretion and roguery? Yet, since the Prophet was having revelations all along, nothing would have been easier, had he the slightest shadow of a misgiving, than to issue a new, revised, and improved edition, or to recall the book altogether, limit its circulation, claim it consisted of mysteries to be grasped by the uninitiated alone, say it was to be interpreted only in a "religious" sense, or supersede it by something else. The Saints who believed the Prophet were the only ones who took the book seriously anyway.

7. There has never been any air of mystery about the Book of Mormon; there is no secrecy connected with it at the time of its publication or today; there is a complete lack of sophistry or policy in discussions of the Book of Mormon; it plays absolutely no role in the history of the Church as a pawn; there is never dispute about its nature or contents among the leaders of the Church; there is never any manipulating, explaining, or compromise. The book has enjoyed unlimited sale at all times.

8. Finally, though the success of the book is not proof of its divinity, the type of people it has appealed to - sincere, simple, direct, highly unhysterical, and nonmystical - is circumstantial evidence for its honesty. It has very solid supporters.

**Challenge on the Book of Mormon Hugh Nibley**

Below is the Book of Mormon Challenge, an assignment that Professor Hugh Nibley at BYU sometimes gave to students in a required class on the Book of Mormon. Though it is several decades old, it still offers a challenge worth pondering. (Recently discovered evidences for Book of Mormon authenticity should be consulted for some real excitement.) The following text is taken from the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Vol. 8, Ch. 11, pp. 221-2:

"Since Joseph Smith was younger than most of you and not nearly as experienced or well-educated as any of you at the time he copyrighted the Book of Mormon, it should not be too much to ask you to hand in by the end of the semester (which will give you more time than he had) a paper of, say, five to six hundred pages in length. Call it a sacred book if you will, and give it the form of a history. Tell of a community of wandering Jews in ancient times; have all sorts of characters in your story, and involve them in all sorts of public and private vicissitudes; give them names--hundreds of them--pretending that they are real Hebrew and Egyptian names of circa 600 B.C.; be lavish with cultural and technical details--manners and customs, arts and industries, political and religious institutions, rites, and traditions, include
long and complicated military and economic histories; have your narrative cover a thousand years without any large gaps; keep a number of interrelated local histories going at once; feel free to introduce religious controversy and philosophical discussion, but always in a plausible setting; observe the appropriate literary conventions and explain the derivation and transmission of your varied historical materials.

"Above all, do not ever contradict yourself! For now we come to the really hard part of this little assignment. You and I know that you are making this all up—we have our little joke—but just the same you are going to be required to have your paper published when you finish it, not as fiction or romance, but as a true history! After you have handed it in you may make no major changes in it (in this class we always use the first edition of the Book of Mormon); what is more, you are to invite any and all scholars to read and criticize your work freely, explaining to them that it is a sacred book on a par with the Bible. If they seem over-skeptical, you might tell them that you translated the book from original records by the aid of the Urim and Thummim—they will love that! Further to allay their misgivings, you might tell them that the original manuscript was on golden plates, and that you got the plates from an angel. Now go to work and good luck!

"To date no student has carried out this assignment, which, of course, was not meant seriously. But why not? If anybody could write the Book of Mormon, as we have been so often assured, it is high time that somebody, some devoted and learned minister of the gospel, let us say, performed the invaluable public service of showing the world that it can be done."

The book starts out with a colophon telling us whose hand wrote it, what his sources were, and what it is about; the author boasts of his pious parents and good education, explaining that his background was an equal mixture of Egyptian and Jewish, and then moves into this history establishing time, place, and background; the situation at Jerusalem and the reaction of Nephi's father to it, his misgivings, his prayers, a manifestation that came to him in the desert as he traveled on business and sent him back post-haste "to his own house at Jerusalem," where he has a great apocalyptic vision.

All this and more in the first seven verses of the Book of Mormon. The writer knows exactly what he is going to say and wastes no time in saying it. Throughout the book we get the impression that it really is what its authors claim it to be, a highly condensed account from much fuller records. We can imagine our young rustic getting off to this flying start, but can we imagine him keeping up the pace for ten pages? For 588 pages the story never drags, the author never hesitates or wanders, he is never at a loss. What is really amazing is that he never contradicts himself.