



90-DAY FIRST-TIME BUYER BLUEPRINT

Master Your Finances, Secure Your Pre-Approval, and Close on Your First Home in as Little as 90 Days.

Created by Lynette Selby, Realtor®

This guide is specifically for first-time homebuyers who want a clear step-by-step plan to go from 'I want to buy' to 'I'm ready' in 90 days.

Lynette Selby
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REAL ESTATE



Welcome!

Congratulations on taking the first step toward buying your first home. This 90-Day First-Time Buyer Blueprint is your step-by-step plan to go from overwhelmed to confident, without guessing your way through the process.

Over the next 90 days, you'll focus on what actually matters:

- Understanding your loan options and getting pre-approved
- Improving your credit if needed (mortgage-ready, not perfect)
- Building a realistic cash-to-close plan
- Knowing exactly what to do from offer to closing

By the end, you'll have a clear timeline, a realistic savings target, and a simple plan you can follow without feeling overwhelmed. These steps work anywhere in the U.S. Some terms vary by state, but the strategy stays the same.

DO THIS FIRST

1. Watch the Welcome Video (click the button below).
2. Print this guide or save it to your phone/tablet so you can check off steps.

Start with the Quick Start Checklist + Choose Your Path, then begin Month One Week 1 (unless you truly match Path A).

Ready?

Let's get started.

PS: Action Templates are included at the end of this Blueprint in the Appendix (Template Pack).

Lynette Selby

[Click here to watch your
WELCOME VIDEO](#)

START HERE:

HOW TO USE THIS BLUEPRINT

Buying your first home is a big deal — and no two journeys look the same.

This Blueprint gives you a clear, step-by-step plan to become buyer-ready with confidence (money, credit, paperwork, and next steps), without feeling overwhelmed.

What to know upfront

- This is a preparation roadmap. Your actual closing date depends on finances, inventory, and lender timelines.
- You may not buy in exactly 90 days — and that's okay. Progress is the win.
- Some buyers move fast. Others need time to build savings, improve credit, or gain clarity. This plan works at your pace.
- Don't try to do everything at once. Focus on one small task at a time and keep moving forward.

How to use this Blueprint (in order)

1. Start with the Quick Start Checklist (15 minutes)
2. This helps you choose your starting point and grab the pages you'll use most.

Choose the path that fits you right now:

- Ready to talk to a lender / start shopping? You may be able to move ahead faster.
- Need clarity on budget and cash-to-close? Start with Month 1 and build your foundation.
- Working on credit? Use the Credit Bonus alongside Month 1.

Follow the plan month-by-month

- Month 1: Money, credit, mindset, and readiness
- Month 2: Pre-approval, choosing your agent, and starting your search
- Month 3: Offers, inspections, loan approval, and closing

Quick note about “Working Pages”

Working Pages are the checklists, trackers, scripts, and planners you'll fill out and reuse as you go. If you can only print/save a few pages, the Quick Start Checklist tells you which ones.

Next step: Turn the page and start the Quick Start Checklist.

If you feel stuck, reach out to a trusted lender or a real estate agent. If you don't have an agent yet, I can help you get connected with a great one in your area.

[CLICK HERE](#) and tell me your city. I'll help you find a trusted agent.

Important: This Blueprint is for education only and isn't legal, tax, or lending advice. Real estate rules vary by state. Always confirm details with your lender, attorney/title company, and licensed professionals.

QUICK START CHECKLIST

YOUR FIRST 15 MINUTES INSIDE THE BLUEPRINT.

QUICK START (15 MINUTES)

You don't need to read all 100+ pages to make progress. Use this quick start to get moving today.

Step 1 — Set your target (2 minutes)

Fill in these two lines:

Target move / close window: _____

Why this matters to me: _____

Step 2 — Print / Save the “working pages” (3 minutes)

If you don't print anything else, print (or screenshot) these pages and keep them together:

90-Day Completion Tracker (PDF pages 8–10)

Month One Game Plan: Week 1–4 (PDF page 14)

Month Two Game Plan: Week 5–8 (PDF page 35)

Month Three Game Plan: Week 9–12 (PDF pages 54–55)

Cash-to-Close Planner (PDF pages 25–26)

Optional (if you're working on credit):

Mortgage-Ready Credit Toolkit (PDF pages 69–79)

5-Minute Credit Score Tracker (PDF pages 80–82)

QUICK START CHECKLIST

YOUR FIRST 15 MINUTES INSIDE THE BLUEPRINT.

Step 3 — Fill in your numbers (7 minutes)

Complete these in order:

Goal Snapshot (PDF pages 15–16)

Cash-to-Close Planner (PDF pages 25–26)

DTI Snapshot (PDF pages 27–28)

Step 4 — Choose your path (2 minutes)

Turn the page and pick the path that matches your real life right now (not your ideal version).

Step 5 — Get support (1 minute)

If you want help personalizing your plan, connecting with an agent, or getting buyer guidance, use:

- Close With Me Bonus (PDF page 68)

YOUR 90-DAY STARTING POINT

CHOOSE THE PATH THAT MATCHES YOUR CURRENT SITUATION.

CHOOSE YOUR PATH (START HERE)

Circle one and follow the steps. You can switch paths later. The goal is forward motion.

PATH A — “I’m Pre-Approval Ready”

You’re likely here if you have stable income, your credit is in decent shape, and you have at least some money set aside.

START HERE:

- If you already know your budget and your documents are basically ready, jump to Month Two, Week 5.
- If you’re not sure about your numbers or paperwork, complete Month One, Weeks 1–2, then move to Month Two.

DO TODAY (15–30 mins):

- Skim Month One, Week 1 (pg. 14 or 35) to confirm your numbers and documents, then jump to Month Two and start Week 5.
- Use the Lender Call Script (pp. 85–91).

DO THIS WEEK:

- Submit your application and documents.
- Get your pre-approval letter (or a step-by-step plan to qualify).

THEN MOVE TO:

- Agent Interview Script (pp. 92–96)

PATH B — “I Need a Credit Boost / Debt Cleanup First”

You’re likely here if your score is below where you want it, utilization is high, collections/late payments are an issue, or you’re not sure what’s on your reports.

DO TODAY (15–30 mins):

Pull your credit reports and list what needs fixing.
Start the 30-Day Credit Boost Action Plan (pp. 69–79).

DO THIS WEEK:

Fill out Credit Starting Points + Next Steps (p. 31).
Track progress using the Credit Score Tracker (pp. 80–82).

THEN MOVE TO:

Once you’ve improved your score or have a clear lender target, switch to PATH A and start Month Two, Week 5.

YOUR 90-DAY STARTING POINT

CHOOSE THE PATH THAT MATCHES YOUR CURRENT SITUATION.

PATH B (continued)

If you've started the credit plan and you're actively cleaning up your report, here's your next step so you keep moving forward.

THEN MOVE TO:

- Month One Plan of Action pages for saving + document prep (PDF pages 32-33)
- Re-check readiness and jump to Month Two Game Plan (PDF page 35) when you're close.

PATH C — “I need Cash-to-Close / Budget Clarity First”

You're likely here if: you don't know your numbers yet, you need to save more, or you're nervous about monthly payment + costs.

DO TODAY (15–30 mins):

- Complete the Cash-to-Close Planner (PDF pages 25–26).
- Do the DTI Snapshot (PDF pages 27–28).

DO THIS WEEK:

- Follow the Month One Game Plan (PDF page 14).
- Complete the Month One Plan of Action (PDF pages 32–33) and set a weekly savings target.

THEN MOVE TO:

- Month Two Game Plan (PDF page 35) once your numbers are clear and your documents are ready.

Your “Don't Mess This Up” reminders

(These keep your loan process clean once you're moving toward pre-approval.)

- Avoid new debt / new monthly payments if you can.
- Don't make big purchases on credit.
- Keep your money easy to document (ask your lender if unsure).

90-DAY COMPLETION TRACKER (CHECK IT OFF AS YOU GO)

This is your “big picture” tracker. Every box you check is proof you’re moving forward.

Reminder: Real estate terms, timelines, and requirements vary by state and loan type. This Blueprint is for educational purposes only and is not legal or financial advice.

MONTH 1: CLARITY + MONEY + CREDIT + ORGANIZATION (Weeks 1–4)

- I set my target move-in timeline: _____
- I pulled my credit report (all 3 bureaus or at least one):

- I listed all monthly debts (car, student loans, credit cards, etc.)
- I calculated my DTI (or got a lender to help me estimate it)
- I set a target monthly payment range: \$_____ to \$_____
- I estimated my price range: \$_____ to \$_____
- I started my buyer file (ID, paystubs, bank statements, etc.)
- I created my savings plan for cash-to-close
- I chose ONE credit focus for the next 30 days (utilization, late payments, etc.)
- I have a clear “Needs vs. Wants” list started
- I wrote down my top deal breakers

Month 1 Done looks like:

I know my target payment, I have a realistic price range, and my finances are organized enough to start pre-approval confidently.

90-DAY COMPLETION TRACKER (CHECK IT OFF AS YOU GO)

MONTH 2: PRE-APPROVAL + AGENT + SMART HOME SEARCH (Weeks 5–8)

- I researched lenders (at least 2 options)
- I asked lender interview questions and compared answers
- I chose a lender and completed my application
- I received a pre-approval letter (or conditional pre-approval)
- I know my estimated cash-to-close target: \$_____
- I understand my likely loan type (Conventional/FHA/VA/USDA)
- I hired a buyer's agent (or chose who I will work with)
- I set up my home search (alerts, price cap, must-haves)
- I toured homes and tracked what I liked/disliked
- I refined my list based on real homes (not just wishful thinking)

Month 2 Done looks like:

I'm pre-approved, I have a pro in my corner, and I'm looking at the right homes with a clear plan.

90-DAY COMPLETION TRACKER (CHECK IT OFF AS YOU GO)

MONTH 3: OFFER + INSPECTIONS + UNDERWRITING + CLOSING (Weeks 9–12)

- I reviewed the offer terms cheat sheet (earnest money, dates, contingencies)
- I submitted an offer that matches my budget and timeline
- My offer was accepted (date): _____
- I scheduled the home inspection
- I reviewed the inspection report and prioritized repairs (safety, structure, systems)
- I negotiated repairs/credits (if needed)
- The appraisal was ordered and completed (if required)
- I submitted all documents requested by underwriting on time
- I avoided the underwriting “DO NOT” list (no new debt, no big deposits, etc.)
- I received the Closing Disclosure and reviewed it
- I completed my final walkthrough
- I closed on my home (date): _____

Month 3 Done looks like:

My loan is clear, my numbers are confirmed, and I'm walking into closing prepared, not nervous.

DO THIS:

- Print this page and put it somewhere you'll see it.
- Check off boxes weekly, not “when you feel like it.”
- If you get stuck, write your questions below and ask your lender/agent.

Done looks like:

I'm not guessing anymore. I can see my progress, and I know exactly what step comes next.

SMART QUESTIONS TRACKER

As you move through this Blueprint, questions will come up. Write them here so you don't forget. Clarity builds confidence.

Use this simple rule:

- Money, credit, pre-approval, loan terms: **ask your lender**
- Homes, neighborhoods, offers, inspections: **ask your real estate agent**
- Contracts, title, closing documents: **ask your closing attorney, title company, or title agent**

QUESTION #1

My Question:_____

Who do I need to ask? Lender Agent Title/Attorney Insurance Other:_____

Answer / Notes:

My Next Step:_____

QUESTION #2

My Question:_____

Who do I need to ask? Lender Agent Title/Attorney Insurance Other:_____

Answer / Notes:

My Next Step:_____

QUESTION #3

My Question:_____

Who do I need to ask? Lender Agent Title/Attorney Insurance Other:_____

Answer / Notes:

My Next Step:_____

QUESTION #4

My Question:_____

Who do I need to ask? Lender Agent Title/Attorney Insurance Other:_____

Answer / Notes:

My Next Step:_____

PURCHASE YOUR FIRST HOME IN 90 DAYS

Month One

MONTH ONE OBJECTIVES

This month is where you stop guessing and start getting ready.

By the end of Month One, you will have:

- A clear homeownership goal, target timeline, and a realistic target payment range
- A real upfront cash goal (down payment + closing costs + cushion) using your Cash-to-Close Planner
- A simple credit and debt plan (your next 2 moves to become mortgage-ready)
- A complete “Pre-Approval Ready” folder so you’re not scrambling later

Month One can feel heavy because it’s all about money, paperwork, and reality checks. But this is the month that turns you from “hoping” into “ready.”

When you know your numbers and have your documents organized, you stop guessing and start moving with confidence.

MONTH ONE GAME PLAN: WEEK 1-4

Use this page to stay on track. If you only do what's on this checklist, you'll finish Month One with a clear plan and real momentum.

WEEK 1: Set Your Baseline (Clarity Week)

- Complete the Goal Snapshot (payment range, price range, savings goal, areas, must-haves, deal breakers)
- Pull your credit reports and write down your top 2 issues (if any)
- Start your "Mortgage Folder" (digital or paper)
- Choose your top 2-3 target areas (even if it changes later)

Done looks like: I know my target monthly payment, my price range, and I've started my buyer file with my key documents saved.

WEEK 2: Build Your Money Target (Savings Week)

- Set your upfront-cost target using your Cash-to-Close Planner (down payment + closing costs + cushion)
- Choose how you'll fund it: saving gift down payment assistance combination
- Pick a monthly savings amount and set an automatic transfer
- Make one change to improve cash flow (cut a bill, pause spending, or lower debt payments)

Done looks like: I know what I need to save and I have a plan to get there.

WEEK 3: Reduce Debt and Protect Credit (Strategy Week)

- Calculate your DTI using your monthly minimum debt payments (car, student loans, credit card minimums, personal loans, etc.)
- Pick one debt to improve this month (usually a credit card).
- Make one extra payment this week, even if it's small.
- Set autopay on all minimum payments
- Avoid new credit inquiries and new accounts

Done looks like: I have one clear debt goal and I'm actively improving my numbers.

WEEK 4: Get Pre-Approval Ready (Organization Week)

- Gather and organize documents (ID, pay stubs, bank statements, W-2s, etc.)
- Prepare for your lender call (questions + timeline)
- Make a list of questions for a lender
- Schedule your lender call (or plan when you will)
- Decide your 2-3 "must-ask" questions before pre-approval

Done looks like: My documents are ready and I'm prepared to talk to a lender.

GOAL SNAPSHOT (YOUR 90-DAY STARTING POINT)

You can't hit a target you haven't set, and that's why this step matters so much. When you know exactly what you want, you stop second-guessing and start making decisions that move you closer to your keys.

This page is where we get clear on your personal homeownership goals.

Define your "Why"

Why do you want to buy a home?

Is it stability, financial freedom, space for family, or an investment for your future?

Write it down here. When things get hard, this is the reminder that will keep you focused.

My reason for buying: _____

Your move timeline (choose one):

0-3 months 3-6 months 6-12 months Not sure yet

My target monthly payment (comfort range):

\$_____ to \$_____

My estimated price range (based on my comfort payment):

\$_____ to \$_____

My cash-to-close savings goal (total): \$_____

My weekly savings number (so I don't guess): \$_____ per week



GOAL SNAPSHOT (YOUR 90-DAY STARTING POINT)

Areas I'm considering (top 3):

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

My must-haves (pick 5):

- 2+ bedrooms
 - 2+ bathrooms
 - Yard
 - Garage
 - Open layout
 - Main-level bedroom
 - Office space
 - Good schools
 - Walkable
- Other: _____

My deal breakers (non-negotiables):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

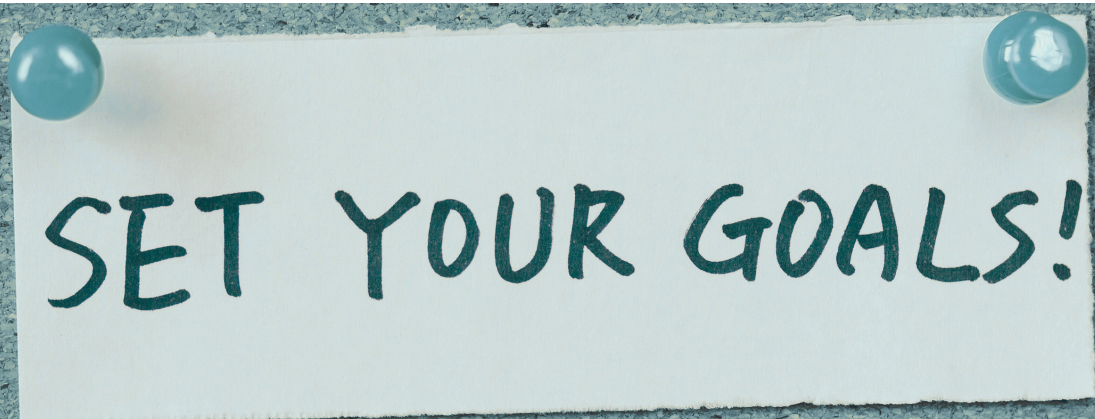
My #1 focus for the next 30 days:

- Save money
- Pay down credit cards
- Fix credit report errors
- Reduce debt
- Organize documents

In the next 7 days, I will complete this step: _____

DO THIS: Put a date on it: ____ / ____ / ____

Done looks like: I can explain my timeline, payment range, price range, and next step in one sentence.



THE HOMEBUYING PROCESS

Buying your first home can seem overwhelming, but breaking it down into clear steps makes the journey much easier. Below is a 5-step roadmap of what we'll cover over the next three months to help you confidently navigate the process.

1

YOUR FINANCES MONTH ONE

- Gather your documents
- Save for a down payment
- Get pre-approved

2

START YOUR SEARCH MONTH TWO

- Hire a real estate agent you trust
- Start previewing properties online
- Schedule showings with your agent

3

GET YOUR OFFER ACCEPTED MONTH THREE

- Write your best offer on your favorite property
- Negotiate terms of your offer and sign contract
- Deliver earnest money (and any option/due diligence fee, where applicable)

4

INSPECTION PERIOD MONTH THREE

- Conduct inspections
- Negotiate any repairs
- Order appraisal
- Order homeowner insurance

5

CLOSING DAY MONTH THREE

- Receive closing statement/clear to close
- Wire funds to closing attorney or get certified funds and bring to closing.
- Conduct final walk-through
- Attend closing appointment to sign loan documents and transfer ownership
- Get keys, celebrate, and move in!

Notice how Step 3 has the most moving parts? That's why we spend Months 1 and 2 getting your money, paperwork, and plan solid. When it's time to move, you'll be ready to act fast and feel confident.

INSPECTION PERIOD (Often called Due Diligence or Option Period depending on your state)

WHY BECOME A HOMEOWNER?

Buying a home is a big decision. Your "why" keeps you focused when the process gets stressful.

DO THIS: When you get tired or nervous, reread this page before making decisions.

My top 3 reasons for buying

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____



MYTHS ABOUT BUYING YOUR FIRST HOME

Many people believe homeownership is out of reach, often because of myths about affordability, credit requirements, or financial readiness. But when you have all the facts, you'll see that buying your first home is more achievable than you think!

Let's debunk the most common home buying myths and show you why owning a home might be closer than you imagined.

1

YOU NEED A 20% DOWN PAYMENT

TRUTH: You don't always need 20% down. Many loan programs allow as little as 3%–3.5% down, and some buyers may qualify for 0% down programs. Your down payment depends on the loan program, your credit, and your finances.

DO THIS:

Ask a lender what down payment options you qualify for and what your estimated total cash needed would be (down payment + closing costs + reserves).

3

YOU SHOULD WAIT UNTIL INTEREST RATES DROP

TRUTH: Interest rates change constantly and no one can predict the perfect time to buy. What matters most is whether you can afford the monthly payment comfortably. If rates drop later, refinancing may be an option.

DO THIS:

Get pre-approved now so you know your real numbers. If rates drop later, talk to your lender about refinance options, but don't pause your plan waiting on the market.

2

IT'S CHEAPER TO RENT

TRUTH: Renting can be cheaper month-to-month, but it doesn't build equity. Buying may cost more upfront, but it can help you build long-term wealth and stability depending on your timeline and financial goals.

DO THIS:

Compare your current rent to a realistic estimated monthly mortgage payment, then decide your timeline. If you plan to stay 3–5+ years, buying may be worth exploring.

4

YOU NEED TO PAY OFF YOUR STUDENT LOANS

TRUTH: Student loans do not automatically disqualify you from buying a home. What matters is your debt-to-income ratio (DTI) and how your monthly payment impacts what you can comfortably afford.

DO THIS:

Write down your student loan payment and ask a lender how it affects your DTI and loan options. Don't assume you're disqualified until you run the numbers.

5

YOU MUST HAVE A PERFECT CREDIT SCORE

TRUTH: You don't need perfect credit. You need a score that meets the loan program and lender requirements.

DO THIS:

Check your credit and focus on the biggest wins: on-time payments, lowering balances, and avoiding new debt.

6

ALL LENDERS ARE THE SAME

TRUTH: Rates, fees, speed, and approval standards can vary a lot between lenders.

DO THIS:

Compare 2–3 lenders and ask about rate, total fees, estimated closing costs, and how fast they can close.

7

THE LIST PRICE IS WHAT THE HOME IS WORTH

TRUTH: The list price is a marketing number. Value is supported by comparable sales, the market, and what buyers are willing to pay.

DO THIS:

Have your agent run comps and set a "max offer" number before you fall in love with the house.

8

FALL AND WINTER ARE BAD TIMES TO BUY

TRUTH: Every season has pros and cons. Off-season can mean less competition, but also fewer homes to choose from.

DO THIS:

Buy when the numbers work and you're ready, not just when it's the "popular" season.

SIGNS YOU MAY BE READY TO BECOME A HOMEOWNER

Buying your first home can feel overwhelming, and it's normal to have questions about whether you're ready. So, how do you know when the time is right? Here are 7 signs that you may be ready to take the exciting step toward becoming a homeowner.



YES

You have enough saved for a down payment

NO



Buying a home involves a few upfront costs, and the biggest one is typically your down payment. Depending on the mortgage program you qualify for, you may be able to put down as little as 3%–3.5%, while other options require more. Some programs, like FHA, offer low down payment options for buyers who meet credit and income guidelines.

YES

You have an average credit score

NO



Don't worry if your credit isn't perfect. Many buyers qualify with a range of credit scores depending on the loan program and the lender. In general, the stronger your credit profile, the more options you'll have and the better your rate and terms may be.

YES

You can afford the mortgage payment

NO



When it comes to how much home you can afford, lenders look closely at your debt-to-income ratio (DTI), which compares your monthly debt payments to your monthly income. Lower is better, and a healthier DTI can give you more options and a smoother approval process.

Instead of guessing, run a quick estimate of your monthly payment using an online mortgage calculator. Focus on a payment range that feels comfortable for your budget, not just the maximum amount a lender might approve.

YES

You have steady employment

NO



Finally, lenders like to see stable, documentable income. Many look for a consistent work history, but that doesn't always mean you must be with the same employer for two years. The goal is to show a stable pattern of income that can be verified.

YES

You plan to live in the home for at least 2 years

NO 

Buying can make more sense than renting if you plan to stay in one place for a few years and the monthly payment fits your budget comfortably. Homeownership can offer stability and the opportunity to build equity over time, but the best choice depends on your timeline, finances, and lifestyle.

YES

You're tired of renting

NO 

Renting can start to feel draining when you're ready for more stability. You may have limited control over your space, and it's hard to truly make a place feel like home when you're working within someone else's rules.

Buying a home can be a different experience. It can bring a sense of pride and ownership, and it gives you the freedom to personalize your space, put down roots, and build something long-term for yourself.

YES

You can afford to make repairs

NO 

Renting can feel easier when it comes to repairs because maintenance is usually handled by the landlord or property manager. With homeownership, you control how and when repairs are done, but you're also responsible for the cost.

Some buyers choose a home warranty for peace of mind, but coverage varies, and there are often service fees and exclusions. It can be helpful for certain systems and appliances, depending on the home and your comfort level.

ADD IT UP

Total checkmarks: _____ / 7

0–2: Not ready yet, but you're in the right place. Start Month One and focus on credit and savings.

3–5: You're closer than you think. Month One will tighten your numbers and get you pre-approval ready.

6–7: You're in a strong spot. Start talking to a lender and move into Month Two once Month One is complete.

Tip from Lynette: "If you're not there yet, don't panic. Month One is about building the plan."

SAVING FOR A DOWN PAYMENT

Now that you've decided you're ready to take the step toward homeownership, congratulations. Let's talk about how to start saving for your down payment.

As we mentioned earlier, you don't always need 20% down. Depending on the loan program you qualify for, you may be able to buy with a low down payment, and in some cases eligible buyers may have options with no down payment. Just keep in mind: the lower your down payment, the higher your monthly payment may be, and mortgage insurance may apply. (Mortgage insurance rules vary by loan type, so ask your lender what that looks like for you.)

You'll also want to plan for closing costs and prepaid expenses. These can sometimes be negotiated with the seller depending on the market, but it's smart to be prepared either way.

Let's Do Some Quick 'Napkin Math' (Don't Panic!) While a common target is saving 3.5% for a down payment plus a buffer for closing costs, you don't necessarily need all of that in your bank account right now.

Your upfront funds can come from three buckets:

- Your Savings: What you set aside starting today.
- Gift Funds: Money gifted from family to help you buy.
- Assistance & Credits: Down payment assistance programs or closing costs paid by the seller. In some markets, seller credits may be negotiated depending on the home and the market.

Your Goal for Month 1: Don't obsess over the final number. Just start filling your bucket. Even small amounts add up fast!



GET YOUR FINANCES IN ORDER

Getting your finances in order is the first thing you'll want to start working on.

Start by paying down your debts. Lenders look closely at your debt-to-income ratio (DTI), which compares your monthly debt payments to your monthly income. Lower is better, and paying down debt can increase your borrowing power. A good rule of thumb is that many lenders prefer DTI around 35%–40%, and some programs may allow higher depending on the full picture.

To make progress faster, pay down your highest-interest debt first (especially credit cards), then move to lower-interest debt like car loans or student loans.

Another important factor in getting a mortgage is your credit score. A stronger credit score can help you qualify for a loan and may help you secure a better interest rate and terms. Even small improvements can make a difference.

Besides debt and credit, lenders look at your overall financial picture to determine your borrowing power. Here's what they're likely to review:

- FICO® credit scores and credit history
- Down payment amount
- Assets (savings, investments, real estate, etc.)
- Income and employment history
- Tax returns
- Bank statements (typically the most recent 2–3 months)
- Desired loan amount compared to the value of the home
- Total debt compared to income (DTI)
- Rental history (if applicable)

Don't worry if your DTI isn't perfect yet. Every bit you pay down helps, and the steps you take now will make the rest of the process much easier.

Your next step: pick ONE debt to tackle this week and pull your credit report so you know what you're working with.

CASH-TO-CLOSE PLANNER

Know exactly how much cash you'll need to buy your home and when you'll need it.

Your goal here is simple: fill out each section honestly, using estimates from your lender or agent if needed.

This isn't about perfection, it's about awareness and readiness.

Down Payment

What it is: The portion of the home price you pay upfront.

When it's due: At closing.

Tip: Many buyers use loan programs that only require 3–5%. Don't assume you need 20%.

My estimate: \$ _____

Closing Costs

What it is: Lender, title, and attorney fees plus prepaid taxes and insurance.

When it's due: At closing.

Tip: Usually 2–4% of the purchase price. Ask your lender for a Loan Estimate early, it lists everything.

My estimate: \$ _____

Earnest Money Deposit

What it is: A good faith deposit you pay when your offer is accepted.

When it's due: Within a few days of going under contract.

Tip: Typically 1–2% of the purchase price and applied toward your closing costs or down payment.

My estimate: \$ _____

Appraisal & Inspection Fees

What it is: Upfront fees for professional inspections and the lender's appraisal.

When it's due: After your offer is accepted (usually within the first 10 days).

Tip: Expect around \$500–\$1,000 combined, paid directly to the vendors. These fees are not part of closing.

My estimate: \$ _____

CASH-TO-CLOSE PLANNER

Moving Costs + Utilities Setup

What it is: Movers, rental trucks, security deposits, new utilities, and other moving-day expenses.

When it's due: Around closing and move-in.

Tip: Add a small cushion for new furniture or cleaning supplies these items add up fast!

My estimate: \$ _____

Emergency or Cushion Fund

What it is: Extra savings for unexpected expenses or repairs after closing.

When it's due: Before closing (keep it separate).

Tip: Aim for at least one month of your new mortgage payment.

My estimate: \$ _____

My Total Cash-to-Close Goal

Add up everything above:

Total Target Savings: \$ _____

Now divide that by 12 weeks to create your plan:

If I save \$_____ per week, I'll be ready to close in 90 days.

Remember:

Some loan programs or down payment assistance can reduce your total cash needed.

If you're not sure what you qualify for yet, that's okay, this page will help you ask smarter questions when you meet with your lender.

Debt-to-Income Ratio (DTI)

DTI shows what percentage of your gross monthly income goes toward monthly debt payments. Lenders use it to estimate what mortgage payment you can realistically afford, and it directly impacts your buying power.

DTI = (Total monthly debt payments ÷ Gross monthly income) × 100

This is your starting DTI (before your future mortgage payment). Your lender will calculate your final DTI using the estimated housing payment.

Monthly Debt

Amount

Monthly car payment

Monthly student loan payment

Monthly child support/alimony

Monthly credit card payment (min. payment)

Monthly Installment Loans

Monthly Co-Signed Loans

Other Monthly Debts

Total monthly
debt payments



Your gross monthly
income



Your Debt-To-
Income Ratio



DEBT-TO-INCOME RATIO

DTI Snapshot (simple guide):

TIP: DTI is based on gross income (before taxes)

DTI Snapshot

- Under 35%: strong
- 35%–45%: common range
- Over 45% may feel tight, so focus on lowering debt before adding a mortgage payment.

90-Day DTI Boost (pick one to start):

- Pay down credit cards until the minimum payment drops
- Avoid new debt or new monthly payments
- Increase income if possible (overtime/side income) and document it

My DTI Focus This Month:

My current DTI: ____%

My first move: _____

My goal by the end of Month 1: ____%





TYPICAL CREDIT SCORE STARTING POINTS

(VARIES BY LENDER)



FHA Loan

580+ typical

Lower may be possible with more restrictions and/or higher down payment.



VA Loan

No official minimum set by VA

Many lenders prefer 620+



USDA Loan

640+ common

Some lenders may allow lower depending on the file



Conventional Loan

620+ typical

Higher scores usually mean better rates and lower mortgage insurance.

Credit score is one factor. Income, DTI, savings, and documentation also impact approval.

If your score is below the typical range: focus on on-time payments, lowering credit card balances, and avoiding new debt while you work Month 1.

GET YOUR CREDIT IN GOOD STANDING

If improving your credit is on your to-do list, you're not alone. The goal isn't perfect credit. The goal is mortgage-ready credit. Here's the simplest way to get started.

Step 1: Pull your credit reports (and read them like a lender)

Start by pulling your credit reports from Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion at: annualcreditreport.com. You can access free reports weekly online, and you're also entitled to free annual reports by law.

What to look for:

- Accounts that are not yours
- Incorrect late payments
- Wrong balances or limits
- Duplicate collections
- Old negatives that should have fallen off
- Addresses/employers you don't recognize

Step 2: Fix errors the right way

If you find errors, dispute them with the bureau showing the error.

Quick tip: If you plan to apply for a mortgage soon, ask your lender before disputing a bunch of items at once. Some lenders may want disputes resolved or removed from the report first, and disputes can slow down underwriting.

Step 3: Get current on late payments first

Payment history is the biggest driver of your score. Your best "first win" is getting everything current:

- Make past-due accounts current
- Set autopay for minimums (at least)
- Pay every bill on time moving forward

Step 4: Handle collections strategically

Before paying a collection, confirm it's valid and yours. Then choose a strategy:

- Settle for less (often possible)
- Ask if they'll delete the account after payment (not guaranteed)
- Get everything in writing

Step 5: Attack credit card balances (this is the fastest lever)

BOOST YOUR CREDIT SCORE

You don't need "perfect" credit to buy a home. You need a score that qualifies you for a mortgage and a payment you can afford.

Reality check: Some loan guidelines allow lower scores, but many lenders have their own minimums (called overlays). And a higher score usually means a better interest rate and lower monthly payment.

PRACTICE GOOD CREDIT HABITS (the non-negotiables)

- Pay on time, every time (set autopay if you can)
- Avoid opening new accounts while preparing for a mortgage
- Keep card balances low (below 30%, ideally below 10%)
- Don't close old credit cards unless your lender advises it

Quick-win strategies that often help within 30–90 days

These are the moves that usually make the biggest difference fastest:

Pay down revolving balances

Credit cards report based on utilization. Lower balances often help quickly.

Make a mid-month payment

Don't wait for the due date. Paying mid-cycle can help your balance report lower.

Ask for a credit limit increase (carefully)

If your card issuer can increase your limit without a hard inquiry, this can reduce utilization.

Stop new inquiries

Every new hard pull can temporarily ding your score and complicate underwriting.
Keep accounts open

Length of credit history matters. Keeping older accounts open can help.

CREATE YOUR ACTION PLAN: STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUR CREDIT SCORE

My Credit Goal (for mortgage approval): _____

My Current Score (if known): _____

Top 3 things hurting my score right now:

CREATE YOUR PLAN OF ACTION FOR MONTH ONE

1) Credit Report Check

I pulled my credit reports (Equifax, Experian, TransUnion) on: _____

I reviewed my reports for errors (accounts not mine, wrong late payments, incorrect balances).

If I found errors, I'm disputing: _____

2) Credit Score Boost Plan (pick your top 2)

- Pay down credit card balances to lower utilization
- Bring any past-due accounts current
- Set autopay for minimum payments
- Avoid new credit inquiries

3) Reduce My DTI (Debt-to-Income)

Pick ONE debt payoff target this month. Debt/account name:

Current monthly payment: _____

My plan:

- pay it off
- pay it down

CREATE YOUR PLAN OF ACTION FOR MONTH ONE

4) Documents to Gather (Mortgage-Ready File)

- Photo ID
- Pay stubs (most recent 30 days)
- Bank statements (most recent 2 months, all pages)
- W-2s (last 2 years)
- Tax returns (last 2 years, if requested)

Missing documents I need to request: _____

5) Down Payment Plan (choose one)

- I'm saving for my down payment

Monthly amount I will save: \$ _____

- I'm using gift funds

Gift amount expected: \$ _____ From: \$ _____

(Important: gift funds require documentation and a paper trail.)

- I'm exploring down payment assistance (DPA)

I will ask: my lender local housing authority

Action: Schedule your lender consult NOW for early next month. You don't need to be perfect to have the first conversation.

[Connect with a Lender](#)
TODAY

PURCHASE YOUR FIRST HOME IN 90 DAYS

Month Two

Month Two Objectives:

- Begin the mortgage pre-approval process
- Meet with local lenders
- Hire your real estate agent
- Decide on your wants and needs for your new home.
- Start the home search process

MONTH TWO GAME PLAN: WEEK 5–8

Use this page to stay on track. If you only do what's on this checklist, you'll finish Month Two pre-approved (or with a clear plan to qualify), touring smarter, and ready to make an offer without panic.

WEEK 5: Get Pre-Approved (Clarity Week)

- Choose 2–3 lenders to talk to (not five)
- Submit your application and documents
- Ask your lender the key questions (payment, cash needed, credit, timeline)
- Get your pre-approval letter (or your step-by-step plan to qualify)

Done looks like: I know my max payment, my max price range, and what I need to bring to closing.

WEEK 6: Agent + Search Setup Week (Focus Week)

- Choose your buyer's agent (or confirm who you're using)
- Schedule your buyer consult and review next steps + expectations
- Finalize your Needs vs Wants list
- Choose your top 2–3 areas (plus 1 backup area)
- Set your deal breakers before touring
- Confirm what matters most: payment, location, layout, condition

Done looks like: I have an agent, a clear search plan, and I'm not wasting time on the wrong homes.

WEEK 7: Tour Smart and Track Everything (Decision Week)

- Tour homes with a checklist every time
- Take notes right after each home (before you forget)
- Compare homes based on needs, not emotions
- Identify your top 2–3 contenders (if any)

Done looks like: I can clearly explain what I like, what I don't, and what my "must-haves" really are.

WEEK 8: Get Offer-Ready (Confidence Week)

- Confirm cash-to-close estimate with your lender
- Understand what makes an offer strong beyond price
- Decide your "walk-away rules" before you fall in love with a house
- Be prepared to move quickly when the right home hits the market
- Review offer terms with your agent (earnest money, inspections, timing)

Done looks like: If the right home pops up tomorrow, I can write a strong offer without second-guessing everything.

TIME TO GET PRE-APPROVED

At this point, your credit should be ready to go, and you should have a savings plan in place for your down payment. Now it's time to reach out to a few local lenders to find out how much home you qualify for and get pre-approved for a mortgage.

A mortgage pre-approval is a statement, usually a document or letter that tells you how much money a lender is willing to let you borrow for a home. The pre-approval indicates that the lender is prepared to move forward with the loan as long as the home meets certain criteria and your financial situation doesn't change significantly while you're looking for a home.

The pre-approval is based on your financial profile, including your income, how much money you have in the bank, investment accounts, and your debts.

It's a good idea to reach out to a few lenders and compare their loan offers, including interest rates, fees, and down payment options. Even a small difference in interest rates can save you thousands over the life of the loan.

Make sure you are getting pre-approved, not just pre-qualified. A pre-approval provides exact loan terms and will be required when making an offer. It also helps you narrow down your home search by giving you a clear price range, saving you time and effort when looking at homes.

Don't worry if the process feels overwhelming at first, your lender will guide you through each step, and getting pre-approved is a big milestone in your home buying journey!

WHAT TYPE OF LOAN IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

A mortgage is simply a loan from a bank or financial institution that helps you buy a home or property. Mortgages come with different interest rates, down payments, and terms, all of which can vary depending on the lender. These differences can affect how much you'll pay each month and how much you'll end up paying over the life of the loan.

A down payment on your mortgage is the money you pay upfront when buying a home. The lender will fund the rest, which means the larger your down payment, the less you'll need to borrow.

Let's take a look at the four main types of loans that most homebuyers use. Depending on your situation, your lender may also offer special programs just for you.

Conventional

A conventional loan is a mortgage loan that's not backed by a government agency. These loans come in all shapes and sizes, and while they don't provide some of the same benefits as FHA, VA and USDA loans, conventional loans remain the most common type of mortgage loan.

Federal Housing Administration (FHA)

An FHA loan is a government-backed mortgage that allows homebuyers to qualify with looser financial requirements. You may qualify if you have debt, a lower credit score, or even a past bankruptcy. FHA loans typically require a credit score of 580 and a down payment as low as 3.5%, but they do require mortgage insurance premiums (MIP), which increases your monthly payment.

Veterans Administration (VA)

A VA loan is a government-backed mortgage available to Veterans, active service members, and eligible surviving spouses. These loans offer up to 100% financing, meaning no down payment is required. Additionally, VA loan recipients don't have to be first-time homebuyers.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

A USDA loan is a government-backed mortgage offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development program. It provides 100% financing with no down payment for eligible buyers with low-to-average incomes. To qualify, the home must be located in a rural area as defined by the USDA.

HOW TO INTERVIEW YOUR LENDER: YOUR STRATEGY

Your mortgage is one of the biggest financial commitments you'll ever make and asking the right questions up front can save you thousands and give you peace of mind.

Don't just ask, "What is my interest rate?" Use these specific questions to find out if a lender is the right partner for your 90-day home buying goal.

The Big 3 (Ask these first):

- What is my estimated total Cash to Close? This includes your down payment plus all lender and closing fees. You need this specific number to know if your Three Buckets from Month One are full enough to move forward.
- What are your total lender fees? Interest rates can change daily, but fees like origination, processing, and underwriting are set by the lender. Comparing these fees is the best way to see which lender is offering the better deal.
- Do you have experience with first-time buyer and down payment assistance programs in my state? Many states and local housing agencies offer programs that can help with down payment and/or closing costs. Make sure you can tell me what I may qualify for and how the application process works.

The Safety & Speed Questions:

- What should I AVOID doing during this process? Ask them to be specific about credit cards, new car loans, or changing jobs. Knowing the No-Go list keeps your pre-approval from stalling out.
- Will my monthly payment estimate include taxes, insurance, and PMI? Don't just get a quote for the loan. You need the Total Cost of Ownership so your monthly budget stays comfortable.
- What happens if the home appraises for less than our contract price? This is called an Appraisal Gap. Understanding how your lender handles this now will prevent major panic when you're ready to make an offer.

Hiring Your Real Estate Agent

Why You Need a Buyer's Agent

Buying a home isn't just about finding the right property, it's about having the right person on your side every step of the way. A buyer's agent represents your interests (not the seller's), and helps you:

- Navigate contracts and timelines
- Understand local market pricing
- Negotiate strategically
- Avoid costly mistakes
- Coordinate inspections, repairs, and closing details

When Should You Hire Your Agent?

The best time to hire your agent is as soon as you're pre-approved or actively preparing your finances. Why?

Because a good agent can:

- Recommend local lenders, inspectors, and attorneys
- Help you understand your buying power
- Set up home searches tailored to your goals
- Save you time by filtering out the noise

Pro Tip: Don't wait until you find a house you like. A strong agent will help you get ready to buy, not just react when it's time to make an offer.

What to Look For in a Buyer's Agent

Not all agents are the same. Here's what to look for:

- Experience with first-time buyers
- Deep knowledge of your local market
- Strong communication and availability
- A clear plan for helping you search, offer, and close
- Someone you feel comfortable asking "small" questions

Hiring Your Expert: 15 Must-Ask Questions for Your Buyer's Agent

Before you commit to working with an agent, treat the process like a professional interview. The right agent can save you time, money, and stress.

Use these 15 questions to vet your potential partners:

How many first-time buyers did you work with in the last 12 months, and what is your average transaction volume?

Why to Ask: Ensure their recent experience aligns with your specific needs and that they are actively closing deals in the current market.

What is your typical communication style and guaranteed response time for critical issues?

Why to Ask: Confirm their communication pace matches yours, especially during time sensitive moments like offer deadlines.

Can you describe a recent competitive negotiation where you successfully secured a home for a buyer?

Why to Ask: This reveals their actual strategy and ability to perform under pressure, which is vital for winning a bid.

What is the average price-to-list ratio in my target neighborhoods right now?

Why to Ask: The agent should have a data-driven understanding of how much over or under the asking price homes are actually selling for.

Do you work alone or do you have a team? Who is my primary contact if you are unavailable?

Why to Ask: It's important to know if you'll have consistent, reliable support throughout the process.

Do you require a Buyer's Agency Agreement? What is its term and are there any exit clauses?

Why to Ask: This sets the legal expectations upfront. A professional agent will clearly explain the agreement and its benefits.

What is your strategic recommendation for asking for repairs or credits after a home inspection?

Why to Ask: A savvy agent will advise asking for credits at closing over seller-managed repairs, as credits give you more control and a smoother process.

What is your plan if our contract price is higher than the home appraisal value?

Why to Ask: This is a major financial risk (the Appraisal Gap). The agent must have a clear, prepared strategy for how you will proceed.

Hiring Your Expert: 15 Must-Ask Questions for Your Buyer's Agent

Can you recommend 2-3 local lenders that you trust and have successfully closed loans with recently?

Why to Ask: A great agent partners with proven, high-quality lenders who can meet deadlines and solve problems, not just offer the lowest rate.

How will you manage all contract deadlines and contingencies to ensure we stay on track?

Why to Ask: This confirms they use a proactive, organized system (like a timeline or checklist) to manage the contract and prevent you from missing critical dates.

How do you handle buyers who want to look at 20+ homes?

Why to Ask: This assesses their expectation management. A good agent focuses on quality viewings after fully understanding your criteria.

What happens if I want to switch agents or decide to stop looking after we sign an agreement?

Why to Ask: Clarity on the exit clause is crucial for the buyer's peace of mind and defines the professional relationship.

What technology or systems do you use to send me new listings, and how quickly will I receive them?

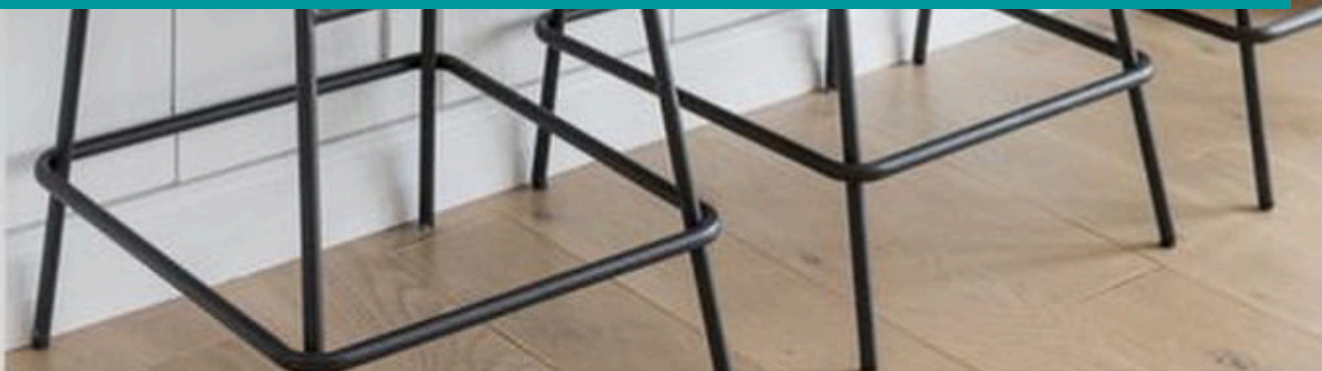
Why to Ask: This verifies they are using efficient tools (like an MLS portal) to give the buyer the earliest access to listings.

Can you provide a copy of the Purchase Contract/Offer form we will be using, and can you walk me through the key sections?

Why to Ask: This empowers the buyer to understand the most important document before the pressure of writing an offer.

What are the common issues or red flags that you look for during a showing that most first-time buyers miss?

Why to Ask: This highlights the agent's expertise and their ability to point out structural, maintenance, or neighborhood issues beyond cosmetics.



Hiring Your Real Estate Agent

Want Personal Guidance?

If I'm licensed in your area, I'd love to personally guide you through your home-buying journey. If you're outside my market, no problem. I can connect you with a trusted agent who works the same way I do: clear, honest, and focused on your success.

DO THIS: Click the link, tell me your city and state, and share your buying timeline.

Done looks like: You have a clear next step and the right support, no matter where you're located.

[Schedule Your First Time
Buyer Consultation
TODAY!](#)



Not Local? I've Got You Covered

If you're moving from out of town, I'll help match you with a trusted, local agent in your area. I only refer to professionals who share my values, so you'll be in good hands.

[Connect Me With an
Agent](#)



Let the home search begin!

Now that you have your approval from your lender, it's time to begin searching for your new home. While it's fun to dream about all the possibilities, getting serious about finding a home to buy will eventually require a series of choices based on what is possible and practical. You will want to start your search by price and then look for all the other wants and needs available to you in that price range.

Here are 6 strategies for finding the perfect home

01 The Right Price

Price will ultimately dictate what you can and cannot afford. If you are searching in a seller's market, it is best to look for homes under the top of your budget. This will give you leverage to put in a great offer and compete with other buyers. If we are in a buyer's market, it is okay to take a look at homes just above your budget as you may be able to negotiate for a lower price.

02 Location, Location, Location

Finding the right location should be at the top of your list. While you can make cosmetic changes to your home down the road, you can't change the school districts, ease of commute to work, or the safety of where you live. It's important to look at how the location will affect your lifestyle now, and in the future. Are you planning on starting a family? Is your job switching to a more work-from-home position? Do the neighbors maintain their homes to help your home appreciate in value, or are the neighboring homes deteriorating?

03 Think Long Term

While location is part of thinking long term, there are other factors to consider when thinking about your lifestyle now and in the future. Does the home have enough bedrooms and bathrooms for an expanding family or aging parents that may move in down the road? Is the backyard large enough for a pool or a garden someday? Are you able to make important renovations to the home as the years go on?

04

Property Conditions

Being a first-time homeowner, you may think purchasing a home that needs fixing up, could be a fun project. But don't let those HGTV shows fool you. Home repairs require a lot of work, time and they can be very costly. If you do not have experience with this type of work, you may want to consider move-in-ready homes that you can make small upgrades to versus a home that needs a lot of repairs.

05

Don't Focus on Minor Cosmetic Issues

The paint can be changed, and wallpaper can be removed. The home's large backyard that is a must on your list, can't be changed.

Don't spend time focusing on the minor decor that is not your style as that can be changed. Try to look past the current homeowner's clutter and personal items.

If the home has a lot of other important wants and needs, it would be wise to focus on that and picture the home with a clean slate.

06

Decide Your Wants vs. Needs

Make a list of all the things your home must have versus additional items that would be added bonuses.

You may want an updated kitchen, but your home must have 3 bedrooms and 2 baths to fit your family comfortably. The kitchen update can always come later.

HOME BUYER QUESTIONNAIRE

Use this list to define your home search criteria before you start touring. Once it's complete, you'll know your must-haves, nice-to-haves, and deal breakers. If you're working with an agent, share it with them so your search stays targeted.

Which areas are you interested in moving to?

How many bedrooms, bathrooms, and how much square footage are you looking for?

Do you prefer a 1-story or 2-story home? Would you like a single-family home, townhome, or condo?

Is there a specific school district you need to be in?

What's your favorite style of home (e.g., modern, traditional, farmhouse)?

Does your home need a home office, a pool, or special features like a large backyard or bonus room?

Any other wants or needs that I should be aware of?

DETERMINING YOUR WANTS AND NEEDS



It's time to start making a list of your wants and needs for your new home. We must do this before we begin touring homes.

A good way to start is to sit down with your family and make a list of everything that comes to mind. You can then determine what your home must include: (your needs) and the features that would be nice to have (your wants).

Remember: A need is a necessity. It is essential, and you can't go without.

A want is something that you may find beneficial but you could live without or make those changes later down the road.

Your list of wants and needs may change as we tour homes, but give it a good start by creating your list on the next page.

Examples of Wants

- A fireplace in the main bedroom
- A backyard underground pool
- Granite countertops in the kitchen
- A walk-in shower in the main bathroom
- Hardwood floors throughout the entire home

Examples of Needs

- Enough bedrooms or square footage for the size of your family
- Within 10 miles of your work or your school district
- Big backyard for kids and pets
- A 2-car garage
- 1 story home to accommodate family members who may be unable to use stairs.

HOME SEARCHING TIPS AND TRICKS

It's easy to get caught up in searching for homes with very specific criteria, but being too selective can mean missing out on great potential properties. Unless it's an absolute deal breaker or you're getting far too many results, try to avoid filtering by overly specific features or amenities.

Examples include homes with fireplaces, attached garages, fenced yards, pools, or formal dining rooms. Many of these features can be added later, and sometimes the information entered in these fields isn't accurate to begin with.

KEEP AN EYE ON PENDING OR UNDER CONTRACT

Homes marked "Pending," "Due Diligence Period," or "Under Contract" usually mean the seller has accepted an offer and the home is not currently available to buy. That said, deals do fall through. If a home like this checks all your boxes, save it and share it with your agent (or keep it on your list) so you can watch for updates. Sometimes it does come back on the market.

DON'T LET PRICES GET IN THE WAY

Don't be fooled by homes that seem too good to be true. Real estate sites don't always show accurate pricing. For example, when a home is labeled "Off Market" or "Pre-Foreclosure," the price you see often isn't the actual list price or true market value.

On the flip side, don't automatically dismiss a home just because it looks "overpriced" compared to an online estimate. Automated values can be wrong. If a home fits your needs but the price seems high, save the address and ask your agent to pull comps. With the right research, you may be able to make a realistic offer that still fits your pre-approval and budget.

DON'T OVERUSE SEARCH FILTERS

Now the exciting part begins, it's time to start searching for homes and creating a list of properties you'd like to explore further! By now, you've likely made your list of wants and needs, so you're ready to start narrowing down your options.

With so many online tools available, sites like Zillow, Realtor.com, and even local MLS platforms can be incredibly helpful in your search. While browsing online, keep in mind that not all listings may have up-to-date information, so knowing what to look for and how to evaluate properties is key.

USE GOOGLE STREET VIEW

Get a really great feel for what the home and neighborhood look like by using the Google Street View tool. Listing photos can sometimes be deceiving, wide-angle lenses can make rooms appear larger, or they might not show that the neighbor next door has a large rock collection in their front yard. Take a virtual stroll down the street to get a better sense of the neighborhood's appearance and overall vibe.

OFFER TERMS CHEAT SHEET

READ BEFORE YOU MAKE AN OFFER

Price

What you're offering to pay for the home.

Earnest Money

A good-faith deposit that is typically credited back at closing. The amount varies, and your agent will guide you.

Due Diligence or Option Fee (state-specific)

In many states, buyers pay a fee directly to the seller for the exclusive right to inspect the home. CAUTION: In some states (like NC), this fee is immediately non-refundable even if you find major repairs. Ask your agent: "Is this money refundable if I walk away during the inspection period?"

Inspection Period

Your window of time to inspect the home and decide what repairs or credits to request. This is when you uncover big-ticket issues.

Appraisal

The lender's value check. If the appraisal comes in low, you may renegotiate, bring additional cash, or walk away depending on your contract terms.

Financing Contingency

A protection clause that can allow you to cancel if your loan is not approved (terms vary).

Closing Date

When you sign final documents and get keys.

What makes an offer strong (besides price):

- Clean terms
- Good timeline
- Strong financing
- Being responsive and organized

My Offer-Ready Numbers

Max monthly payment: \$_____

Max purchase price: \$_____

Estimated cash needed to close: \$_____

Cash I have set aside right now: \$_____

My non-negotiables: _____

My flex items (what I can compromise on): _____

CREATE YOUR PLAN OF ACTION FOR MONTH TWO

1) Pre-Approval Status

I chose my lender on:

Lender name: _____

I submitted my application on: _____

I uploaded my documents: Yes No

Missing documents I still need to send: _____

My pre-approval is: Approved Pending Not started yet

2) My Buying Numbers (from my lender)

Max purchase price: \$ _____

Comfortable monthly payment: \$ _____

Estimated cash needed to close: \$ _____

Loan type (if known): Conventional FHA VA USDA Not sure yet

3) Hire Your Buyer's Agent

I chose my agent on:

Agent name: _____

I scheduled my buyer consult for: _____

I understand how showings will work: Yes No

I know how quickly I may need to move when I find the right home: _____

Yes No

4) Build My Search Plan

Top areas I'm focusing on:

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

My must-haves (needs):

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

My deal breakers:

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

I'm set up on home alerts (MLS or agent search): Yes No

CREATE YOUR PLAN OF ACTION FOR MONTH TWO

5) Tour Smart + Get Offer-Ready

of Homes toured so far: _____

My top 3 so far (if any):

I know what upfront money I may need when writing an offer (earnest money, inspections, etc.)

Amount I have set aside right now: \$ _____

My "walk-away" rule (what I won't accept):

Action: Schedule your buyer consult (if you haven't) and set your first showing day for next week.

PURCHASE YOUR FIRST HOME IN 90 DAYS

Month Three

Month Three Objectives:

- Make offers on homes that you would like to purchase.
- Negotiate a fair deal to get your offer accepted
- Enter escrow and begin the closing process
- Complete inspections
- Finalize your loan
- Close on your new home!

MONTH THREE GAME PLAN: WEEK 9–12

Use this page to stay on track. If you only do what's on this checklist, you'll finish Month Three under contract, through inspections, and ready to close without panic.

WEEK 9: Get Under Contract (Offer Week)

- Choose your top home and confirm it fits your “must-haves”
- Review your offer strategy with your agent (price + terms + timeline)
- Confirm your upfront money (earnest money, option/due diligence, inspection funds)
- Submit offer with your pre-approval letter and proof of funds (if needed)
- Once accepted: calendar EVERY deadline immediately
- Send contract to lender and schedule inspections right away

Done looks like: I'm officially under contract, my deadlines are on my calendar, and inspections are scheduled.

WEEK 10: Inspections + Repair Strategy (Protection Week)

- Attend the home inspection (or review the report the same day)
- Decide if you need specialty inspections (HVAC, roof, sewer, structural, etc.)
- Identify your “Big 3” concerns (safety, structure, major systems)
- Get repair quotes if needed (don't guess)
- Negotiate repairs/credits with your agent before your deadline

Done looks like: I understand the home's condition, I'm not ignoring red flags, and repairs are negotiated (or I'm walking away confidently).

MONTH THREE GAME PLAN: WEEK 9–12

WEEK 11: Appraisal + Underwriting (Numbers Week)

- Pay for / confirm appraisal is ordered and scheduled
- Shop homeowners insurance and send your binder to your lender
- Respond to lender conditions within 24–48 hours (faster = smoother closing)
- Keep finances stable: no new credit, no big deposits, no job changes
- If appraisal is low: review options with your agent (renegotiate, cash gap, or exit if allowed)

Done looks like: My loan is moving forward, insurance is set, and there are no last minute surprises.

WEEK 12: Clear to Close + Closing Prep (Finish Strong Week)

- Review the Closing Disclosure carefully (this is your final numbers check)
- Note: you must receive it at least 3 business days before closing**
- Confirm cash to close and how you'll bring funds (wire/certified funds)
 - Schedule your final walkthrough (24–48 hours before closing)
 - Confirm utilities transfer + movers + time off work
 - Bring ID and be ready to sign (and ask questions if anything looks off)

Done looks like: I've reviewed my final numbers, my funds are ready, walkthrough is done, and I'm picking up keys.

CONTRACT TO CLOSING TIMELINE

Now that you've found a home and are ready to make an offer, it's important to understand what happens next. Here's a general timeline of the key steps from making your offer to closing on your new home:

- 1 Submit offer and negotiate:
- 2 Sign the sales contract and deliver the earnest money deposit.
- 3 Schedule a home inspection
- 4 Complete the home appraisal
- 5 Submit repair requests (if needed)
- 6 Obtain a home insurance plan:
- 7 Schedule the final walkthrough
- 8 Secure your mortgage and receive final loan approval
- 9 Close on your new home



YOUR GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL CLOSING

Getting pre-approved for a mortgage doesn't guarantee closing on the loan. Mortgage lenders will check your credit during the pre-approval process and again right before closing. It's imperative that your credit and financial profile remain the same as when you first applied for the loan.

Even a small financial change can affect your loan approval, so it's important to stay mindful of your financial activity during this time.

To keep closing on schedule and avoid delays, here's a list of things you should do and things to avoid.

By following these simple steps, you'll be well on your way to closing on your new home without any surprises!

DO

- **Do** submit all documents on time.
- **Do** gather your financial documents for your lender (e.g., recent pay stubs, bank statements, and tax returns).
- **Do** continue paying your bills on time.
- **Do** make sure to keep your lender informed regarding any financial changes, such as new debts or changes in employment.

DON'T

- **Don't** open or close bank or credit card accounts. This can affect your credit profile.
- **Don't** finance large expenses. New debt can impact your loan approval.
- **Don't** change jobs, lenders require stable employment.
- **Don't** spend or deposit large amounts of cash, unverified deposits can delay closing.

To learn more about things you should avoid when going through the mortgage process, check out this video

**WATCH
VIDEO HERE**



MAKING THE OFFER

Now that we've found a home you've fallen in love with, it's time to make an offer.

Making an offer is essentially sending a proposal to the seller's agent, who will present it to the home seller. Your offer will include key terms such as the purchase price, contingencies, and an earnest money deposit. If the seller likes the terms, they will accept it. If not, they may counter with their own terms and conditions. Don't worry if this happens, it's a normal part of negotiations, and we'll work together to get a deal that works for you.

Once an offer is accepted and signed, it becomes legally binding, meaning you've made a commitment to purchase the property.

Tips for making your best offer

Whether we're in a buyer's market or a seller's market will influence how you and your agent decide to structure your offer. In a buyer's market, you may be able to negotiate for more favorable terms, such as asking the seller to help with closing costs or pay for a home warranty. While there's no guarantee the seller will agree to your requests, sometimes it's worth asking.

In a more competitive market, you'll want to put your best foot forward, as you may need to compete with multiple buyers. If that's the case, here are some tips for making your best offer:

- Know your budget: Don't offer more than what you can realistically afford.
- Ask your agent what's allowed in your market. Some areas discourage buyer letters to protect fair-housing compliance.
- Write up favorable terms: Be reasonable in your requests. Avoid asking the seller to cover unnecessary inspections or repairs.
- Cash offers are highly attractive: If possible, making a cash offer reduces the seller's risk of your loan falling through and strengthens your position.
- Shorten your due diligence period/inspection period: By completing inspections quickly, you reassure the seller that you're serious about moving forward and won't back out of the transaction.

NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiating a contract can sound intimidating, but don't let it scare you. Negotiations are a critical part of any real estate sales contract, and there's nothing wrong with doing all you can to get the best deal possible. Remember, negotiating isn't about being difficult, it's about ensuring you get the best value for your investment.

Many terms can be negotiable, depending on the market, the seller, and your loan. If you don't ask, you don't get, but your requests should be respectful and realistic, and the seller can always say no.

Below is a list of the most negotiable items that you can include in your offer. For example, you can negotiate for the seller to cover a portion of your closing costs or leave behind certain appliances.



Buyer Negotiating Tips

- Be prepared to walk away. This may be the hardest part of any negotiation. While it may seem like you "lost" on the surface, the reality is that the deal didn't meet the criteria you needed for it to be successful. Remember, the right home is out there, and staying firm on what matters most will ensure you find it.
- Avoid too many back-and-forth requests. Nothing can sour a seller on a deal faster than endless additional requests after an initial contract is offered. For example, asking for too many small repairs can discourage the seller from continuing negotiations.
- Contingencies can break a deal. While sometimes necessary, sellers are often reluctant to enter into a deal involving too many contingencies. It's best to limit these whenever possible.

HOME INSPECTIONS

Your offer was accepted! It's almost time to pop the champagne, but first, it's time to roll up your sleeves and gather as much information about your new home as possible.

This is your inspection period, typically lasting 10-20 days, where you'll schedule important inspections, such as a general home inspection, termite inspection, or roof inspection. You will also submit any repair requests before the end of this inspection period.



A home inspection is a must when buying a home. It helps ensure that you're aware of any potential issues with the property before committing to the purchase. This is a direct buyer cost, and most home inspectors charge a few hundred dollars for their service.

A professional home inspector will check for anything that may be wrong with the home. Think mold, a leaky roof, or a faulty foundation. They also look for minor issues, such as missing tiles in the bathroom or broken seals around faucets.

After the inspection is complete, you'll receive a full report detailing the condition of the home and any faulty findings. If issues are discovered, you can request that the seller fix them, negotiate for a credit, back out of the contract, or choose to handle the repairs yourself after moving in.

Note: FHA loans may require all major issues to be repaired before the lender will approve the loan, as they want to ensure the home meets minimum safety standards.

REPAIR REQUEST

Once you have the inspection report in hand, you can request that the seller repair the items found. The seller may agree, decline, or in some cases, offer you repair credits instead. These credits lower your closing costs, giving you more cash to handle the repairs yourself after you own the home.

Tip: If the repairs are minor or something you want to handle yourself, repair credits may be a better option. For major issues, you might prefer that the seller address them before closing.

HOME APPRAISAL

A home appraisal is required by the bank if you're financing your home. It helps the lender estimate the home's value to ensure they aren't lending more than the property is worth. A licensed appraiser, hired by your lender, will assess the property's value by comparing it to similar homes recently sold in the area.

Just because you and the seller agreed to a price doesn't mean the bank will loan you that amount. After all, the home is their collateral in case you can't make your mortgage payment. If the appraised value comes in less than the contract price, it's time to try to renegotiate your offer. Your agent will contact the listing agent to see if the seller will reduce the price to match the appraisal value. If the seller won't reduce the price, you'll have the option to either make up the difference with cash or back out of the deal.

An appraisal is ultimately a good thing for a buyer. It protects you from falling into a bad deal and overpaying for a home.

HOME INSURANCE

Before closing on a new home, your lender will require you to purchase a homeowners insurance policy. Since your lender holds a lien on the property until it's fully paid off, they want to ensure that it's properly insured while you're paying down your mortgage. Homeowners insurance generally covers damage from events like fire, storms, and theft, but it's important to review what each policy includes.

You may also want to protect your home further with flood insurance, especially if the property is in a flood-prone area. You can start shopping for policies as soon as you're under contract. Shopping early gives you more time to select the right policy, compare quotes, and look into ways to save.

The Critical 3-Day Countdown: What to Review on Your Closing Disclosure (CD)

After your loan is fully approved and your lender gives you the official “Clear to Close (CTC)” they will issue the final, all-important document: the Closing Disclosure (CD).

This document legally finalizes every fee, credit, and number in your transaction. By federal law (TRID), you must receive the CD at least three business days before your closing appointment. This is a non-negotiable review period. This is your last chance to find and fix errors.

Use this checklist to focus on the three most critical areas of the CD:

CD Section to Review	Buyer Action Item	Why It Matters (The Risk)
1. Loan Terms	Verify the Loan Amount, Interest Rate, and Loan Lock Expiration Date match exactly what you were promised in your last Loan Estimate.	Any change here is a major surprise that could affect your monthly payment or put your rate at risk of expiring before closing.
2. Cash to Close	Compare this final cash amount to the estimate on your last Loan Estimate. Pay close attention to any fees (e.g., Lender's Title Fees, Origination Fees) that have drastically increased.	Unexpected increases in this number are the most common source of closing day stress. You need to know the exact wire amount several days in advance.
3. Summaries of Transaction	Check that all of your credits are applied correctly. This includes your Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) and any Seller Credits you negotiated for closing costs or repairs.	A missing credit can cost you thousands of dollars. If a credit is missing or incorrect, notify your real estate agent immediately.

FINAL CLOSING STEPS

Meet Your Loan Conditions

This is the part where your lender asks for final documents to fully approve your loan. The faster you respond, the smoother your closing will be.

Common examples: updated bank statements, proof of repairs (if required), final pay stubs, or an insurance binder.

Prepare To Move

At this point, you have just a few days left until you get to move into your new home. If possible, hire movers and have a packing plan in place to make the process easier. Don't forget to schedule utility transfers and arrange help for kids or pets on moving day, if needed.

Do Your Final Walkthrough

One of the last things you'll complete before closing is a final walkthrough of the home. This ensures that the property is in the agreed-upon condition and allows you to check for any last-minute issues. If anything is wrong, you can address it before closing. Remember, once you close on the house, any problems become your responsibility.

Review Closing Disclosures & Transfer Ownership

Review your closing disclosures carefully to ensure you understand all fees and final costs. This step also involves signing the necessary documents to transfer ownership. Once everything is in order, you're ready to collect your keys!

Closing Day

Closing is the final step in the home buying transaction. All outstanding fees listed in the closing disclosure are paid, escrow funds are cleared to be delivered to the seller, and both buyer and seller sign the necessary documents to transfer ownership. You'll also sign the mortgage loan, and the closing attorney or title company will register the deed in your name.

Collect keys to your new home

It's time to collect the keys and start moving in. You're now an official homeowner!

CREATE YOUR PLAN OF ACTION FOR MONTH THREE

1) Contract + Deadline Snapshot

- Contract accepted date: ___ / ___ / ___
- Closing date: ___ / ___ / ___
- Earnest money amount: \$_____ Due date: ___ / ___ / ___
- Option/Due Diligence fee (if applicable): \$_____ Due date: ___ / ___ / ___
- Inspection deadline: ___ / ___ / ___
- Appraisal ordered on: ___ / ___ / ___
- My walk-away rule (what would make me cancel): _____

2) Inspection Plan

- General inspection scheduled for: ___ / ___ / ___ at _____

Specialty inspections I'm doing (if needed):

- HVAC Roof Sewer Structural Radon Termite/Pest
- My top 3 inspection concerns to watch for: 1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____
- Repair strategy: request repairs request credit accept as-is (only if truly okay)

3) Lender + Underwriting Tracker

- Lender name/contact: _____
- Loan status: submitted in underwriting conditions received clear to close
- Top conditions I still need to satisfy:
1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____
- Rate lock status: locked not locked not sure (ask!)

CREATE YOUR PLAN OF ACTION FOR MONTH THREE

4) Insurance + Utilities

- Insurance quotes received from: _____
- Insurance selected: _____ Premium: \$_____
- Deductible: \$_____
- Binder sent to lender on: ___ / ___ / ___
- Utilities transfer scheduled: power water gas trash internet
- Transfer date: ___ / ___ / ___

5) Closing Prep

- Closing company/attorney + contact: _____
- Cash to close estimate: \$_____
- Funds method: wire certified funds (confirm what's required)
- Final walkthrough scheduled: ___ / ___ / ___ at _____
- Movers booked: Yes No Move date: ___ / ___ / ___
- Kids/pets plan for closing day: _____

Action: If you're behind, focus on only two things: (1) hit deadlines, (2) respond fast to lender requests.

MONTH THREE WRAP-UP: YOU'RE AT THE FINISH LINE

MONTH THREE WRAP-UP: YOU'RE AT THE FINISH LINE

You've filled out your Month 3 Action Plan. Perfect. Now you're in execution mode. This is the part where things move quickly, deadlines matter, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Don't overthink it. Your job is simple: stay on top of deadlines and respond quickly when your agent or lender needs something.

Most buyers want to know, "What happens next?" Here's the general flow from here:

Inspections usually happen first, then you'll negotiate repairs or credits if needed. In the background, your lender is working through underwriting and the appraisal is scheduled and completed. After that, you'll receive your Closing Disclosure, complete your final walkthrough, and then it's closing day.

You don't have to memorize every step. You just need to know what phase you're in and what deadline is coming next.

IF SOMETHING GOES SIDEWAYS, HERE'S WHAT TO DO FIRST

If inspections bring up surprises, don't panic. Focus on what matters most. If it's a safety issue or a major system issue, get a professional opinion quickly and make a clear decision. If it's cosmetic, don't waste time or negotiating power trying to "perfect" the house. Every home has something.

If the appraisal comes in low, you have options. You can renegotiate the price, ask the seller to cover part of the gap, bring cash to cover the difference, or walk away if your contract allows it. The key is to address it quickly so your timeline doesn't get thrown off.

If your closing gets delayed, handle it immediately. Ask about extension options right away and update your movers and utility start dates as soon as you know there's a change. Delays happen. They're frustrating, but they're manageable when you respond fast.

MONTH THREE WRAP-UP: YOU'RE AT THE FINISH LINE

QUICK SAFETY NOTE: WIRE FRAUD IS REAL

If you're wiring funds for closing, protect yourself. Never trust wiring instructions sent by email or text. Always call the closing attorney or title company using a verified phone number to confirm instructions. If anything changes last minute, assume it could be fraud until proven otherwise.

AFTER CLOSING: FIRST 7 DAYS IN YOUR NEW HOME

Closing day is exciting, but the first week matters too. These steps will help you settle in smoothly:

- Change the locks or re-key the home right away.
- Confirm all utilities are active and working.
- Save your closing documents in one folder, both digitally and on paper.
- Set up a simple home maintenance routine, even if it's just reminders to change filters and test smoke detectors.
- Submit your change of address for mail, the DMV, your employer, and any subscriptions. Then, ask your lender when your first mortgage payment is due and how to set up autopay.
- Finally, start a "home fund," even if it's small. Stuff will come up. Having a little cushion makes homeownership feel way less stressful.

Done looks like: You're moved in, organized, and set up for your first payment and basic home maintenance.

CLOSE WITH ME BONUS: GET THE BLUEPRINT REIMBURSEMENT

Local to the NC Triad? Upgrade to Private Representation.

If you purchased this Blueprint and I represent you as your buyer's agent, I'll credit the Blueprint cost back to you as a thank-you for trusting me with your home buying journey.

HOW IT WORKS

1. **Purchase the Blueprint:** Start your preparation today with the 90-day roadmap.
2. **Book a Buyer Consult:** When you are ready to move forward, schedule a meeting with me to discuss your Greensboro/Triad home search.
3. **Receive Your "Client Courtesy" Credit:** If you choose to hire me as your agent, the cost of this Blueprint is included in my service. I will apply a \$47 credit to your settlement statement at closing.

Why? Because my private clients shouldn't have to pay extra for my best advice.

IMPORTANT NOTES (PLEASE READ)

- **NC Triad only:** This bonus is for buyers purchasing in the Triad area of North Carolina where I'm able to represent you.
- **No receipt needed:** I'll verify your Blueprint purchase in my records.
- **Applied at Closing:** This credit may appear on your final Closing Disclosure (CD) as an agent credit, subject to lender approval.

ADDITIONAL TERMS

- One credit per closed purchase.
- Non-transferable.
- You must be the original purchaser of the Blueprint.

NOT BUYING IN NORTH CAROLINA? Click [HERE](#) To get matched with a trusted agent in your area.

DO THIS If you're buying in the NC Triad, book your consult [HERE](#) and tell me your timeline.

DONE LOOKS LIKE You have a plan, a pro in your corner, and a clear path to closing.

[Book your consult with me](#)
[HERE!](#)

CREDIT BONUS: MORTGAGE-READY CREDIT TOOLKIT (30-90 DAY PLAN)

FAST-ACTION STEPS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CREDIT BEFORE YOU BUY
CREATED BY LYNETTE SELBY, REALTOR®

CREDIT CHALLENGE TOOLKIT (MORTGAGE-READY IN 30-90 DAYS)

Important: This toolkit is for education only. Credit results vary. For personalized guidance, always confirm next steps with a licensed mortgage lender or qualified credit professional.

CREDIT BONUS: CREDIT CHALLENGE TOOLKIT

Mortgage-Ready in 30-90 Days (Without Overwhelm)

If any of these are true, start here:

- My score isn't where I need it.
- My utilization is high.
- I have collections/late payments.
- I'm scared to even apply.

WHAT YOU'LL DO INSIDE THIS TOOLKIT:

- Pull your reports + spot what's hurting you
- Attack the fastest wins (utilization + on-time payments)
- Clean up errors the right way (with templates)
- Walk into pre-approval with confidence

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MORTGAGE CREDIT BASICS (READ THIS FIRST)

Most apps show a consumer score that may not match your mortgage score.

Key points:

- Mortgage lenders may pull all 3 bureaus and use a classic mortgage scoring model.
- Your goal isn't "perfect credit." Your goal is mortgage-ready credit.

The fastest improvements usually come from:

- Lowering utilization (how much of your limits you're using)
- Protecting payment history (never miss payments)
- Fixing true errors (not "disputing everything")

Mortgage season rules (keep your file clean):

- Don't open new accounts unless your lender says to.
- Avoid hard inquiries.
- Don't close old cards during the process.

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PULL YOUR REPORTS + CREDIT AUDIT CHECKLIST (20-30 MIN)

Step 1: Pull all 3 reports

- Get your reports from Equifax / Experian / TransUnion.
- Save PDFs + take screenshots of anything that looks wrong.

Step 2: Do a fast audit (check these first)

- Personal info: name, addresses, employers (flag anything unfamiliar)
- Accounts you don't recognize
- Late payments you don't agree with
- Collections you don't recognize
- Incorrect balances/limits
- Duplicate collections (same debt listed twice)
- Accounts that should be closed/paid but show open

Step 3: Circle your "Top 3 blockers".

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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CHOOSE YOUR CREDIT FIX PATH (THE DECISION MAP)

Circle what's MOST true right now:

A) HIGH UTILIZATION (balances are too high) → Go to Utilization Playbook (Page 74)

B) LATE PAYMENTS (missed/30-day lates) → Go to Payment History Playbook (Page 75)

COLLECTIONS / CHARGE-OFFS → Go to Collections Playbook (Page 76)

ERRORS ON YOUR REPORT → Go to Dispute Kit (Page 77)

THIN FILE (not enough credit history) → Start Build Credit Safely (Page 75 bottom section)

Your starting path: _____

Your goal date for pre-approval: _____

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UTILIZATION PLAYBOOK (FASTEST POINT GAINS)

What to aim for:

Keep each card under 30% utilization (ideal: under 10%).
If you can't get under 30% yet, start by lowering the highest-utilization card first.

Fast wins (do these in order):

- Pay before the statement date (not just the due date)
- Make two payments per month (mid-cycle + before statement)

If possible, pay down cards to these targets:

Card 1 target balance: \$_____

Card 2 target balance: \$_____

Card 3 target balance: \$_____

Ask for a credit limit increase only if it won't cause a hard inquiry

Do NOT do this right now:

Don't close cards to "simplify" (it can raise utilization).

Don't move balances randomly without a plan

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PAYMENT HISTORY PLAYBOOK (PROTECT YOUR SCORE)

Rule #1: No missed payments. Period.

This week:

- Turn on autopay minimum payment for every credit account
- Pay at least 48 hours before the due date (set reminders)

If you have late payments:

- You may try a Goodwill Request (ask for a one-time courtesy removal)

GOODWILL SCRIPT (COPY/PASTE)

"Hi, I've been a customer since _____. I'm working to qualify for a mortgage and I noticed a late payment reported on _____. I take full responsibility. This was an isolated incident and my account is now current. Would you consider a one-time goodwill adjustment to remove the late payment reporting?"

BUILD CREDIT SAFELY (IF YOU HAVE A THIN FILE)

- Consider a secured card (one small balance you pay off monthly)
- Keep utilization low (under 10% when possible)
- Never apply for multiple cards at once (ask your lender first if you're mortgage shopping)

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COLLECTIONS & CHARGE-OFFS PLAYBOOK (DO THIS CAREFULLY)

Step 1: List what's there

Creditor/Collector	Type	Amount	Date Opened	Notes

Step 2: Decide the best next action (choose ONE per item)

Confirm accuracy (is it yours? correct amount? correct dates?)

If it's wrong → use the Dispute Kit (Page 8)

If it's right → talk to a lender about whether to:

- Pay in full
- Settle
- Leave it for now while you work on utilization and payment history

Negotiation reminder:

- Get agreements in writing.
- Ask the lender how they want this handled before you pay anything (timing matters).

Medical collections note (quick check):

Some medical debt may not show the same way as other collections. Still, review your report and talk to your lender about your specific file.

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DISPUTE KIT (ERRORS ONLY — SIMPLE + CLEAN)

Dispute only what's inaccurate or incomplete.

Dispute options:

1. Dispute with the credit bureau (Equifax/Experian/TransUnion)
2. Dispute directly with the business/furnisher reporting the info

What to include:

- The exact item you're disputing
- Why it's wrong
- Proof (receipts, statements, letters)
- A clear request: "Please correct or remove this item."

DISPUTE LETTER TEMPLATE

Date: _____

To: (Bureau or Furnisher Name)

Re: Dispute of inaccurate information on my credit report

I am disputing the following item on my credit report:

- Account/Item: _____
- Reported as: _____
- Reason it's inaccurate/incomplete. _____

Please investigate and correct/remove this item. Attached are copies of supporting documents.

Sincerely,

Name: _____

Address: _____

DOB (optional): _____

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FAST-ACTION STEPS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CREDIT BEFORE YOU BUY
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30-DAY CREDIT BOOST (UPGRADED SPRINT)

Week 1: Audit + Targets

- Pull reports + circle Top 3 blockers
- Set utilization target per card
- Turn on autopay

Week 2: Clean Up + Reduce

- File disputes for true errors
- Pay down the highest utilization card
- Request limit increases only if no hard inquiry

Week 3: Optimize Reporting

- Two payments this month (mid-cycle + before statement)
- Keep balances low ahead of statement dates
- Avoid new credit

Week 4: Mortgage-Ready Prep

- Re-check utilization + balances
- Gather documents for lender
- Book your pre-approval strategy call

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CREDIT TRACKERS (WEEKLY + STATEMENT DATES)

5-Minute Weekly Credit Tracker

Pick one day each week (same day). Track it. Move on.

Score source (ex: Experian app) – write once: _____

Week Of	Score	Utilization %	Total Monthly Debt \$	Biggest Win	Next Step

Card	Due Date	Statement Date	Target Balance Before Statement

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WHAT NOT TO DO (COMMON CREDIT MISTAKES)

- Don't apply for multiple new credit cards
- Don't finance furniture, appliances, or a car before closing
- Don't move money around in confusing ways without asking your lender.
- Don't dispute everything (keep it clean and strategic)

WHEN TO GET HELP

If you feel stuck, use this simple rule:

- Get lender guidance when:
- You have collections/charge-offs
- You're within 60 days of applying
- Your score is close but not quite there
- You're unsure whether to dispute or settle

SUPPORT (NC + EVERYWHERE ELSE)

If you're buying in North Carolina (Triad): Use the Close With Me bonus in the main Blueprint for guidance and to officially work together.

If you're buying outside North Carolina: Click [HERE](#) to connect with an agent, to get matched with a trusted local agent in your area.

You can still use the Agent Interview Script in this Blueprint to choose the best fit before you commit.

5-MINUTE CREDIT SCORE TRACKER

CREDIT TRACKER (WEEKLY LOG)

DO THIS:

Pick ONE day each week (same day every week). Spend 5 minutes. Track it. Move on.

Score source (write once): _____

(Examples: Credit Karma, Experian app, your bank/credit card app, myFICO)

You can receive your full credit report at annualcreditreport.com

WEEKLY CREDIT LOG

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

5-MINUTE CREDIT SCORE TRACKER

CREDIT TRACKER (WEEKLY LOG)

DO THIS:

Pick ONE day each week (same day every week). Spend 5 minutes. Track it. Move on.

Score source (write once): _____

(Examples: Credit Karma, Experian app, your bank/credit card app, myFICO)

You can receive your full credit report at [annualcreditreport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com)

WEEKLY CREDIT LOG

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

5-MINUTE CREDIT SCORE TRACKER

CREDIT TRACKER (WEEKLY LOG)

DO THIS:

Pick ONE day each week (same day every week). Spend 5 minutes. Track it. Move on.

Score source (write once): _____

(Examples: Credit Karma, Experian app, your bank/credit card app, myFICO)

You can receive your full credit report at annualcreditreport.com

WEEKLY CREDIT LOG

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

Week Of: __/__/__ Score: _____ Utilization: _____% Total Monthly Debt: \$_____

Biggest win this week: _____

Next step: _____

APPENDIX: TEMPLATE PACK (PRINT + USE)

IMPORTANT NOTES (PLEASE READ)

THIS BLUEPRINT IS PROVIDED FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. IT IS NOT LEGAL, TAX, LENDING, OR FINANCIAL ADVICE AND SHOULD NOT BE RELIED ON AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR GUIDANCE FROM LICENSED PROFESSIONALS. REAL ESTATE LAWS, CONTRACT TERMS, TIMELINES, AND LOAN REQUIREMENTS VARY BY STATE AND BY LENDER. ALWAYS CONFIRM DETAILS WITH YOUR REAL ESTATE AGENT, LENDER, ATTORNEY/TITLE COMPANY, AND ANY LICENSED INSPECTORS OR CONTRACTORS BEFORE MAKING DECISIONS.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR VERIFYING:

- LOAN PROGRAM RULES AND QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS
- INTEREST RATES, FEES, AND YOUR CASH-TO-CLOSE ESTIMATE
- CONTRACT TIMELINES, CONTINGENCIES, AND DEADLINES
- INSPECTION FINDINGS AND REPAIR RECOMMENDATIONS
- PROPERTY CONDITION, PERMITS, AND DISCLOSURES

WIRE FRAUD WARNING

NEVER WIRE MONEY BASED ON AN EMAIL OR TEXT ALONE. ALWAYS VERIFY WIRING INSTRUCTIONS BY CALLING A TRUSTED PHONE NUMBER FOR YOUR LENDER OR CLOSING ATTORNEY/TITLE COMPANY.

NO GUARANTEES

THIS BLUEPRINT PROVIDES GENERAL EDUCATION AND BEST PRACTICES, BUT RESULTS WILL VARY BASED ON YOUR FINANCES, THE PROPERTY, THE MARKET, AND LENDER REQUIREMENTS. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES.

APPENDIX: TEMPLATE PACK (PRINT + USE)

Template Index (Use This When)

Template #1: Lender Call Script

Use on your first call with 2–3 lenders to compare options, get real numbers, and avoid surprise costs.

Template #2: Agent Interview Script

Use before choosing an agent so you can compare who has the best process, communication, and strategy for you.

Template #3: Offer Submission Checklist

Use right before submitting an offer to confirm your numbers, documents, deadlines, and key terms.

Template #4: Inspection + Repair Negotiation Prep Sheet

Use after you receive the inspection report to identify what matters most, understand your options, and know what to watch for during repair negotiations.

Template #5: Underwriting Do's & Don'ts

Use from contract to closing to avoid common underwriting mistakes that delay or derail approvals.

LENDER CALL SCRIPT

Use This On Your First Lender Call (Fill It In As You Talk)

HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE (READ THIS FIRST)

What this is:

A guided script + note sheet you use while you're on the phone with a lender so you don't miss important questions and you can compare lenders side-by-side.

When to use it:

Use this on your first call with each lender before you commit to a full application.

What you're doing with it (step-by-step):

- Print this or open it on your phone before the call.
- Call 2–3 lenders and fill in the blanks during each call.
- At the end of each call, ask them to email you a written breakdown (rate, estimated payment, and estimated cash-to-close).
- Use the scorecard to rate each lender.
- Choose the lender who gives you clear answers, realistic numbers, and reliable communication.
- Keep this sheet. It's your reference later during underwriting.

By the end of each call, you should have:

- Your estimated price range
- Your estimated cash-to-close
- A document list
- A clear next step and follow-up date

LENDER CALL SCRIPT

Before you call (30 seconds)

Target monthly payment: \$_____ to \$_____

Down payment you're comfortable with: \$_____

Savings available today: \$_____

Credit score (estimate): _____

Timeline to buy: _____

Home type: Single-family / Townhome / Condo / New construction

Areas you're considering: _____

Lender: _____ Company: _____

Phone/Email: _____ Date of call: _____

1) Opening (Say this)

Hi, my name is _____. I'm planning to buy my first home and I want a clear plan. I'd like to ask a few questions, then talk next steps.

2) Credit pull + pre-approval (Say this)

How do you handle credit pulls? Soft pull first or hard pull? If hard, when does that happen?

Soft pull option? Yes / No

Hard pull happens when: _____

Pre-approval valid for: _____ days

Turnaround time: _____ hours/days

3) Affordability (Say this)

My goal is a comfortable monthly payment. Based on my income and debts, what price range fits that?

Estimated price range: \$_____ to \$_____

Estimated monthly payment: \$_____

Does that payment include taxes, insurance, HOA? Yes / No

Notes: _____

LENDER CALL SCRIPT

4) Loan options (Say this)

What loan programs do you recommend for me, and why? Please compare at least two options.

Option 1: _____ | Down payment: _____%

Option 2: _____ | Down payment: _____%

Why they recommend it: _____

5) Cash-to-close breakdown (Say this)

Can you estimate my cash-to-close, including down payment, closing costs, and prepaids?

Down payment: \$_____

Closing costs: \$_____

Prepaids, escrows: \$_____

Estimated total cash-to-close: \$_____

What could change it: _____

6) Rate, APR, points, and lender fees (Say this)

What rate are you quoting, and what does it assume? Any points? What lender fees should I expect?

Rate today: _____%

APR: _____%

Points included? Yes / No | Cost: \$_____

Lender fees, origination: \$_____

Can I lock the rate? Yes / No | Lock length: _____ days

7) Down payment assistance (if applicable) (Say this)

Do I qualify for any down payment assistance? What are the rules and repayment terms?

Program name(s): _____

Minimum credit score: _____

Income limits? Yes / No | If yes, what limits: _____

Type: Grant / Forgivable / Deferred / Monthly payment

Restrictions or "catch": _____

LENDER CALL SCRIPT

8) Documents + common delays (Say this)

What documents do you need for a strong pre-approval, and what delays should I avoid?

Docs needed: _____

Common delays: _____

9) Communication (Say this)

When I'm writing an offer, how fast can I reach you and who covers after hours?

Expected response time: _____

Main contact person: _____

After-hours help: Yes / No

Best method: Call / Text / Email

10) Close the call (Say this)

Thanks, this was helpful. Can you email me a written breakdown of the options and estimated cash-to-close?

Follow-up date/time: _____

Call Complete Checklist (Do not hang up until you have these)

- Estimated price range
- Estimated cash-to-close
- Document list
- Next step + follow-up date/time

Quick Scorecard (circle one)

Clear explanations (1 2 3 4 5)

Gave real numbers (1 2 3 4 5)

Offered 2 options (1 2 3 4 5)

No pressure (1 2 3 4 5)

Communication feels solid (1 2 3 4 5)

Total: ____ / 25

LENDER CALL SCRIPT SCORECARD

Quick Scorecard (circle one)

Clear explanations (1 2 3 4 5)

Gave real numbers (1 2 3 4 5)

Offered 2 options (1 2 3 4 5)

No pressure (1 2 3 4 5)

Communication feels solid (1 2 3 4 5)

Total: ____ / 25

LENDER SCRIPT: QUICK DEFINITIONS

QUICK DEFINITIONS (SO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE HEARING)

Pre-approval vs pre-qualification

- Pre-qualification: a rough estimate based on what you tell the lender.
- Pre-approval: the lender reviews documents and credit (stronger when making offers).

Soft pull vs hard pull

- Soft pull: often used for an initial review.
- Hard pull: may impact your score slightly and is often required for a true pre-approval.

Rate vs APR

- Interest rate: the percent you pay to borrow money.
- APR: rate plus certain costs and fees. Helpful for comparing lenders.

Points

- An upfront fee paid to lower the interest rate.
- Rough rule: 1 point is about 1% of the loan amount.

Rate lock

- Locks your interest rate for a set time (example: 30 or 45 days).
- Ask what happens if the closing date changes.

PITI (what your payment usually includes)

- Principal + Interest + Taxes + Insurance
- HOA may be extra depending on the home.

Escrow vs prepaids

- Escrow: money collected monthly for taxes and insurance.
- Prepaids: money due at closing to start your escrow cushion and cover upfront items.

Closing costs

- Lender fees + appraisal + title and attorney + recording fees + prepaids.
- Closing costs are not the same as the down payment.

Cash-to-close

- Total money you bring to closing: down payment + closing costs + prepaids, minus credits.

LENDER SCRIPT: QUICK DEFINITIONS

QUICK DEFINITIONS (SO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE HEARING)

Lender credits

- Lender covers some closing costs, usually in exchange for a higher rate. It's a trade-off.

DTI (debt-to-income ratio)

- Monthly debt compared to monthly income. Lower DTI usually means easier approval.

Reserves

- Extra money left in savings after closing that some loans require or prefer.

Underwriting and conditions

- Underwriting is final approval where everything is verified.
- Conditions are extra documents or clarifications requested before final approval.

Loan Estimate (LE)

- A standardized document showing projected rate, payment, and cash-to-close.
- Best way to compare lenders is requesting an LE using the same purchase price and down payment.

Optional NC note (include if you want it)

- Due diligence fee: paid to seller, usually non-refundable.
- Earnest money: held by a third party and may be refundable based on contract terms.

AGENT INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Use This Before You Choose Your Agent (Fill It In As You Talk)

HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE (READ THIS FIRST)

What this is:

A guided script + scorecard you use while interviewing agents so you can choose the right person without guessing.

When to use it:

Use this before you commit to working with an agent.

What you're doing with it (step-by-step):

- Call or meet with 2–3 agents.
- Use this script and write down the answers.
- Score each agent using the scorecard.
- Choose the agent who is clear, proactive, and communicates well.

By the end, you should have:

- A clear plan for getting you from “pre-approved” to “keys”
- Confidence you can reach your agent when it matters
- Clarity on how they represent you, negotiate, and protect you

AGENT INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Before you start (30 seconds)

Fill this in so you're interviewing the agent with your real goals in mind:

Your timeline to buy: _____

Price range target: \$_____ to \$_____

Must-haves: _____

Deal-breakers: _____

Areas you're considering: _____

You are: First-time buyer / Relocating / Both

Agent name: _____ Company: _____

Phone/Email: _____ Date: _____

1) Opening (Say this)

"Hi, I'm interviewing a couple agents before I decide who to work with. I have a few questions so I can understand your process and see if we're a fit."

2) Experience and focus (Ask this)

"Do you work mostly with buyers, sellers, or both? And how many buyers have you helped in the last 12 months?"

Notes: _____

Buyer focus? Yes / No

Buyers helped in last 12 months: _____

Do they work with first-time buyers often? Yes / No

Do they work with relocation buyers often? Yes / No

3) Local knowledge and strategy (Ask this)

"How do you help buyers choose an area if they're not sure yet? What's your approach to narrowing neighborhoods and options?"

Notes: _____

AGENT INTERVIEW SCRIPT

4) Their step-by-step process (Ask this)

"Walk me through your process from the moment I'm pre-approved to closing day. What happens first, then what?"
Listen for an actual process, not vague talk.

Notes: _____

5) Touring homes and scheduling (Ask this)

"How do showings work? How quickly can we get into homes, and what's realistic for touring?"

Notes: _____

6) Offer strategy and negotiation (Ask this)

"How do you advise your buyers on offer price and terms? And how do you negotiate if we're competing with other buyers?"

Notes: _____

7) Inspections and repairs (Ask this)

"How do you guide buyers through inspections, repair requests, and decision-making if the inspection is rough?"

Notes: _____

8) Communication expectations (Ask this)

"What does communication look like? How fast do you respond, and what happens if I need you quickly when making an offer?"

Response time: _____
Best method: Call / Text / Email
After-hours availability for offers: Yes / No

Notes: _____

AGENT INTERVIEW SCRIPT

9) Red flags and honesty check (Ask this)

"What are the biggest mistakes first-time buyers make, and how do you help them avoid them?"

Notes:

10) Fees, agreements, and how they get paid (Ask this)

"Can you explain how buyer representation works, and how you get paid in a typical transaction? Are there any agreements I'd be asked to sign?"

Notes:

Do they explain clearly? Yes / No

Any agreement mentioned? Yes / No

Anything that concerns you? _____

11) New construction (if applicable)

If you might buy new construction, ask this:

"If I buy new construction, what do you do for me, and when should you be involved?"

Notes:

12) Close the interview (Say this)

"Thank you. I'm speaking with a couple agents this week. If I choose you, what are the next steps and what do you need from me?"

Follow-up date/time: _____

AGENT INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Quick Scorecard (circle one)

Clear process (1 2 3 4 5)

Strong strategy and negotiation (1 2 3 4 5)

Communication feels reliable (1 2 3 4 5)

Honest about risks and red flags (1 2 3 4 5)

I feel protected, not pressured (1 2 3 4 5)

Total: ____ / 25

Decision Notes (optional)

What I liked most: _____

What I didn't like: _____

Would I trust this person with a stressful situation? Yes / No

QUICK DEFINITIONS + WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

What a buyer's agent should do (in plain English)

A strong buyer's agent should:

- Help you build a smart plan and timeline
- Educate you so you're not guessing
- Spot risks and protect your money
- Write clean offers and negotiate terms
- Guide you through inspections, repairs, and closing
- Communicate fast when deadlines matter

Common terms you may hear

Buyer representation:

The agent is working for you, not the seller.

Exclusive agreement (names vary):

A document that confirms the agent represents you. Some states require this, and many agents use it to set expectations.

Dual agency (if allowed in your state):

One agent represents both buyer and seller. This can limit how much the agent can advise either side.

Commission and compensation:

Agents are typically paid through the transaction, but how that is handled can vary. A good agent explains it clearly, up front, with no weirdness.

Green flag answers sound like this

- "Here's my step-by-step process..." (and they actually have one)
- "I'll show you the numbers and explain why."
- "If the inspection is ugly, I'll help you prioritize and negotiate."
- "When you're writing an offer, you can reach me quickly."
- "My job is to protect you, not push you."

Red flags (tell it like it is)

- They avoid explaining how they get paid
- They promise things they can't control (like "I'll always get you a deal")
- They pressure you to commit on the first call
- They can't clearly explain their process
- They're slow to respond during the interview (it won't get better later)

Call Complete Checklist (before you choose)

- I understand their process from start to finish
- I know how communication will work
- I trust their negotiation approach
- I feel comfortable asking questions
- I understand representation and agreements

OFFER SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Use This Right Before You Submit Any Offer (So You Don't Miss Anything)

HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE (READ THIS FIRST)

What this is:

A step-by-step checklist to use right before you submit an offer so your offer is clean, complete, and competitive.

When to use it:

Use this every time you're about to write an offer. Don't rely on memory.

What you're doing with it:

- Fill in the property basics.
- Confirm your numbers and terms.
- Gather everything needed for the offer packet.
- Review the "final check" section.
- Submit with confidence.

OFFER SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Property Basics

- Address: _____
- Listing price: \$_____
- Property type: Single-family / Townhome / Condo
- HOA? Yes / No HOA dues: \$_____/month (if known)
- Days on market: _____
- Seller occupancy: Vacant / Owner-occupied / Tenant-occupied
- Ideal closing date for you: _____
- Ideal possession date for you: _____

Your Financing Snapshot

- Loan type: Conventional / FHA / VA / USDA / Other: _____
- Down payment: ____% (\$_____)
- Interest rate locked? Yes / No
- Lender name: _____ Phone: _____
- Monthly payment comfort range: \$_____ to \$_____
- Max purchase price you're willing to do: \$_____

Offer Price Strategy

Confirm you're not guessing:

- I reviewed the comps or pricing guidance with my agent/lender
- I understand why this offer price makes sense
- Offer price: \$_____
- If offering above list, reason: _____
- Escalation clause? Yes / No
 - Max price: \$_____
 - Escalation amount: \$_____
 - Proof required from seller? Yes / No
- Appraisal gap coverage? Yes / No
 - Amount you can cover if appraisal is low: \$_____

OFFER SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Your Offer Terms (The Stuff That Gets Offers Accepted)

Earnest money (deposit): \$_____

Due diligence / option fee (if applicable in your state): \$_____

Seller concessions requested? Yes / No

- Amount: \$_____

- Purpose: Closing costs / Rate buy-down / Repairs / Other: _____

Contingencies (check what applies):

Inspection contingency

- Inspection period length: _____ days

Appraisal contingency (common unless waived)

Financing contingency (if used in your state)

Home sale contingency (if applicable)

Other terms that matter:

Closing date: _____

Possession: At closing / After closing (rent-back) / Other: _____

Rent-back needed? Yes / No

- Days: _____ Daily rate: \$_____ (if applicable)

Personal property included (fridge, washer/dryer, etc.):

Home warranty requested? Yes / No

Special requests: _____

Deadlines and Logistics

I understand every deadline in the contract

I know how earnest money is delivered (wire, check, where, and by when)

- Earnest money delivery method: _____

- Who receives it: _____

- Deadline: _____

I know who will handle closing (title/attorney/escrow) if buyer choice is allowed

Closing company: _____

OFFER SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Offer Packet (What must be attached or ready)

- Pre-approval letter (matching THIS offer price and loan type)
- Proof of funds (for down payment, appraisal gap, or cash offer)
- Any required addenda (HOA/condo, disclosures, lead-based paint if applicable, etc.)
- ID verification if required (rare, but sometimes requested)
- Explanation letter only if your agent says it's appropriate (not always recommended)

Final Check Before Submitting (Do not skip)

- Offer price and terms match what I approved
- Names are correct (spelling matters)
- Loan type is correct
- Dates are realistic and match my lender timeline
- Contingencies match my comfort level
- Seller concessions (if requested) make sense with my loan type
- I understand what money is at risk and when

OFFER READY CHECKLIST (If these aren't true, pause)

- I know my true monthly payment estimate
- I know my estimated cash-to-close range
- I understand the inspection timeline and next steps
- I know exactly what happens if appraisal comes in low
- I can deliver earnest money on time

OFFER SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

QUICK CLARITY (SO BUYERS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY'RE AGREEING TO)

Earnest money vs option fee vs due diligence (varies by state)

- Earnest money: A deposit tied to the contract. It may be refundable depending on contract terms and timelines.
- Option fee / due diligence fee (some states): Often paid up front for the right to inspect and walk away. In many cases, this fee is not refundable.
- Your agent should tell you what applies in your state.

Seller concessions (what they really mean)

- Seller concessions are money the seller agrees to contribute toward your closing costs or approved items.
- Sellers are more likely to agree when the offer price and overall terms support it.

Appraisal gap (plain English)

- If the home appraises low, the lender bases the loan on the appraised value, not your offer price.
- An appraisal gap is the amount you agree you can cover if the appraisal is short.

Escalation clause (plain English)

- You're saying: "I'll beat other offers up to a max price."
- It can help in multiple-offer situations, but it needs clean wording and proof rules.
-

Inspection period (what matters most)

- This is your window to inspect and decide if you want to move forward, renegotiate, or walk away (depending on your contract rules).
- The shorter the inspection window, the stronger the offer can look, but don't shorten it so much that you can't get inspections scheduled.

OFFER SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Possession and rent-back

- Possession at closing: You get the keys at closing.
- Rent-back: The seller stays after closing for a set time (you become the owner/landlord during that period).
- Only do rent-back if your contract clearly spells out terms, insurance, and daily rate.

What usually makes an offer stronger (without doing anything reckless)

- Clean paperwork, correct numbers, and fast lender communication
- Realistic closing date
- Clear earnest money plan
- Reasonable inspection timeline
- Minimal "extra" demands

What weakens offers fast

- Missing documents (pre-approval letter, proof of funds)
- Confusing terms or unrealistic timelines
- Asking for too much without supporting offer strength
- Not being ready to deliver earnest money on time

INSPECTION + REPAIR NEGOTIATION PREP SHEET

INSPECTION + REPAIR NEGOTIATION PREP SHEET

Use This Right After the Inspection Report (So You Know What Matters and What to Watch For)

WHAT THIS IS

This is a buyer-friendly guide to help you:

- Sort inspection findings fast
- Decide what to ask for (repairs vs credit vs price change)
- Understand what "good" looks like in the negotiation
- Avoid common mistakes that cost money later

WHEN TO USE IT

Use this immediately after you receive the inspection report and before repair negotiations.

INSPECTION + REPAIR NEGOTIATION PREP SHEET

Step 1: Sort findings into 3 buckets

Write the biggest items in each bucket.

Bucket A: Safety / major function issues (priority)

Examples: electrical hazards, active leaks, roof problems, HVAC not working, plumbing failures, structural concerns, gas issues.

Bucket B: Big cost items that affect value (secondary)

Examples: old roof near end of life, aging HVAC, drainage/moisture problems, significant defects that may become expensive soon.

Bucket C: Cosmetic / normal wear (usually skip)

Examples: paint, minor cracks, loose handles, small cosmetic issues, outdated finishes.

I understand: Almost every home has Bucket C items. That's normal.

Step 2: Pick your negotiation approach (check one)

- Repairs (best when it's safety/function and you want it resolved before closing)
- Credit (best when you want control over the contractor and quality)
- Price reduction (sometimes works, depends on the deal and loan rules)
- Walk away (if the issues are too big or the seller won't address major concerns)

Step 3: Choose your top requests (keep it focused)

Do not negotiate 25 small items. Pick 3-6 that matter most.

My top 3-6 priority items:

What I prefer:

- Repairs Credit Combination Price reduction

INSPECTION + REPAIR NEGOTIATION PREP SHEET

Step 4: Prep your proof (this helps your negotiation)

- I saved the inspection pages that support my priority items
 - I have photos (if provided)
 - I have at least one contractor quote for any major items (if possible)
- Estimated cost (if known): \$_____

Step 5: Questions to ask your agent before they negotiate

Use these so you understand the strategy.

1. Which items are "must address" vs "nice to have"? Why?
2. What's the most realistic outcome in this market: repairs, credit, or neither?
3. Will my loan type limit credits or affect how repairs must be handled?
4. If the seller offers repairs, how do we ensure the work is done correctly?
5. What's our backup plan if the seller says no?

Notes: _____

Step 6: If the seller agrees to repairs, protect yourself

- Repairs must be completed by a licensed professional when appropriate
- Ask for paid receipts/invoices (not just "they said it's done")
- If permits are needed, confirm permits were pulled/closed
- Confirm repairs will be completed before final walkthrough
- Confirm what happens if repairs are not completed on time

Step 7: If the seller offers a credit, make sure it's usable

- Confirm the credit is allowed with my loan type
- Confirm the credit amount and what it applies to (closing costs, prepaid items, etc.)
- Confirm I still have enough cash-to-close if credit rules limit how it's applied

Step 8: Make your "go/no-go" decision (be honest)

If the seller won't address Bucket A issues, I will:

- move forward anyway
- renegotiate further
- terminate within my contract timeframe

My bottom line is: _____

INSPECTION + REPAIR NEGOTIATION PREP SHEET

WHAT TO LOOK FOR (SO YOU DON'T GET PLAYED)

The goal of an inspection

It's not a "perfect home" report. It's a risk report so you can make a smart decision.

Best items to negotiate (generally)

- Active leaks or water intrusion
- Roof issues or major roof defects
- HVAC not functioning properly
- Electrical hazards
- Plumbing failures
- Structural concerns
- Safety hazards that create real risk or liability
- Moisture/drainage problems that can cause long-term damage

Items that usually waste negotiation power

- Minor cosmetic issues
- Small DIY fixes
- Normal wear and tear
- "Upgrade" requests (new appliances, new counters, etc.) unless tied to a real defect

INSPECTION + REPAIR NEGOTIATION PREP SHEET

Repairs vs credits: what's better for buyers?

Repairs can be fine, but sellers often choose the cheapest contractor and quickest fix.

Credits often give buyers more control and better quality long term. Your agent will advise what's realistic based on the seller and the market.

Red flags during repair negotiations

- Seller refuses to address serious safety/function issues
- Seller agrees to repairs but won't provide receipts or details
- Repairs are vague (ex: "fix leak") instead of specific (what leak, where, who, proof)
- Work is promised but timelines are unclear
- You feel pressured to accept major issues without understanding the risk

Final walkthrough reminder

If repairs were agreed to:

- Verify repairs are completed before closing
- Bring receipts/invoices to closing file
- Confirm repairs look complete and functional, not just "patched"

Due diligence/inspection timelines and what money is at risk vary by state. In NC specifically, your agent should explain how due diligence and timelines impact your ability to renegotiate or walk away.

UNDERWRITING/PROTECT YOUR APPROVAL DO'S & DON'TS

Use This From Contract to Closing (So You Don't Blow Up Your Loan)

WHAT THIS IS

A simple, print-and-stick-on-the-fridge checklist to help you avoid the most common underwriting mistakes.

WHEN TO USE IT

From the day you go under contract until the day you close.
Underwriting is strict. Even small changes can delay or kill approval.

UNDERWRITING/PROTECT YOUR APPROVAL DO'S & DON'TS

Use This From Contract to Closing (So You Don't Blow Up Your Loan)

WHAT THIS IS

A simple, print-and-stick-on-the-fridge checklist to help you avoid the most common underwriting mistakes.

WHEN TO USE IT

From the day you go under contract until the day you close. Underwriting is strict. Even small changes can delay or kill approval.

1) Keep your finances boring

- Keep your spending steady
- Keep your bank balances stable
- Keep your credit exactly the same
- Keep your job and income steady

2) Respond fast to lender requests

- Check email daily
- Upload documents within 24-48 hours if possible
- Send full PDFs, not screenshots (unless they ask)
- If you don't understand a request, ask immediately

3) Document everything. If money moves, be prepared to explain it.

- Save receipts for large deposits
- Keep copies of bank statements (all pages)
- Keep pay stubs current
- Keep proof of any gift funds (if applicable)

4) Keep funds easy to verify

- Keep down payment/closing funds in the same account if possible
- Avoid moving money between accounts
- Avoid cash deposits
- Avoid large unexplained deposits

UNDERWRITING/PROTECT YOUR APPROVAL DO'S & DON'TS

5) Plan your money for closing

- Ask your lender for a cash-to-close estimate early
- Keep a cushion for last-minute adjustments
- If you're getting gift funds, start that process early

6) Protect your credit until after closing

- Monitor your credit if you can
- Keep credit card balances low
- Pay bills on time
- Avoid disputes and chargebacks unless your lender approves it

DON'T DO THIS (THE FASTEST WAYS TO GET DENIED OR DELAYED)

Do NOT:

- Open a new credit card
- Finance furniture, appliances, or a car
- Co-sign for anyone (even family)
- Apply for "0% financing" store offers
- Run up credit card balances
- Miss or pay late on anything
- Quit your job or change jobs without telling your lender
- Switch from W-2 to self-employed during the process
- Deposit cash (even if it's your money)
- Move large amounts of money around without a paper trail
- Buy crypto or move money to/from crypto exchanges without talking to your lender
- Make large Venmo/CashApp/Zelle transfers that aren't easy to explain
- Let anyone pull your credit for "quotes" or "pre-approvals"

UNDERWRITING DO'S & DON'TS

WHAT TO WATCH FOR (SO YOU DON'T GET SURPRISED)

Underwriting in plain English

Underwriting is the lender's final review where they verify:

- Your income
- Your job and employment history
- Your bank funds and transfers
- Your debts and credit
- The property details (appraisal, insurance, title work)

They will ask for extra documents called conditions.

Common underwriting "conditions" (normal requests)

You might be asked for:

- Updated pay stub
- Updated bank statement
- Letter of explanation (for a credit inquiry, deposit, job change, etc.)
- Proof of where a deposit came from
- Verification of employment right before closing
- Gift letter + proof of gift transfer (if using gift funds)

The 7 most common buyer mistakes - DON'T DO THIS!

1. Buying furniture before closing
2. Moving money between accounts to "organize" it
3. Cash deposits with no paper trail
4. New credit inquiries from shopping around
5. Changing jobs or hours without telling the lender
6. Large deposits (tax refund, bonus, gift) without documenting it
7. Waiting too long to upload documents

UNDERWRITING DO'S & DON'TS

WHAT TO WATCH FOR (SO YOU DON'T GET SURPRISED)

Red flags that mean “call your lender today”

If any of these happen, stop and call your lender before doing anything:

- You need to change jobs, switch pay structure, or reduce hours
- You need to move money between accounts
- Someone wants to gift you money
- You're planning a large purchase (even if you pay cash)
- Your credit card balance went up
- You had an unexpected deposit (bonus, refund, reimbursement, etc.)

Final week before closing (extra strict)

Expect:

- Final employment verification
- Final credit check (some lenders do this)
- Updated bank statement or proof of remaining funds
- Final numbers changing slightly (taxes, insurance, prorations)

What you should do:

- Keep everything the same
- Don't spend your closing funds
- Don't change anything financially until keys are in your hand

Closing day reminders

- Bring whatever ID your closing company requires
- Ask your lender who to wire funds to, and verify wiring instructions by phone
- Don't wire money based on an email alone (wire fraud is real)

READY FOR MORE ADVANCED GUIDANCE?

Congratulations on completing the 90-Day First-Time Buyer Blueprint. You've mastered the essentials of buying your first home: preparing financially, understanding the home-buying process, making offers, and moving toward closing.

This blueprint has provided you with a solid foundation, but there's always more to learn when it comes to homeownership. Whether it's navigating complex inspections, negotiating like a pro, or preparing for unexpected hurdles, advanced strategies can make a huge difference.

If you're ready to take things to the next level, my Premium Course offers a deeper dive into advanced strategies, tools, and personalized resources. You'll gain access to:

- Step-by-step guidance on handling inspections and repairs
- Tips for finding hidden red flags during showings to help you avoid costly surprises later.
- Detailed checklists and templates for a smoother closing process
- And much more!

Let's continue your journey with confidence. Your future home is waiting, and I'm here to guide you every step of the way!

Check out the Premium Course now and unlock advanced strategies to help you navigate every stage of homeownership with ease.



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[Join the Premium Course Waitlist \(Coming Soon\)](#)



"Homeownership begins where preparation meets determination."

-Lynette Selby, Realtor®