

First-Time Homebuyer's Checklist

Make sure you're (really) ready

- You have a stable job.
- You can see yourself living in the same town for the next 5-10 years.
- You're prepared for the extra work that comes with homeownership.

Create your home wish list

- Determine what's most important to have right now – e.g., location, number of bedrooms, a yard.
- Check out the different neighborhoods, home styles and listings online to get a feel for what's most important to you.

Figure out what you can afford

- Request your credit report from all three credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion). Fix any errors right away.
- Determine a down payment amount (ideally 20% to avoid paying private mortgage insurance).
- Calculate how much you'll need in an emergency fund for unexpected maintenance or repair costs.

Gather the necessary documents

- Collect proof of employment, including pay stubs and past tax returns.
- Print out bank and investment account statements from the past 90 days.
- Compile your previous addresses and current landlord's contact information.

Research mortgages

- Request quotes from multiple lenders and comparison shop for loans.
- Get pre-qualified for a loan (many sellers won't even consider a bid unless you're pre-qualified).
- Obtain a pre-approval letter (this requires a credit and background check, but it can make you a stronger candidate).

Assemble your team

- Find a real estate agent you trust and communicate well with (check out agent profiles on Zillow and Trulia).
- Ask a friend or family member for second opinions as you go through the buying process.