**First-Time Homebuyer Guide**

**Welcome to Your Homeownership Journey!**

Buying your first home is a big milestone — exciting, a little overwhelming, and full of questions. This guide will break the process into simple steps so you know exactly what to expect from start to finish.



**Step 1: Get Your Finances in Order**

Before shopping for homes, take a snapshot of your financial health. This gives you confidence and shows lenders you're prepared.

- **Check Your Credit Score**
  - Request a free copy of your credit report from Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion.
  - Look for errors and dispute them.
  - Aim for a score of **620 or higher** (FHA loans allow lower scores).
- **Understand Your Debt-to-Income Ratio (DTI)**
  - Lenders compare your monthly debt to your monthly income.
  - Lower is better (ideally under 43% but most programs allow higher).
- **Save for Upfront Costs**
  - Down payment: usually **3%–20% of the purchase price** (depending on loan type).
  - Closing costs: typically **2%–5% of the home price**.



**Step 2: Get Pre-Approved for a Loan**

A pre-approval is like your golden ticket — it shows sellers you're serious and helps you shop with a clear budget.

- Share income, assets, and employment history with a lender.

- Get a letter showing the loan amount you qualify for.
- This sets your price range and strengthens your offers.

 **Visual Aid Suggestion:** An example **"Pre-Approval Letter" mock-up** with a "stamp" that says *Stronger Offer*.

**Step 3:**  **Find the Right Real Estate Agent**

Your agent is your guide through the housing market.

- Look for someone experienced with first-time buyers.
- Ask about their communication style and local knowledge.
- A good agent makes sure you don't overpay and helps with negotiations.
- Loan officers can recommend a Real Estate Agent in the community you are looking to purchase.

**Step 4:**  **Start House Hunting**

Now the fun part begins!

- Make a **must-have list** (location, number of bedrooms, commute time).
- Be realistic about wants vs. needs.
- Tour homes online and in person.

 **Tip:** Keep notes and photos so you remember details after multiple showings.

**Step 5:**  **Make an Offer**

Once you find “the one,” it’s time to write an offer.

- Your agent will help you decide on a fair price.
- Be ready to negotiate with the seller.
- Include contingencies (inspection, appraisal, financing) to protect yourself.

**Step 6:**  **Home Inspection & Appraisal**

Before closing, two key steps happen:

- **Inspection:** A professional checks the home for issues.
    - You may ask the seller to fix things or lower the price.
- **Appraisal:** The lender ensures the home is worth the price you’re paying.

 **Tip:** Don’t skip the inspection — it’s your safety net!

**Step 7:**  **Final Loan Approval & Closing**

You’re almost there!

- Your lender will recheck your finances (don’t make big purchases or open new credit!).
- You’ll sign final paperwork.
- Bring your ID, proof of funds, and patience — closing takes time.
- After signing, you’ll get your keys!

**Step 8:**  **Move Into Your New Home**

Congratulations — you're a homeowner!

- Change your address with USPS.
- Set up utilities (electric, water, internet).
- Celebrate — you've achieved a huge life milestone.

**Final Thoughts**

Homebuying may feel like a maze, but with the right guidance, it's a clear path. Stay focused, lean on professionals, and remember this is not just buying a house, it's creating your home.