CRUZ DWELLINGS

COLDWELL BANKER REALTY

FROM RENTING TO KEYS IN HAND

The First-Time Homebuyer Planner

Your step-by-step plan from your first "why" to keys in hand: 4 simple phases, every tracker and checklist you'll need.



THIS PLANNER BELONGS TO

_____



Christian Cruz, REALTOR®
Coldwell Banker Realty · Lic #475.212761
(773) 914-4299 · christian.cruz@cbrealty.com

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

How to use this planner

Buying your first home comes down to 4 simple phases, each broken into easy steps. You don't have to know it all today. Just know where you are and what comes next.

PHASE 1

Get ready

Stages 1 to 5

1 · Your why
2 · Am I ready?
3 · Get ready
4 · Loan options
5 · Pre-approval

PHASE 2

Find your home

Stages 6 to 8

6 · Choose your agent
7 · The search
8 · Offer and inspection

PHASE 3

Close the deal

Stages 9 to 13

9 · Insurance
10 · Attorney review
11 · Underwriting
12 · Clear to close
13 · Closing day

PHASE 4

Move in

Stages 14 and 15

14 · Before you move in
15 · The move

Getting the most out of it

1 Go in order
Each stage builds on the one before it. The colored bar at the top of every page shows where you are.

2 Not ready? That's normal
If Stage 2 shows a few red spots, Stage 3 is your plan to fix them. Take the time you need.

3 Bring it to every meeting
Lender calls, showings, the inspection. Your notes and questions are already here.

4 Fill in as you go
Your team and key dates are up front. Every stage opener has a spot for your results.

My starting point

Today's date _____

Where I'm buying _____

Target move-in _____



Hi, I'm Christian.

I help first-time buyers go from renting to owning, and I built this planner so you always know your next step. Stuck on any page? Text me.

(773) 914-4299
christian.cruz@cbrealty.com · REALTOR® · Lic #475.212761

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This planner is general education, not legal, tax, lending or financial advice. Programs, rules and timelines vary by state and change over time. Confirm details with your lender, attorney, tax professional and agent.

Your Journey Tracker

Check off each stage as you finish it and write the date. Come back to this page any time to see where you are.

- [ ] **01** Your why — What is pushing you to buy — DONE _____
- [ ] **02** Am I ready? — Job, credit, income, savings — DONE _____
- [ ] **03** Get ready — Credit, savings and debt game plans — DONE _____
- [ ] **04** Loan options — Loan types and lender comparison — DONE _____
- [ ] **05** Pre-approval — Documents and finance tracker — DONE _____
- [ ] **06** Choose your agent — Interview scorecard — DONE _____
- [ ] **07** The search — Lifestyle, budget, showings — DONE _____
- [ ] **08** Offer and inspection — Bones to cosmetics — DONE _____
- [ ] **09** Insurance and warranty — Quotes and coverage — DONE _____
- [ ] **10** Attorney review — Comps and negotiations — DONE _____
- [ ] **11** Underwriting and appraisal — Requests and value — DONE _____
- [ ] **12** Clear to close — Final checks and walkthrough — DONE _____
- [ ] **13** Closing day — Cash to close — DONE _____
- [ ] **14** Before you move in — Repairs and projects — DONE _____
- [ ] **15** The move — Trucks, utilities, address — DONE _____

My target move-in date _____

My home-buying team

Everyone who helps you get to closing, in the order you'll meet them. Fill it in as you go, alongside your key dates on the next page.



Co-buyer (if any) — Stage 1

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Loan officer / lender — Stage 4

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Real estate agent / REALTOR® — Stage 6

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Home inspector — Stage 8

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Insurance agent — Stage 9

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Real estate attorney (if used) — Stage 10

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Appraiser (if shared) — Stage 11

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Title company / closer — Stage 12

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Contractor — Stage 14

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Movers — Stage 15

Name _____
Phone _____
Email _____



YOUR FIRST-TIME BUYER GUIDE

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Contract-to-closing calendar

Every date that matters, in one list. Fill in your dates the day your offer is accepted.



MILESTONE	USUAL TIMING	MY DATE	DONE
Offer accepted	Day 0		☐
Earnest money due	Usually 1 to 3 business days after acceptance		☐
Inspection and radon test	Usually within 5 to 10 days		☐
Attorney review ends (if used)	Starts at 5 business days, often runs 1 to 2 weeks while repairs are negotiated		☐
Full loan application with lender	Within a few days of acceptance		☐
Rate locked	When your lender advises. Write down when it expires		☐
Homeowner's insurance chosen	Within 2 weeks. Proof goes to your lender		☐
Appraisal done	Usually 2 to 3 weeks in		☐
Mortgage contingency date	Set in your contract, often 21 to 30 days. Longer for some loans		☐
Clear to close	Usually 3 to 7 days before closing		☐
Closing Disclosure received	At least 3 business days before closing		☐
Wire or certified funds ready	1 to 2 days before closing		☐
Utilities scheduled to switch	1 week before closing		☐
Final walk-through	Within 24 to 48 hours of closing		☐
Closing day	Often 30 to 45 days. Up to 60 for some loans		☐

Your contract sets the real dates. These are common timelines, but every state and every deal is different. Your agent (and attorney, if you use one) will confirm each one. Missing a contract deadline can cost you your earnest money or your right to cancel, so mark these the day your offer is accepted.

PHASE 1 · GET READY

01 Your why

Get clear on why you're buying. It's what keeps you going when it takes longer than you hoped.

Usually takes: One evening



What happens in this stage

1. Write down what's pushing you to buy
2. Add up the rent you've already paid
3. Compare renting vs. owning for your situation
4. Decide if you're buying solo or with someone
5. Pick a target move-in date

You'll need

- [ ] An honest hour to think
- [ ] Your last 12 months of rent
- [ ] Anyone buying with you (if any)

Common first-timer mistakes

Comparing rent to just the mortgage, not taxes, insurance and repairs

Thinking you need 20% down, so never starting

Waiting to time the market instead of getting your money ready

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Owning beats renting in more ways than most people realize:

- Every payment builds equity, not a landlord's
- Your home may grow in value over time
- Forced savings you can borrow against later
- No lease non-renewals or surprise move-outs
- Something to pass down to your family
- A fixed-rate payment that doesn't rise like rent
- Possible tax breaks (ask a tax pro)
- Paint, renovate and get the dog. No permission
- Can be rented out later for income
- Roots, stability and a say in your community

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] My why is written down
- [ ] I know what I've paid in rent
- [ ] I have a target date

My results

_____

_____

_____

01 What's pushing you to buy?

Check everything that's true. Then circle the one that matters most. That's the reason you'll come back to when saving gets hard.

- ☐ I'm tired of landlords: rent hikes, slow repairs, their rules
- ☐ I'm tired of paying someone else's mortgage
- ☐ I want to leave something behind for my kids
- ☐ I want to build wealth and make money in real estate
- ☐ I need more space: family growing or working from home
- ☐ I want stability: same school, same neighbors
- ☐ I want a place that's mine to paint, renovate, get a dog
- ☐ Other: _____

My why, in my words

I'm buying a home because...

_____

_____

_____

BUYING WITH
Solo · Partner · Family · Co-buyer

KEYS IN HAND BY
Month / year

IN 5 YEARS I SEE MYSELF
Where, and with who

The rent I've paid so far

Monthly rent _____ × Months renting _____ = Total paid to landlords _____

Rent vs. own

Put your real rent next to what owning would cost. This is the page that makes it real.



If I keep renting

Rent	$ _____
Renter's insurance	$ _____
Utilities I pay Gas, electric, internet	$ _____
Parking, pet or other fees	$ _____
Expected rent increase next year Ask your landlord	$ _____

Monthly cost to rent $ _____

If I buy

Principal and interest From the Stage 4 payment page	$ _____
Property taxes Yearly tax bill ÷ 12	$ _____
Homeowner's insurance Yearly premium ÷ 12	$ _____
Mortgage insurance (PMI or MIP) If you put less than 20% down	$ _____
HOA dues Condos and townhomes	$ _____
Utilities Often more than renting	$ _____
Maintenance set-aside 1–2% of price a year ÷ 12	$ _____

Monthly cost to own $ _____

The 5-year picture

Rent paid in 5 years (rent × 60)	$ _____
Loan paid down in 5 years	$ _____
Down payment (still yours)	$ _____
Equity before any price change	$ _____

Ask your lender for an amortization schedule. It shows exactly how much of each payment pays down the loan.

Think about it this way

Rent of **$1,900** a month for 5 years is **$114,000** paid to a landlord, with nothing coming back to you. As an owner, part of every payment pays down your loan, and your down payment stays yours. How much depends on your rate, so ask your lender to run the 5-year numbers for you.

Renting is better when

- [ ] I might move in the next 2–3 years
- [ ] My job or income is unsure right now
- [ ] I don't have savings for repairs
- [ ] I want zero maintenance

Buying is better when

- [ ] I plan to stay 5 years or more
- [ ] My income is steady
- [ ] Owning costs about what I pay in rent
- [ ] I want to build equity and stop rent hikes

PHASE 1 · GET READY

02 Am I ready?

An honest look at the five things lenders check, so there are no surprises when you apply.

Usually takes: 1 to 2 hours



What happens in this stage

1. Pull your free credit reports and check your score
2. Total up your monthly debt payments
3. Gather your income numbers
4. Count what you've saved
5. Rate each area and fill in your budget today

You'll need

- [ ] Recent pay stubs
- [ ] Your credit reports (AnnualCreditReport.com)
- [ ] Bank and debt statements
- [ ] Your monthly bills

Common first-timer mistakes

- Guessing your credit score instead of checking it
- Forgetting small debts like a financed phone
- Counting money you'll "probably" have

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Being "not ready yet" is normal. Most of my buyers needed a few months of prep. Knowing exactly what to fix is the win.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] All five areas rated
- [ ] My budget is filled in
- [ ] I know if I go to Stage 3 or Stage 4

My results

_____

_____

_____

02 My readiness check

Fill in each box, then rate it: Ready, Close, or Work on it. Any "Work on it" sends you to Stage 3 first, and that's normal.

Employment Lenders like 2 years in the same line of work	Employer and start date _____ Years in this line of work / any gaps _____	○ Ready ○ Close ○ Work on it
Income type Self-employed usually needs 2 years of returns	W-2 · Self-employed · 1099/gig · Commission _____ Gross monthly income _____	○ Ready ○ Close ○ Work on it
Credit Check all three bureaus, free	My score and where I checked _____ Late payments or collections _____	○ Ready ○ Close ○ Work on it
Debts Minimum monthly payments only	Car · Student loans · Cards · Other _____ Total monthly debt payments _____	○ Ready ○ Close ○ Work on it
Savings Down payment + closing costs + a cushion	Saved so far (checking, savings, gifts) _____ My savings goal _____	○ Ready ○ Close ○ Work on it

My debt-to-income

Monthly debt payments _____ ÷ Gross monthly income _____ = My DTI % _____

General guidelines only. Your lender confirms the exact requirements for your loan type. Self-employed? Lenders count income after write-offs, so gather 2 years of tax returns.

Am I ready to buy?



Circle the row that fits you in each box, then count your colors at the bottom.

Circle where you are: Green: ready · Yellow: close · Red: work on it

Credit score

○	**740 and up**	Usually the best rates
○	**680 to 739**	Solid approval odds
○	**620 to 679**	May qualify. Shop programs
○	**580 to 619**	Some FHA options
○	**Under 580**	Build it first in Stage 3

My score _____

Debt-to-income (DTI)

○	**Under 36%**	Strong. Room in your budget
○	**36% to 43%**	Workable for many loans
○	**Over 43%**	Pay some debt down first

My DTI _____

Job and income history

○	**2+ years**	Same line of work
○	**Recent change**	Same field is often fine
○	**Self-employed**	Usually 2 yrs of returns
○	**Gaps or new field**	Tell your lender early

My history _____

Savings

○	**All three saved**	Down, costs and a cushion
○	**Down only**	Plan for closing costs
○	**Less than that**	Ask about assistance

Saved so far _____

Documents I have ready

☐	**Tax returns**	Last 2 years
☐	**Pay stubs**	Last 30 days
☐	**W-2s or 1099s**	Last 2 years
☐	**Bank statements**	Last 2 months, all pages
☐	**Photo ID**	Government issued

Ready for the commitment?

2 to 4 weeks	Get pre-approved
1 to 3 months	Find the right home
30 to 45 days	Close once under contract

Typical timing. Every market and loan is different.

So, how did you score?

All 4 green
You may be ready now. Go to Stage 4 and talk to lenders.

Some yellow
You're close. A quick lender call shows what's left.

Any red
No worries. Stage 3 is your plan to get there.

General guide only. Every lender and loan program has its own rules, and only your lender can tell you what you qualify for. A strong job history or savings can sometimes make up for a lower score.

02 Self-employed, 1099 or gig?

You can absolutely buy a home. Lenders just read your income differently than a W-2 paycheck.

My game plan

- [ ] **Get to 2 years**
  Most loans want 2 years. One year can work if you did the same work on a W-2 before.
- [ ] **Talk to a lender 6 to 12 months early**
  Before you file your next return. Ask your tax pro how write-offs affect what you qualify for.
- [ ] **Separate business and personal money**
  One account for the business, one for you. Your income is easier to prove.
- [ ] **Keep a profit and loss statement**
  Lenders often ask for a year-to-date P&L, especially late in the year.
- [ ] **Gather 2 years of paperwork**
  Personal and business tax returns (all pages), 1099s, and 2 to 3 months of bank statements.
- [ ] **Have proof the business is real**
  A business license, a letter from your CPA, or your website and client invoices.
- [ ] **Keep deposits steady and explainable**
  Large cash deposits need a paper trail. Pay yourself the same way every month.
- [ ] **Ask about other loan options**
  Bank-statement loans use deposits instead of tax returns. Rates and down payments are often higher.

The write-off trap

Lenders use the income on your tax return after write-offs, not what hits your bank account.

Business brought in	$90,000
Write-offs	−$40,000
Income a lender uses	**$50,000**

Example only. Big write-offs lower your taxes, but they can also lower the loan you qualify for.

My numbers

Years self-employed _____

Net income, last year $ _____

Net income, year before $ _____

Both years added ÷ 24 $ _____

That's roughly the monthly income a lender may use. Put it in your readiness check on page 10.

Income went down this year?
Lenders may use the lower year or ask you to explain the drop. Tell your lender up front.

General guidelines only, not tax or lending advice. Your lender and tax pro confirm what applies to your loan and your business.

My budget today

Before you can save for a home, you need to know where every dollar goes. Fill in "now," then set a "goal" for each line.

Money coming in (monthly)

My take-home pay	$ _____
Co-buyer's take-home pay	$ _____
Side income	$ _____
Other (child support, benefits)	$ _____
Total take-home	$ _____

Debts (monthly minimums)

Car loan or lease	$ _____
Student loans	$ _____
Credit cards	$ _____
Personal loans	$ _____
Child support I pay	$ _____
Other	$ _____
Total monthly debts	$ _____

Spending

	NOW	GOAL
Rent	$ _____	$ _____
Utilities	$ _____	$ _____
Phone and internet	$ _____	$ _____
Groceries	$ _____	$ _____
Eating out and coffee	$ _____	$ _____
Gas and transit	$ _____	$ _____
Car insurance	$ _____	$ _____
Health insurance and meds	$ _____	$ _____
Childcare	$ _____	$ _____
Subscriptions	$ _____	$ _____
Shopping	$ _____	$ _____
Fun and travel	$ _____	$ _____
Giving	$ _____	$ _____
Savings already set aside	$ _____	$ _____

What's left each month

Take-home − debts − spending. This is your savings power.

$ _____

My debt-to-income (DTI)

Monthly debts plus the new house payment, divided by your monthly income **before** taxes. Many lenders want this around 43% or lower. Some loans allow more.

$ _____ ÷ $ _____ = _____ %

PHASE 1 · GET READY

03 Get ready

Fix what's holding you back: credit, savings and debt, one month at a time.

Usually takes: 3 to 12 months, depending on where you start



What happens in this stage

1. Dispute any errors on your credit reports
2. Set up autopay and pay card balances down
3. Open a separate house fund with auto-transfers
4. Pay off debts in a set order
5. Re-check your readiness every 90 days

You'll need

- [ ] Your readiness check from Stage 2
- [ ] A savings account just for the house
- [ ] A monthly reminder on your phone

Common first-timer mistakes

- Closing old credit cards
- Opening store cards for a discount
- Saving what's left at month-end instead of first

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Text me when you hit green in every area. I'll check in every few months too, so you're never doing this alone.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Credit score at my goal
- [ ] Savings target reached
- [ ] Debt-to-income where lenders want it

My results

_____

_____

_____

03 My credit game plan

Credit gets better with time and habits, not tricks. Check off each step, then log your score every month.

The steps

- [ ] **Pull all three reports, free**
  Equifax, Experian and TransUnion through AnnualCreditReport.com.
- [ ] **Dispute anything wrong**
  Wrong balances, accounts that aren't yours, late payments you made on time.
- [ ] **Set autopay on every minimum**
  Payment history is the biggest part of your score.
- [ ] **Get card balances under 30%**
  Under 10% of the limit is even better. Pay before the statement date.
- [ ] **Keep old cards open**
  Closing them shortens your history and raises your usage.
- [ ] **No new credit before buying**
  New accounts and hard pulls can drop your score.
- [ ] **Handle collections the smart way**
  Talk to your lender before paying old collections, and get any deal in writing.
- [ ] **Build credit if you're thin**
  Secured card, credit-builder loan, or reporting your rent.

12-month score log

MONTH	SCORE	WHAT I DID
Month 1		
Month 2		
Month 3		
Month 4		
Month 5		
Month 6		
Month 7		
Month 8		
Month 9		
Month 10		
Month 11		
Month 12		

Starting score _____

Goal score _____

03 My savings game plan

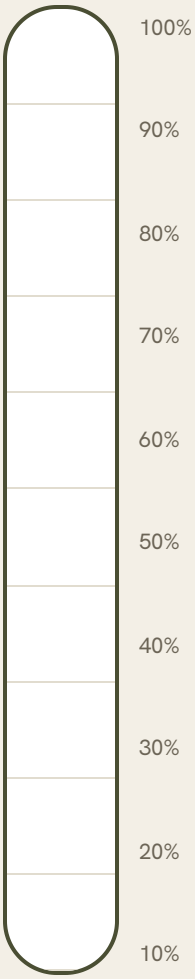
Know your number, give it its own account, and pay it first every payday.

My savings target

Down payment _____ + Closing costs _____ + Cushion _____ = **My target** _____

Target minus what I have _____ ÷ Months until I buy _____ = **Save every month** _____

Color it in



Find the money

WHERE IT COMES FROM	PER MONTH
Subscriptions I can cancel	
Eating out and delivery	
Tax refund (once a year)	
Side income or overtime	
Raise or bonus	
Car payment once paid off	
Other:	
Other:	

HOUSE FUND ACCOUNT · BANK _____

AUTO-TRANSFER AMOUNT · PAYDAY _____

Family helping with a gift? Lenders need a signed gift letter and a paper trail for the money. Ask your lender before it hits your account.

03 My debt game plan

Less debt means a bigger loan approval and a smaller monthly squeeze. Pick a method, list every debt, and knock them out in order.

☐ **Snowball**
Pay off the smallest balance first. Quick wins keep you motivated.

☐ **Avalanche**
Pay off the highest interest rate first. Saves the most money.

ORDER	DEBT	BALANCE	RATE	MINIMUM	PAID OFF
	Credit card				
	Credit card				
	Car loan				
	Student loan				
	Personal loan				
	Medical bill				
	Collections				
	Other				
	Other				
Totals					

! **While you're getting ready to buy:** don't finance a car, furniture or anything else. A new monthly payment can shrink the loan you qualify for, even if you can afford it.

03 My get-ready timeline

One goal a month from your credit, savings and debt plans. Check it off and keep going.

Starting date _____ Ready-to-apply date _____

MONTH 1 _____ ☐	MONTH 2 _____ ☐
MONTH 3 _____ ☐	MONTH 4 _____ ☐
MONTH 5 _____ ☐	MONTH 6 _____ ☐
MONTH 7 _____ ☐	MONTH 8 _____ ☐
MONTH 9 _____ ☐	MONTH 10 _____ ☐
MONTH 11 _____ ☐	MONTH 12 _____ ☐

Job and income notes

Changing jobs? Same field is usually fine, but ask your lender first. Self-employed? File taxes that show your real income for 2 years. Gig or commission pay? Keep records that show it's steady.

All green on Stage 2?
Text me and we'll start Stage 4 together.
(773) 914-4299

PHASE 1 · GET READY

04 Loan options

Understand your loan choices and shop more than one lender. It can save you thousands.

Usually takes: 1 to 2 weeks



What happens in this stage

1. Learn the main loan types
2. Estimate a monthly payment at different prices
3. Ask about down payment assistance
4. Get quotes from 3 lenders
5. Compare rates, fees and service

You'll need

- [ ] Your readiness numbers
- [ ] The lender questions list
- [ ] Time for 3 phone calls

Common first-timer mistakes

- Going with the first lender you talk to
- Comparing rates but not fees
- Never asking about assistance programs

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Ask every lender which down payment help they offer. Programs change, and not every lender works with every program.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] I know which loan fits me
- [ ] I compared 3 lenders
- [ ] I picked my lender

My results

_____

_____

_____

04 Loan types, in plain English

Check the ones that might fit you, then ask every lender about them. Your lender confirms what you qualify for.

☐	**Conventional**	WHO IT FITS Solid credit and steady income.	GOOD TO KNOW Mortgage insurance can come off once you build enough equity.
☐	**FHA**	WHO IT FITS Lower credit scores or a smaller down payment.	GOOD TO KNOW Easier to qualify for. Mortgage insurance usually stays longer.
☐	**VA**	WHO IT FITS Veterans, service members and some spouses.	GOOD TO KNOW Often no down payment and no monthly mortgage insurance.
☐	**USDA**	WHO IT FITS Homes in eligible rural and some suburban areas.	GOOD TO KNOW Income limits apply. Ask if your area qualifies.
☐	**Down payment help**	WHO IT FITS First-time and moderate-income buyers.	GOOD TO KNOW State, county and city programs. Ask each lender which ones they offer.

Fixed vs. adjustable

Fixed keeps the same rate for the whole loan. Adjustable starts lower and can change later.

Points

Money paid upfront to lower your rate. Worth it only if you stay long enough.

Mortgage insurance

Protects the lender when you put down less than 20%. It's added to your monthly payment.

Questions I want to ask about loans

Help you might qualify for

Most first-time buyers don't know half of these exist. Check the ones worth asking about and bring this page to every lender call.



Down payment assistance

☐ Ask

Grants or low-cost second loans from state, county and city housing agencies. Some are forgiven over time.

Often has income and price limits, and a homebuyer class

3% down conventional

☐ Ask

Some conventional loans for first-time or moderate-income buyers allow as little as 3% down.

Ask about Fannie Mae HomeReady and Freddie Mac Home Possible

FHA loan

☐ Ask

Government-backed, with as little as 3.5% down and more flexible credit rules.

Has mortgage insurance; home must meet FHA standards

VA loan

☐ Ask

For eligible veterans, service members and some surviving spouses. Often no down payment.

Get your Certificate of Eligibility early

USDA loan

☐ Ask

For homes in eligible rural and some suburban areas. Often no down payment.

Income limits apply; check the address on the USDA map

Mortgage Credit Certificate

☐ Ask

A federal tax credit for part of your mortgage interest, offered through some state and local agencies.

Ask a tax pro how it works for you

Homebuyer education

☐ Ask

Many programs require a short homebuyer course. Some lenders and programs give a credit for finishing one.

Look for a HUD-approved counseling agency

Gift money

☐ Ask

Family can often help with your down payment or closing costs.

Needs a signed gift letter and a clear paper trail

Seller credits

☐ Ask

The seller pays part of your closing costs, written into your offer.

Each loan type caps how much is allowed

Employer, union or credit union help

☐ Ask

Some employers, unions and credit unions offer grants, rate discounts or closing cost help.

Ask HR, your union rep and your credit union

How to find yours: search your state's housing finance agency, then your county and city. Ask every lender which programs they work with. Programs open, close and change their limits, so confirm the details before you count on the money. This page is general information, not a promise that any program fits you.

Programs I might qualify for

PROGRAM	AMOUNT	CONTACT / LENDER

What will my payment be?

Your monthly payment has four parts: principal, interest, taxes and insurance (PITI), plus HOA and mortgage insurance if you have them.

Payment per $1,000 borrowed

Rates change daily. Get today's rate from your lender, then find it here.

RATE	30-YEAR	15-YEAR
3.0%	4.22	6.91
3.5%	4.49	7.15
4.0%	4.77	7.40
4.5%	5.07	7.65
5.0%	5.37	7.91
5.5%	5.68	8.17
6.0%	6.00	8.44
6.5%	6.32	8.71
7.0%	6.65	8.99
7.5%	6.99	9.27
8.0%	7.34	9.56
8.5%	7.69	9.85
9.0%	8.05	10.14
9.5%	8.41	10.44
10.0%	8.78	10.75

Principal and interest only. Rate between two rows? Use a number between them. For planning only, not an offer of credit. Your lender's Loan Estimate shows your real rate, APR and costs.

How to use the table

Loan $ _____ ÷ 1,000 = _____

× number at my rate _____ = $ _____

That's your principal and interest. Add taxes, insurance, mortgage insurance and HOA below. Use the real tax bill from the listing.

My numbers

Home price	$ _____
Down payment	$ _____
Loan amount Price − down payment	$ _____
Principal and interest Loan ÷ 1,000 × table number	$ _____
Property taxes Yearly bill ÷ 12	$ _____
Homeowner's insurance Yearly premium ÷ 12	$ _____
PMI or MIP Ask your lender	$ _____
HOA dues If any	$ _____
My estimated monthly payment	$ _____

Compare loan scenarios

	Option A	Option B	Option C
Loan type and rate			
Monthly payment			
Cash to close			
Mortgage insurance			

04 Shop three lenders

Rates and fees can differ a lot between lenders. Get a quote from at least three, on the same day if you can, and compare them here.

	Lender 1	Lender 2	Lender 3
Company			
Loan officer			
Phone / email			
Loan type offered			
Interest rate / APR			
Points and lender fees			
Est. monthly payment			
Est. closing costs			
Assistance programs			
How fast they respond			

Ask every lender

- [ ] Which loan types do I qualify for?
- [ ] Which down payment help programs do you work with?
- [ ] What rate and APR can you offer today?
- [ ] What are your lender fees and points?
- [ ] How long does pre-approval take?
- [ ] How long can I lock my rate?
- [ ] Do you offer an upfront underwriting approval?
- [ ] How fast can you close?

PHASE 1 · GET READY

05 Pre-approval

Get your pre-approval letter and know your real numbers before you look at homes.

Usually takes: A few days to 2 weeks



What happens in this stage

1. Gather your documents
2. Apply with the lender you chose
3. Get your pre-approval letter
4. Set your comfortable monthly max
5. Learn the true monthly cost of owning

You'll need

- [ ] The documents checklist
- [ ] Your lender's application
- [ ] Your budget from Stage 2

Common first-timer mistakes

- Shopping at your maximum approval
- Forgetting taxes, insurance and HOA
- Applying for new credit after pre-approval

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Sellers take you seriously with a pre-approval letter in hand. In a busy market, an offer without one often isn't even considered.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Pre-approval letter in hand
- [ ] Comfortable max written down
- [ ] Finance tracker started

My results

_____

_____

_____

05 Gather your documents

Have these ready before you apply. Keep digital copies in one folder so you can send them the same day your lender asks.

DOCUMENT	HAVE IT	N/A	SENT ON
Pay stubs Last 30 days	☐	☐	
W-2s Last 2 years	☐	☐	
1099s If you do contract or gig work	☐	☐	
Tax returns Last 2 years, all pages (self-employed: business returns too)	☐	☐	
Bank statements Last 2 months, every page, every account	☐	☐	
Retirement and investment statements Most recent	☐	☐	
Photo ID Driver's license or state ID	☐	☐	
Rent history Landlord contact or 12 months of rent payments	☐	☐	
Gift letter If family is helping with the down payment	☐	☐	
Letters of explanation Late payments, job gaps, large deposits	☐	☐	
Divorce or child support papers If they apply to you	☐	☐	
Bankruptcy or foreclosure papers If they apply to you	☐	☐	
Pre-approval letter Once you get it. Keep a copy here.	☐	☐	

Tip: send every page of every bank statement, even the blank ones. Missing pages are one of the most common reasons lenders ask again.

05 My finance tracker

Every money number in one place, from pre-approval to closing. Update it each time your lender sends something new.

LENDER

LOAN OFFICER · PHONE

PRE-APPROVED FOR

EXPIRES ON

MY COMFORTABLE MAX

ITEM	ESTIMATE	FINAL
Loan type Conventional, FHA, VA, USDA		
Interest rate And the date it's locked until		
Monthly payment Principal, interest, taxes, insurance, HOA, mortgage insurance		
Down payment		
Earnest money Paid when your offer is accepted		
Closing costs Lender, title, attorney, taxes and fees		
Assistance program Name and amount		
Seller credits From negotiations		

Remember: your pre-approval is the most a lender will lend, not what you should spend. Your comfortable max comes first.

! **Until closing day:** no new credit, no job changes, no big purchases, no large deposits you can't explain. Any of these can stop your loan.

The true cost of owning

Pre-approval shows what you can borrow. This shows what owning will really cost, every month and on closing day. Check it against your lender's Loan Estimate.



Monthly, after I buy

Principal and interest	$ _____
Property taxes	$ _____
Homeowner's insurance	$ _____
PMI or MIP	$ _____
HOA dues	$ _____
Gas and electric Ask the seller for past bills	$ _____
Water, sewer, trash Billed by the town in many suburbs	$ _____
Internet and phone	$ _____
Maintenance set-aside 1–2% of price a year ÷ 12	$ _____
Lawn, snow, upkeep	$ _____
New furniture or projects	$ _____

True monthly cost $ _____

Cash I need to close

Down payment	$ _____
Closing costs Often 2–5% of the price	$ _____
Prepaids and escrow Taxes and insurance paid up front	$ _____
Earnest money Usually credited back at closing	$ _____
Inspection and radon test	$ _____
Appraisal Often paid up front	$ _____
Attorney fee	$ _____

Total cash to close $ _____

After closing, I still have

Emergency fund	$ _____
Months of payments that covers	_____
Move-in and repair money	$ _____

Christian's rule of thumb: Don't let pre-approval decide your budget. Your lender tells you the most you *can* borrow. This page tells you what you can *live with*. Many lenders like to see a few months of payments left in savings after closing, so ask yours.

The most I'm comfortable paying each month $ _____

PHASE 2 · FIND YOUR HOME

06 Choose your agent

Pick the person who will find, negotiate and guide your purchase.

Usually takes: About a week



What happens in this stage

1. Interview 2 or 3 agents
2. Ask how they work with first-time buyers
3. Read and understand the buyer agreement
4. Ask who they trust: lenders, inspectors, attorneys
5. Choose and sign

You'll need

- [ ] The interview scorecard
- [ ] Your pre-approval
- [ ] Your must-haves list

Common first-timer mistakes

- Picking someone only because they're a friend
- Not reading the buyer agreement
- Calling a different listing agent for every home

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

You'll sign a buyer agreement before touring. Agent pay is negotiable, and a good agent walks you through every line of it. If they rush it, that's your answer.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Agent chosen
- [ ] Buyer agreement signed and understood
- [ ] First home search set up

My results

_____

_____

_____

06 Choosing your agent

Your agent finds homes, writes and negotiates your offer, and keeps the lender, inspector, attorney and appraiser on schedule. Interview before you commit.

How it works now: you'll sign a written buyer agreement before touring homes. It spells out what your agent does and how they're paid. Agent pay is not set by law and is fully negotiable. A seller may agree to cover some or all of it, and your agreement says what happens if they don't. Ask any agent to walk you through theirs.

Interview question	Agent 1	Agent 2	Agent 3
Name and brokerage			
How many first-time buyers have you helped this year?			
How well do you know the areas I want?			
How will we talk, and how fast do you reply?			
How will I hear about new homes the moment they're listed?			
How do you win when there are multiple offers?			
What's in your buyer agreement? How are you paid?			
Who do you trust for lenders, inspectors, attorneys?			
What happens if I'm not happy working together?			
Gut feeling, 1 to 5			

Red flags

- Pushes you over your budget
- Doesn't know your areas
- Slow to call or text back
- Says to skip the inspection

PHASE 2 · FIND YOUR HOME

07 The search

Find a home that fits how you live and what you can comfortably afford.

Usually takes: A few weeks to a few months



What happens in this stage

1. Map your lifestyle and must-haves
2. Set your budget box and towns
3. Tour homes and score each one
4. Ask the right questions (and the HOA's, for condos)
5. Narrow it down to your top 3

You'll need

- [ ] Your pre-approval letter
- [ ] Printed scorecards
- [ ] Your phone camera

Common first-timer mistakes

- Falling for staging and missing the bones
- Ignoring property taxes and HOA dues
- Touring above budget "just to look"

> CHRISTIAN'S TIP
>
> Score every home the day you see it. After the fifth showing, they all start to blur together.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Top 3 compared
- [ ] One home I'm ready to offer on
- [ ] My questions answered

My results

_____

_____

_____

07 How I actually live

Start your search from your life, not from listing photos. The right home fits your day before it fits your vision board. Research schools and neighborhoods yourself: under fair housing law, agents share facts but never steer you toward or away from an area.

Commute

Work address, longest commute I'll accept, car, train, bus or bike.

Daily life

Groceries, gym, place of worship, family nearby, quiet or lively.

Kids and schools

Now or in the future. School district must-haves.

Pets

Yard, fencing, walking space, condo pet rules.

Working from home

A real office, a quiet corner, internet speed.

Parking and cars

Garage, driveway, street parking, how many cars.

07 Must-haves and deal-breakers

Be honest about what you truly need. Fewer must-haves means more homes to choose from.

Home type: ☐ Condo ☐ Townhome ☐ Single family ☐ 2-flat or multi-unit

FEATURE	MUST	NICE	NO WAY	DETAILS
Bedrooms	○	○	○	
Bathrooms	○	○	○	
Square footage	○	○	○	
Garage or parking	○	○	○	
Yard or outdoor space	○	○	○	
Basement	○	○	○	
In-unit laundry	○	○	○	
Central air	○	○	○	
Updated kitchen	○	○	○	
HOA (max per month)	○	○	○	
Move-in ready vs. fixer	○	○	○	
Stairs and accessibility	○	○	○	
Other	○	○	○	
Other	○	○	○	

07 My budget box and areas

Your search price comes from the monthly payment you're comfortable with, not the biggest number a lender approves.

My budget box

Comfortable monthly payment _____

Max HOA per month _____

Down payment I'll use _____

Price range I'll shop _____

Property taxes and HOA dues can change a monthly payment a lot from one home to the next. Check both on every listing you like.

Areas I'm considering

AREA	COMMUTE	PRICES I'VE SEEN	SCHOOLS	VIBE 1–5	NOTES

Ask your agent for recent sales in each area. Check schools, crime maps and commute times yourself. Fair housing law means agents share facts, never steer.

Homes I've seen

Print as many copies as you need

Address _____ Price _____ Seen _____

Beds _____ Baths _____ Sq ft _____ HOA _____ Taxes _____

Location	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Layout	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Kitchen	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bathrooms	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Storage	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Outside	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Red flags I noticed (water stains, smells, cracks, old roof or windows)

What I loved

Could I live here? ☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ No

Address _____ Price _____ Seen _____

Beds _____ Baths _____ Sq ft _____ HOA _____ Taxes _____

Location	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Layout	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Kitchen	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Bathrooms	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Storage	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Outside	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Red flags I noticed (water stains, smells, cracks, old roof or windows)

What I loved

Could I live here? ☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ No

Homes I've seen, continued

Print as many copies as you need

Address _____ Price _____ Seen _____

Beds _____ Baths _____ Sq ft _____ HOA _____ Taxes _____

Location	○○○○○	Layout	○○○○○	Kitchen	○○○○○
Bathrooms	○○○○○	Storage	○○○○○	Outside	○○○○○

Red flags I noticed (water stains, smells, cracks, old roof or windows)

What I loved

Could I live here? ☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ No

Address _____ Price _____ Seen _____

Beds _____ Baths _____ Sq ft _____ HOA _____ Taxes _____

Location	○○○○○	Layout	○○○○○	Kitchen	○○○○○
Bathrooms	○○○○○	Storage	○○○○○	Outside	○○○○○

Red flags I noticed (water stains, smells, cracks, old roof or windows)

What I loved

Could I live here? ☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ No

Questions to ask

Bring this page to showings. The answers can save you thousands, or save you from the wrong home.



At the showing

- [ ] How old are the roof, furnace, AC and water heater?
- [ ] Any water in the basement? Is there a sump pump?
- [ ] Do the windows open, close and lock?
- [ ] Look under sinks for leaks or stains
- [ ] Is there a musty smell?
- [ ] How is the water pressure?
- [ ] Where would my furniture go?
- [ ] Is there enough storage?
- [ ] Where do I park? Is there a garage?
- [ ] How loud is it? Trains, traffic, planes?
- [ ] Which way does the yard slope?
- [ ] Do I like the street at night?

Ask the listing agent

- [ ] Why is the seller moving?
- [ ] How long has it been on the market?
- [ ] Have there been any offers?
- [ ] Has the price changed?
- [ ] What are the yearly taxes? Any exemptions?
- [ ] What are average utility bills?
- [ ] Any past flooding or water problems?
- [ ] Was any work done with permits?
- [ ] Has a radon test been done?
- [ ] What stays: appliances, window treatments?
- [ ] When does the seller want to close?
- [ ] What would make an offer stand out?

Condo or townhome (HOA)

- [ ] What are the monthly dues and what do they cover?
- [ ] How much is in the reserve fund?
- [ ] Any special assessments now or planned?
- [ ] Any big repairs coming up (roof, tuckpointing)?
- [ ] Is there a rental cap or rental rules?
- [ ] What are the pet rules?
- [ ] Is there any lawsuit involving the association?
- [ ] Who manages the building?
- [ ] What does the master insurance cover?
- [ ] How many units are behind on dues?
- [ ] Is parking or storage included?
- [ ] Can I see the last meeting minutes?

For condos and HOAs: ask for the association documents: rules, budget, reserves, insurance, meeting minutes, planned big repairs and any lawsuits. Many states require the seller to provide them. Read every page, or have your attorney or agent go through them with you. See the Disclosures page in Stage 8.

Answers worth writing down

07 My top 3, side by side

When it's down to a few, compare them on the same lines. The right one usually shows itself.

	Home A	Home B	Home C
Address			
List price			
Est. monthly payment			
Taxes / HOA			
Beds / baths / sq ft			
Commute			
Condition			
Must-haves met			
Biggest pro			
Biggest con			
Days on market			
Rank 1, 2, 3			

My pick _____ Why _____

PHASE 2 · FIND YOUR HOME

08 Offer and inspection

Make a strong offer, then find out exactly what you're buying.

Usually takes: 1 to 2 weeks



What happens in this stage

1. Decide your price and terms with your agent
2. Submit the offer and earnest money
3. Review the seller's disclosures
4. Schedule the inspection and any extras
5. Sort every issue: must fix, negotiate, or live with

You'll need

- [ ] Your pre-approval letter
- [ ] Earnest money ready
- [ ] An inspector lined up

Common first-timer mistakes

Skipping the inspection to win	Not reading the disclosures	Asking for every small cosmetic fix

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Go to the inspection. Follow the inspector, ask questions and take photos. You'll learn more about the home in 3 hours than in a year.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Offer accepted
- [ ] Disclosures reviewed
- [ ] Inspection done and sorted

My results

_____

_____

_____

FIND YOUR HOME

08 My offer

Write down exactly what you offered. You'll check every later step against this page.

PROPERTY ADDRESS

LIST PRICE

MY OFFER PRICE

EARNEST MONEY

DOWN PAYMENT AND LOAN TYPE

CLOSING DATE

SELLER CREDITS REQUESTED

WHAT'S INCLUDED (APPLIANCES, FIXTURES)

OFFER SENT ON

RESPONSE DEADLINE

Contingencies in my offer

- [ ] Attorney review (if used)
- [ ] Inspection
- [ ] Mortgage financing
- [ ] Appraisal
- [ ] Sale of my current home

Extra inspections to consider

- [ ] Sewer line scope
- [ ] Radon test
- [ ] Mold test
- [ ] Chimney
- [ ] Pest / termite

The answer

- [ ] Accepted
- [ ] Countered
- [ ] Declined

Counter terms / final price

Contract signed on

Seller disclosures

Before or right after your offer is accepted, the seller has to share certain things in writing. Here is what you should get and what to look for.



Seller property disclosure

Most states

The seller tells you about problems they know of: flooding, leaks, roof, foundation, electrical, plumbing, heating, mold, pests and more. Each state has its own form.

Look for: Any "yes" answer. Ask for details, dates and repair receipts.

- [ ] Received
- [ ] Read it
- [ ] Sent to attorney

Radon

Required in some states

Radon is a gas from the ground that's common across the country. Some states require a radon disclosure or pamphlet. Either way, the EPA recommends testing.

Look for: Past test results at or above 4.0 pCi/L, or a mitigation system already installed.

- [ ] Received
- [ ] Read it
- [ ] Sent to attorney

Lead-based paint disclosure

Homes built before 1978

Federal law. The seller shares what they know about lead paint, you get the EPA pamphlet, and you usually get 10 days to do a lead check if you want one.

Look for: Known lead paint, peeling paint, old windows. Matters most with young kids.

- [ ] Received
- [ ] Read it
- [ ] Sent to attorney

HOA or condo documents

Condos, townhomes, HOAs

The association papers: rules, budget, reserves, insurance, planned big repairs, unpaid dues, lawsuits and who to contact.

Look for: Low reserves, special assessments, lawsuits, rental caps, big repairs coming.

- [ ] Received
- [ ] Read it
- [ ] Sent to attorney

Rules vary by state. Ask your agent which disclosures your state requires and when you get them. In some states, a late disclosure that shows a big problem lets you cancel within a short window, so act the same day. Disclosures are what the seller *knows*. They don't replace your own inspection.

Things in the disclosures I want to ask about

08 From the bones to the cosmetics

Inspector _____ Date _____ Respond by _____

SYSTEM	GOOD · WATCH · FIX	AGE	INSPECTOR'S NOTE	EST. COST
Foundation and structure	○ ○ ○			
Roof, gutters, chimney	○ ○ ○			
Water, drainage, basement	○ ○ ○			
Sewer line	○ ○ ○			
Electrical panel and wiring	○ ○ ○			
Plumbing and water heater	○ ○ ○			
Furnace and A/C	○ ○ ○			
Windows and doors	○ ○ ○			
Attic and insulation	○ ○ ○			
Radon and mold	○ ○ ○			
Kitchen and appliances	○ ○ ○			
Bathrooms	○ ○ ○			
Floors, walls, ceilings	○ ○ ○			
Exterior, deck, driveway	○ ○ ○			
Condo: common areas, reserves	○ ○ ○			

Shaded rows: the bones (structure and systems) White rows: finishes and cosmetics

Must fix
Safety, structure, water. Ask the seller.

Negotiate
Aging systems. Ask for a credit.

Live with it
Cosmetic. Add it to Stage 14.

PHASE 3 · CLOSE THE DEAL

09 Insurance and warranty

Protect your new home before closing. Your lender requires proof of insurance.

Usually takes: A few days



What happens in this stage

1. Get 2 or 3 homeowners insurance quotes
2. Compare coverage, not just price
3. Ask about sewer backup and flood
4. Decide on a home warranty
5. Send proof of insurance to your lender

You'll need

- [ ] The property address and details
- [ ] Your inspection report
- [ ] Your lender's insurance requirements

Common first-timer mistakes

- Picking the cheapest policy without reading it
- Skipping sewer backup coverage
- Waiting until closing week

> CHRISTIAN'S TIP
>
> Ask your car insurance company for a bundle quote. It's often the easiest discount you'll get.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Policy chosen
- [ ] Proof sent to my lender
- [ ] Warranty decided

My results

_____

_____

_____

CLOSE THE DEAL

09 Protect your home

Your lender needs proof of homeowners insurance before closing. Get 2 or 3 quotes and compare more than the price.

	Quote 1	Quote 2	Quote 3
Company / agent / phone			
Policy type (house or condo)			
Dwelling coverage			
Personal property			
Liability			
Deductible			
Sewer / water backup			
Flood (if needed)			
Annual premium			
Bundle discount?			

Ask about: sewer and water backup coverage (often an add-on, and it matters if the home has a basement) and flood coverage if the home is in a flood zone. Buying a condo? Ask how your policy works with the building's master policy.

Home warranty (optional)

Sometimes the seller pays for it. Ask during negotiations.

COMPANY _____ COST _____ PAID BY _____

COVERS _____ DOESN'T COVER _____ FEE PER CLAIM _____

PHASE 3 · CLOSE THE DEAL

10 Attorney review

Your attorney, or your agent in states that don't use one, reviews the contract and negotiates repairs or credits.

Usually takes: Often 1 to 2 weeks. Your contract sets the days.



What happens in this stage

1. Ask your agent how contract review works in your state
2. Your attorney or agent reviews the contract
3. Share your inspection findings
4. Ask for repairs or credits
5. Agree on final terms or walk away

You'll need

- [ ] Your signed contract
- [ ] Your inspection report
- [ ] Your must-fix list

Common first-timer mistakes

Not knowing your review deadline before you offer	Asking for cosmetic fixes	Missing the review deadline

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

If your state uses attorneys, line one up before you make an offer. The review clock starts fast, and you don't want to lose days searching.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Attorney review complete
- [ ] Repair or credit terms agreed
- [ ] Key dates written down

My results

_____

_____

_____

10 Attorney review

In some states, buyers hire a real estate attorney and the contract has a review period, often 5 business days that can stretch to 1 or 2 weeks while repairs are negotiated. In others, your agent handles it within the contract's deadlines. Ask your agent how it works where you're buying.

ATTORNEY	FIRM	PHONE
EMAIL	**FLAT FEE**	**PAID AT**

My key dates

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5
Contract signed	Attorney review ends	Inspection deadline	Mortgage commitment	Closing day

Comps check: is the price right?

	ADDRESS	SOLD PRICE	SOLD	BD / BA / SF	VS. MINE
My home					—
Comp 1					Better · Same · Worse
Comp 2					Better · Same · Worse
Comp 3					Better · Same · Worse

10 Repairs and credits

Bring your "must fix" and "negotiate" items from the inspection tracker. Focus on safety, structure and water, not paint colors.

ISSUE FROM INSPECTION	EST. COST	ASK FOR	SELLER SAID	FINAL
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		
		☐ Fix ☐ Credit ☐ Price		

Repair
Seller fixes it before closing. Get receipts and check it at the walkthrough.

Credit
Money back at closing. You control who does the work and how.

Price drop
Lowers the price. Can lower your loan and monthly payment too.

My walk-away point _____

PHASE 3 · CLOSE THE DEAL

11 Underwriting and appraisal

Your lender verifies everything and the home gets appraised. Stay calm and answer fast.

Usually takes: 2 to 4 weeks



What happens in this stage

1. Your lender orders the appraisal
2. Answer every underwriter request quickly
3. Review the appraised value
4. Receive your mortgage commitment
5. Clear any final conditions

You'll need

- [ ] Fast access to your documents
- [ ] Your phone on and nearby
- [ ] Patience

Common first-timer mistakes

- Buying furniture or a car on credit
- Changing jobs
- Moving money with no paper trail

> CHRISTIAN'S TIP
>
> Answer underwriter requests the same day. Fast answers keep your closing date on track.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Appraisal is back
- [ ] Mortgage commitment received
- [ ] All conditions cleared

My results

_____

_____

_____

CLOSE THE DEAL

11 The quiet stretch

Underwriting double-checks everything. Answer every request fast and log it here so nothing slips.

ASKED ON	WHAT THEY ASKED FOR	SENT	SENT ON
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	

Common asks: new pay stubs and bank statements, letters explaining deposits or credit checks, job verification, gift letter, HOA documents.

Appraisal

Appraisal date _____

Appraised value _____

Contract price _____

Difference _____

If it comes in low

- Ask the seller to lower the price
- Pay the difference in cash
- Challenge it with better comps
- Cancel if your contract has an appraisal contingency

Mortgage commitment received _____

Conditions left to clear _____

Rate lock expires _____

CLOSE THE DEAL

PHASE 3 · CLOSE THE DEAL

12 Clear to close

Your lender signs off. Now it's the final checks before the closing table.

Usually takes: About 3 to 7 days



What happens in this stage

1. Receive your clear to close
2. Review your Closing Disclosure
3. Confirm wire instructions by phone
4. Do the final walkthrough
5. Set utilities to start on closing day

You'll need

- [ ] Your Loan Estimate to compare
- [ ] The title company's number from a trusted source
- [ ] Your agent for the walkthrough

Common first-timer mistakes

- Trusting emailed wire instructions
- Skipping the walkthrough
- Not comparing your Closing Disclosure to your Loan Estimate

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Wire fraud is real. Call the title company at a number you already have before you send a single dollar.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Closing Disclosure reviewed
- [ ] Funds ready
- [ ] Walkthrough done

My results

_____

_____

_____

CLOSE THE DEAL

12 You're clear to close

The lender has signed off. Now it's the final checks before the closing table.

☐	**Clear to close received** From your lender, in writing	DATE _____
☐	**Closing Disclosure received** At least 3 business days before closing	DATE _____
☐	**Closing Disclosure matches my Loan Estimate** Ask your lender about anything that changed	DATE _____
☐	**Insurance binder sent to lender** Proof your policy starts on closing day	DATE _____
☐	**Final walkthrough scheduled** With your agent	DATE _____
☐	**Utilities set to start on closing day** Electric, gas, water, internet	DATE _____
☐	**Wire instructions confirmed by phone** See the warning below	DATE _____

! Wire fraud warning

Before you wire any money, call the title company at a number you already have and confirm the instructions out loud. Never trust wiring instructions that arrive by email, even if they look real.

Final walkthrough (24 to 48 hours before closing)

- ☐ Agreed repairs are done (receipts)
- ☐ Faucets, toilets, shower run
- ☐ No new damage or leaks
- ☐ Included items are still there
- ☐ All appliances work
- ☐ Heat and A/C turn on
- ☐ Nothing left behind that shouldn't be
- ☐ Keys, garage remotes, codes

PHASE 3 · CLOSE THE DEAL

13 Closing day

Sign, fund and get your keys.

Usually takes: 1 to 2 hours at the table



What happens in this stage

1. Bring your ID and your funds
2. Review and sign the documents
3. Ask about anything you don't understand
4. Get your keys
5. File for any homestead or homeowner tax exemption

You'll need

- [ ] Photo ID for every buyer
- [ ] Wire confirmation or cashier's check
- [ ] Your cash-to-close worksheet

Common first-timer mistakes

- Signing without reading
- Forgetting a co-buyer's ID
- Never filing for property tax exemptions

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Take a picture with your keys, then tag me. This is the moment the whole planner was for.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Keys in hand
- [ ] Papers saved safely
- [ ] Tax exemption filed (if offered)

My results

_____

_____

_____

13 Cash to close

Fill this in from your Closing Disclosure so you know exactly what you're bringing and what it pays for.

Down payment	$
Lender fees origination, points, application	$
Appraisal and credit report	$
Title insurance and title fees	$
Attorney fee	$
Prepaid interest	$
Escrow deposit taxes and insurance held by the lender	$
Transfer taxes and recording fees depends on location and contract	$
HOA or move-in fees condos	$
Minus: earnest money already paid	$
Minus: seller credits and assistance	$
Total to bring to closing	**$**

Closing day

Date and time _____

Location (title company) _____

Who will be there _____

Bring

- [ ] Photo ID for every buyer
- [ ] Wire confirmation or cashier's check
- [ ] Your checkbook, just in case

After you get the keys

Apply for your county's homestead or homeowner exemption and any other property tax breaks you qualify for. They can lower your tax bill every year.

- [ ] Tax exemption filed (if offered)
- [ ] Closing papers saved in one safe place

PHASE 4 · MOVE IN

14 Before you move in

Do the messy projects while the rooms are still empty.

Usually takes: A few days to a few weeks



What happens in this stage

1. Change the locks
2. List the projects that must happen first
3. Get 2 or 3 quotes for bigger work
4. Schedule work around your move date
5. Check the safety basics

You'll need

- [ ] Your inspection list
- [ ] A project budget
- [ ] Contractor quotes

Common first-timer mistakes

- Draining your savings on day one
- Starting big work without permits
- Hiring the first contractor you call

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Paint and floors are easiest before the furniture arrives. Most other projects can wait a few months.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Locks changed
- [ ] Must-do projects finished
- [ ] Safety checks done

My results

_____

_____

_____

14 Projects before the boxes

Empty rooms are the easiest to work in. Do the dusty, smelly, messy jobs first: floors, paint, ceilings.

PROJECT	WHEN	CONTRACTOR	QUOTE	DONE
Change the locks	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
Paint	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
Floors	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
Deep clean	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
Repairs from the inspection list	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐
	☐ Before move ☐ Can wait			☐

Project budget

Budget _____

Spent so far _____

Left _____

Keep some cushion. Don't drain the house fund on day one.

Move-in safety

- ☐ Smoke and CO detectors tested
- ☐ Found the water shut-off
- ☐ Found the breaker panel
- ☐ Fire extinguisher in the kitchen

Bigger work may need a permit from your city or town. Get 2 or 3 quotes for anything over a few hundred dollars.

PHASE 4 · MOVE IN

15 The move

Plan the move so moving day isn't chaos.

Usually takes: 2 to 4 weeks of planning



What happens in this stage

1. Book movers or a truck
2. Give notice to your landlord
3. Switch utilities and your address
4. Pack room by room
5. Settle in and start your maintenance calendar

You'll need

- [ ] Your moving budget
- [ ] Utility account numbers
- [ ] Boxes, tape and labels

Common first-timer mistakes

- Booking movers last minute
- Forgetting your lease notice period
- Packing everything in one weekend

"

CHRISTIAN'S TIP

Pack an open-first box: sheets, towels, toilet paper, chargers and coffee. Your first night will thank you.

This stage is done when

Finished on _____

- [ ] Moved in
- [ ] Utilities and address switched
- [ ] Maintenance calendar started

My results

_____

_____

_____

MOVE IN

15 Moving money and switches

Moving day _____ Lease ends _____

MOVING COST	QUOTE / COST	BOOKED
Movers or truck rental		☐
Boxes and supplies		☐
Overlap rent or lease-break fee		☐
Elevator reservation or condo move-in fee		☐
Cleaning the old place		☐
New furniture and essentials		☐
Other		☐
Total		

Switch it over

- ☐ Electric _____
- ☐ Gas _____
- ☐ Water, sewer and trash _____
- ☐ Internet _____
- ☐ USPS change of address _____
- ☐ Bank and credit cards _____
- ☐ Employer and payroll _____
- ☐ Car insurance _____
- ☐ Driver's license and registration _____
- ☐ Voter registration _____
- ☐ Subscriptions and deliveries _____
- ☐ Notice to my landlord _____

15 Moving countdown

A little each week beats one crazy weekend.

4 weeks out

- [ ] Book movers or a truck
- [ ] Give notice to your landlord
- [ ] Start packing what you don't use
- [ ] Sell or donate what you won't bring
- [ ] Schedule utilities to switch

2 weeks out

- [ ] Change your address with USPS
- [ ] Confirm moving day and time
- [ ] Pack room by room, label every box
- [ ] Use up food in the freezer
- [ ] Arrange kids and pet care for moving day

Moving week

- [ ] Pack an open-first box
- [ ] Confirm the elevator or parking
- [ ] Clean out the fridge
- [ ] Charge phones and devices
- [ ] Get cash for movers' tips

Moving day

- [ ] Walk the old place one last time
- [ ] Take meter photos at both homes
- [ ] Check every box made it
- [ ] Set up beds first
- [ ] Order a celebration dinner

First things to buy for the house

- [ ] Toolkit and ladder
- [ ] First-aid kit
- [ ] Lawn tools or hose
- [ ] Plunger
- [ ] Flashlights
- [ ] Shower curtain
- [ ] Fire extinguisher
- [ ] Shovel and ice melt (if it snows)
- [ ] Trash cans

Your first year: home care

A little care each season prevents most big repairs. Skip what doesn't apply to your home or your climate.

Spring

March to May

- [ ] Test the sump pump: pour a bucket in the pit
- [ ] Clean gutters and point downspouts away
- [ ] Look at the roof for winter damage
- [ ] Service the AC before the first hot day
- [ ] Check that soil slopes away from the house
- [ ] Turn outside faucets back on and check for leaks

Summer

June to August

- [ ] Run a dehumidifier in the basement
- [ ] Check caulk around windows and tubs
- [ ] Look for ants, wasps and termites
- [ ] Trim trees and bushes off the house
- [ ] Check deck, porch and railings
- [ ] Clean the dryer vent all the way outside

Fall

September to November

- [ ] Service the furnace before it gets cold
- [ ] Clean gutters after the leaves drop
- [ ] Shut off and drain outside faucets (if it freezes)
- [ ] Winterize the sprinkler system
- [ ] Seal drafts at doors and windows
- [ ] Test for radon (heating season is a good time)

Winter

December to February

- [ ] Change the furnace filter
- [ ] Watch for ice dams on the roof edge
- [ ] Keep the heat at 55°F or higher if you travel
- [ ] Cold climate? Know how to keep pipes from freezing
- [ ] Keep snow and leaves away from vents and the meter
- [ ] Check local rules on sidewalk snow removal

Every month

- [ ] Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms
- [ ] Check the furnace filter
- [ ] Press "test" on GFCI outlets
- [ ] Run water in unused sinks and drains

I know where these are

- [ ] Main water shut-off
- [ ] Gas shut-off
- [ ] Breaker panel (and labels)
- [ ] Sump pump and backup
- [ ] Sewer cleanout

My home care log

DATE	WHAT I DID OR FOUND	COST

Glossary: A to E

Plain-English meanings for the words you'll hear from lenders, attorneys and agents.

Amortization
How your loan is paid down over time. Early payments are mostly interest; later ones are mostly principal.

APR
The yearly cost of the loan, including the rate and some fees. Use it to compare lenders.

Back-end ratio
All monthly debts plus the new house payment, divided by monthly income before taxes.

Closing Disclosure
Your final loan terms and costs. You must get it at least 3 business days before closing.

Comparable sales (comps)
Similar nearby homes that sold recently. Used to judge price and value.

Conventional loan
A loan not backed by the government. Often 3–5% down for first-time buyers.

Debt-to-income (DTI)
How much of your income goes to debts. Lenders use it to set what you can borrow.

Down payment assistance
Grants or loans that help with your down payment, often from your state housing agency, county or city.

Equity
What your home is worth minus what you owe on it.

Escrow account
Part of your monthly payment saved by the lender to pay your taxes and insurance.

Appraisal
The lender's estimate of what the home is worth. If it comes in low, the loan amount may change.

Attorney review
A short window after acceptance where either attorney can change or cancel the deal.

Closing costs
Fees to finish the purchase: lender, title, attorney, recording and more. Often 2–5% of the price.

Clear to close
The lender has approved everything. You can schedule closing.

Contingency
A condition in the contract, like inspection or financing, that lets you cancel if it isn't met.

Credit score
A number from 300 to 850 that shows lenders how you handle debt.

Down payment
The part of the price you pay up front. The rest is your loan.

Earnest money
A deposit showing you're serious. Held in escrow and usually credited at closing.

Escrow
Money held by a third party, like earnest money, or taxes and insurance collected with your payment.

Exemption (tax)
A break on property taxes for owners who live in the home, often called a homestead exemption.

Glossary: F to Z

Plain-English meanings for the words you'll hear from lenders, attorneys and agents.

FHA loan
A government-backed loan with 3.5% down and more flexible credit rules. Has mortgage insurance.

HOA
Homeowners association. Sets rules and collects dues for condos and some townhomes.

Homeowner's insurance
Covers damage to your home and belongings. Your lender requires it.

Loan Estimate
A 3-page form from each lender showing rate, payment and costs. Use it to compare.

PITI
Principal, interest, taxes and insurance. Your full monthly payment.

Points
Fees you pay up front to lower your interest rate.

Prepaids
Taxes, insurance and interest you pay at closing in advance.

Radon
An odorless gas from the ground. Common in many areas and fixable with a mitigation system.

Special assessment
An extra fee the HOA charges owners for a big repair.

Underwriting
The lender's full review of you and the home before final approval.

Final walk-through
Your last look at the home before closing to make sure it's in the agreed condition.

Home warranty
A service plan that helps pay for repairs to systems and appliances. Not the same as insurance.

Inspection
A professional check of the home's condition, from foundation to roof.

Mortgage contingency
Lets you cancel if you can't get the loan by a certain date.

PMI / MIP
Mortgage insurance that protects the lender when you put down less than 20%.

Pre-approval
A lender has checked your income, credit and assets and says how much you can borrow.

Principal
The amount you borrowed, not counting interest.

Rate lock
A lender's promise to hold your rate for a set time, often 30 to 60 days.

Title insurance
Protects you and the lender if someone later claims ownership or a lien on the home.

VA loan
A loan for eligible veterans and service members, often with no down payment.

Notes

Questions, ideas, numbers, names. Anything you don't want to forget.



CRUZ DWELLINGS

YOU DID IT

Welcome home.

From your first "why" to keys in hand. This page is for the photo you'll want to keep.

YOUR FRONT-STEPS PHOTO HERE

MY ADDRESS

KEYS IN HAND ON

Know someone still renting?

Share this planner with them, and tag me in your front-steps photo.

(773) 914-4299
christian.cruz@cbrealty.com



Christian Cruz, REALTOR®
Coldwell Banker Realty · Lic #475.212761

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