



A BUYER'S GUIDE

A First-Time Homebuyer's Guide

From mortgage to moving truck — the steps, the money, the timeline, and the tasks, in plain language for your very first home.

Prepared for first-time buyers across the greater Houston area



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Educational guide — current as of 2026. Lending terms, programs, and figures change over time; the principles here do not. Not financial, tax, or legal advice — please confirm specifics with a trusted lender, tax professional, or attorney. Equal Housing Opportunity. If your home is currently listed with a REALTOR® or broker, please disregard any solicitation — this is shared for education, not to interfere with an existing agreement.

START HERE

Your first home, broken into simple steps.



For most people, a home is the biggest purchase they'll ever make. That's exciting — and it can feel like a lot. The good news is that buying your first home isn't one giant leap. It's a series of small, manageable steps, and you don't take any of them alone.

This guide walks you from the very beginning — figuring out what you can afford — all the way to the day you get the keys. We'll cover the basic steps, the money side, a realistic timeline, the tasks that are yours to handle, and what moving day actually looks like.

You don't need to know everything before you start. You just need to know the next right step. Let's take them one at a time.

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SECTION 1

The basic steps, start to finish

Here's the bird's-eye view of the whole journey. Every buyer's path looks a little different, but almost all of them move through these same milestones in roughly this order. You don't have to memorize them — just know the shape of the road ahead.

1

Get your bearings

Research neighborhoods and home prices, then take an honest look at your budget. Knowing your real number first keeps the whole process on solid ground.

2

Get pre-approved

A lender reviews your finances and tells you what you can borrow. This makes your future offer real to sellers — it's the step that turns a dream into a plan.

3

Team up and shop

Partner with a REALTOR® to tour homes that fit your list and budget. When you find the one, you make an offer and negotiate the terms.

4

Inspect, appraise, and close

An inspection checks the home's condition; your lender's appraisal confirms its value. Once underwriting is done, everyone meets to sign — and the home is yours.

THE REASSURING PART

You won't be doing this solo. A lender handles the financing details, an inspector checks the home, a title company manages the paperwork, and your agent coordinates it all and keeps your interests first. Your job is mostly to stay organized and ask good questions.

SECTION 2

The money: loans and assistance

The financing piece scares a lot of first-time buyers — usually more than it should. You don't need to be a mortgage expert. You just need to understand the broad strokes and lean on a trusted lender for the specifics.

The loan process, in plain terms



Pre-approval first

The lender looks at your income and debts to see how much you can comfortably afford. This is your starting line.



Make an offer in budget

You find a home and offer a price that fits the number your lender gave you — not a penny of stretch you'll regret.



Underwriting verifies

The lender double-checks your finances and the home's details. A few document requests here are normal, not a red flag.



Appraisal, then closing

Once the home's value checks out and underwriting wraps up, all parties schedule the closing and you sign.

You may need less down payment than you think

One of the biggest first-time myths is that you must save 20% down. For many buyers, that simply isn't true. Several loan types and assistance programs are built specifically to lower that hurdle — including FHA loans, VA loans for those who served, USDA loans in qualifying areas, and a range of state, local, and educator down-payment programs.

A WORD ON CLOSING COSTS

Beyond the down payment, plan for closing costs — fees for the loan, title work, and more. In Texas these are a normal part of the deal and are often negotiable. Ask your lender for an estimate early so there are no surprises, and learn a few key terms along the way: pre-approval, escrow, APR, and earnest money are the ones worth knowing.

The single best move you can make here is to talk with a trusted lender before you fall in love with a home. They'll show you which programs you actually qualify for and what your real monthly payment — including taxes and insurance — would be.

SECTION 3

A realistic timeline

Weeks 1–2 ● **Get pre-approved and set your criteria**

You connect with a lender for pre-approval and sit down with your agent to define your must-haves and nice-to-haves. This groundwork makes everything after it faster.

Weeks 2–10 ● **Shop, tour, and make an offer**

Home shopping can take anywhere from a single weekend to a couple of months, depending on the market and your list. When you find the right home, you'll move into offer and negotiation, which usually settles within a week or two.

Weeks 6–12 ● **Loan, appraisal, inspection**

Once your offer is accepted, the loan moves toward final approval while the home is inspected and appraised. These overlap, and your team keeps them on track behind the scenes.

Closing day ● **Sign — and the home is yours**

Closing is usually a single meeting to sign the final paperwork. Once the ink is dry, you get the keys. That's the moment it all becomes real.

KEEP IN MIND

Every situation is unique, so treat these as friendly estimates, not promises. A motivated buyer with financing lined up can move quickly; a particular home or loan can add time. Staying responsive — returning documents promptly — is the easiest way to keep your timeline short.

From first conversation to keys in hand, many first-time buyers complete the journey in roughly two to three months once they're pre-approved. The part you control most is the beginning: the sooner you start the financing conversation, the smoother everything downstream tends to go.

SECTION 4

What's on your plate

You'll have plenty of experts in your corner — but a few responsibilities belong to you. None are hard. Knowing them up front keeps the process calm and prevents last-minute scrambles.

Your part of the job



Keep your documents ready

Have proof of income, tax history, and bank records handy for your lender. Quick responses keep your loan moving.



Stay in touch

Communicate with your agent and lender, and attend your scheduled meetings and showings. You're the center of the team.



Know what you want

Decide your true must-haves versus nice-to-haves so you can act with confidence when the right home appears.



Be present for the big steps

Take part in the inspection, the negotiations over repairs and costs, and know what you'll need to bring to closing.

ONE STEADY HABIT

Keep copies of everything you sign — paper or digital. A simple folder for your home-buying paperwork will save you stress now and serve you for years as a homeowner.

SECTION 5

Moving in: the home stretch



When can you move in?

As soon as you leave the closing table, the home is yours — you can start moving in as early as the same day. Most buyers line up movers for the days right after closing so they're ready to go.

Hire movers, or DIY?

Moving is physical and time-consuming. If you'd rather not haul boxes yourself, a moving company that packs and unpacks can be money well spent. Either way, decide early and book ahead.

Watch for hidden costs

Budget a little extra for the easy-to-forget items: professional cleaning, moving or truck-rental fees, new keys or changed locks for security, and any small repairs you want done before you settle in.

Use a move-in checklist

Moving day gets hectic fast. A simple checklist keeps you and everyone helping on the same page so nothing important slips through the cracks.

FIRST THING IN YOUR NEW HOME

Change the locks or re-key them on day one — you never know how many copies of the old keys are floating around. It's an inexpensive step that buys real peace of mind in a home that's finally yours.

LET'S TALK

Work with Allen



First-time buyers tell me the same thing again and again: they didn't want to be sold — they wanted someone patient to explain the steps and make sure they didn't miss anything. That's exactly how I work, and there's no such thing as a silly question.

Ready to take the first step?

If you're even thinking about buying your first home, let's talk it through. I'll help you understand where you stand, connect you with a trusted lender if you'd like, and map out a plan that fits your budget and your timeline. No pressure, no jargon — just a clear path forward. When would be a good time to connect?

Reach out for a free, no-pressure consultation

Call or text: (832) 709-2540 · allen@allenmarkel.com · allenmarkel.com

If now isn't quite the right time for you, I'll tell you that honestly — and help you build a plan to get ready. My job is to help you make the right call, not just any call.