

Your Journey to Homeownership Starts Here

Imagine embarking on the exciting adventure of finding your dream home in vibrant Atlanta and Houston neighborhoods like Inman Park or The Heights—where every step builds toward unlocking the front door of your future. This guide weaves the homebuying process into a compelling story, complete with essential numbers and timelines to make it smooth and achievable for first-time buyers or savvy investors eyeing metro growth spots.

1. Lay the Financial Foundation (6+ Months Before Buying)

Picture yourself as the hero gearing up for the quest: strong finances are your trusty sword and shield. Start saving for a down payment—typically 20% of the purchase price, though options like conventional loans (as low as 3%), FHA (3.5%), VA/USDA (0% for eligible buyers) open doors wider—while budgeting 2–5% more for closing costs and 3–6% of home value for fees like appraisals and title insurance (e.g., \$6,000–\$12,000 on a \$200,000 home).

Boost your credit score (aim for 620+; 720+ unlocks best rates) by reviewing reports, paying debts, and maintaining a debt-to-income (DTI) ratio under 50%—calculated as monthly debts divided by gross income (e.g., \$2,000 debts / \$6,000 income = 33%)—while gathering 2 years of income docs like pay stubs or tax returns.

Down Payment Options

- Conventional: 3% minimum
- FHA: 3.5% minimum
- VA/USDA: 0% for eligible
- Traditional: 20% recommended

Additional Costs

- Closing costs: 2–5% of price
- Fees: 3–6% of home value
- Example: \$6K–\$12K on \$200K home

Credit & DTI Goals

- Credit score: 620+ minimum
- Best rates: 720+
- DTI ratio: Under 50%
- Gather 2 years income docs

2. Explore Your Dream Market (4-5 Months Before)

Now, step into the marketplace like a treasure hunter scanning horizons: browse online listings and open houses to refine your must-haves, from square footage and bedrooms to school districts, transit access, and backyard oases amid rising property values.



Partner with Local Experts

Hire a local real estate agent—your guide through Atlanta's dynamic scene—to connect you with inspectors, lenders, and attorneys, all while tracking spending to safeguard your credit and DTI.



Define Must-Haves

Square footage, bedrooms, school districts, transit access, outdoor space



Build Your Team

Agent, inspector, lender, attorney—your support network



Track the Market

Monitor property values and neighborhood trends

3. Secure Your Pre-Approval and Hunt (2-3 Months Before)

With momentum building, ally with a lender for pre-approval (valid 60–90 days; submit bank statements, pay stubs, tax returns) to signal seriousness to sellers, exploring loans like conventional (Fannie Mae/Freddie Mac-backed, 3% down), FHA (government-insured, 3.5% down), VA (0% down for veterans), or USDA (0% for rural/suburban eligibles).

1	<div>Conventional Loans</div> <div>Fannie Mae/Freddie Mac-backed, 3% down minimum</div>
2	<div>FHA Loans</div> <div>Government-insured, 3.5% down minimum</div>
3	<div>VA Loans</div> <div>0% down for eligible veterans and service members</div>
4	<div>USDA Loans</div> <div>0% down for rural and suburban eligible buyers</div>

Set up saved MLS searches with your agent, prioritize your list (price, condition, taxes, trends), and schedule showings—patience pays as you tour plenty before committing.



4. Craft and Conquer the Offer (1-2 Months Before)

Found Your Perfect Home?

Submit a written offer via your agent, including your details, price, response deadline, and 1-2% earnest money deposit (credited toward down payment/closing if you proceed).



Submit Offer

Written offer with all details, price, deadline, 1-2% earnest money



Negotiate

Sellers may accept, reject, or counter—work with your agent



Sign Contract

Once aligned, sign the contract and move forward

Sellers may accept, reject, or counter—negotiate confidently, then sign the contract once aligned.

5. Navigate Escrow Adventures (Under 1 Month)

In this 30–45 day checkpoint phase, inspections reveal hidden gems or fixes (test systems, roof, appliances; negotiate repairs, credits, or price drops via contingency to protect your deposit), appraisals confirm value (lender-required; contest lows with contingency), and you prep for move-in by booking movers, utilities, insurance, and notifying your landlord.

01

Home Inspection

Test systems, roof, appliances—negotiate repairs, credits, or price drops via contingency

02

Appraisal

Lender-required value confirmation—contest low appraisals with contingency protection

03

Move-In Prep

Book movers, set up utilities, secure insurance, notify current landlord

04

Stay Connected

Maintain communication with lender, agent, and attorney for seamless documentation



Pro Tip: Stay in touch with your lender, agent, and attorney for seamless docs.

6. Cross the Threshold at Closing (Closing Week)

The Final Steps

Culminate your saga with a final walkthrough—verify repairs, vacancy, and systems—then sign paperwork at the title company for hours of triumph, grabbing your keys to start new memories.

1 Final Walkthrough

Verify all repairs completed, home is vacant, systems functioning properly

2 Sign Paperwork

Meet at title company to sign closing documents—plan for several hours

3 Get Your Keys

Receive keys and officially become a homeowner—start making memories!





Welcome Home!

Your journey to homeownership is complete

Congratulations on taking every step of this exciting adventure. From laying your financial foundation to crossing the threshold with keys in hand, you've navigated the path to homeownership with confidence and determination. Now it's time to create lasting memories in your dream home.



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Ready to start your homeownership journey? Let's make it happen together.