

Buying a home in California

Eight steps, in order. What happens at each one, what you'll need, and who you'll work with.

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BUYER GUIDE

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Inland Empire 909-581-8364
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Inside

Buying a home has a lot of moving parts. This guide takes them one at a time, in the order they happen, so you always know what comes next and what to ask.

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Two halves: getting ready, then under contract.

The first four steps run on your schedule. Once a seller accepts your offer, the contract sets the dates and the pace picks up.

Getting ready

At your pace

01 Know your numbers
Cash up front and a monthly payment

02 Get pre-approved
A lender confirms what you can borrow

03 Choose your agent
Sign a written buyer agreement

04 Shop and tour
See homes and narrow the list

Under contract

About 30 to 45 days

05 Make an offer
Contract accepted, escrow opens

06 Investigation period
Inspect, review, request repairs

07 Appraisal and loan approval
Value confirmed, loan finalized

08 Walk-through and closing
Sign, fund, record, keys



7 days for seller disclosures

17 days to investigate

17 days for loan and appraisal

**Pricing and compensation may vary.*

01

STEP 01 OF 08

Know your numbers

Before you look at a single listing, work out the cash you'll need up front and the monthly payment you're comfortable with.

WHEN
Before you start looking

YOU'LL NEED
Recent pay stubs
Account balances
Your monthly debts

WHO'S INVOLVED
You and a lender

Earnest money	About 1% to 2% of the price Paid after acceptance; credited to you at closing
Down payment	From 3% on many loans; 0% on VA and USDA Paid at closing
Closing costs	About 2% to 5% of the loan Lender, title and escrow fees, prepaid taxes and insurance
Inspections	A few hundred dollars each Paid to inspectors during the inspection period
Appraisal	Several hundred dollars Ordered and billed by your lender
Cushion	Your choice Moving, utility deposits and first repairs

For the monthly payment, lenders count principal, interest, property taxes and homeowner's insurance, plus HOA dues and mortgage insurance when they apply. Choose the payment first and let it set your price range. The ranges above are typical; your lender's Loan Estimate will show your actual numbers.

CALIFORNIA NOTE
California has state and local down payment assistance programs, including CalHFA, for buyers who qualify. Ask your lender which ones you're eligible for.

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02

STEP 02 OF 08

Get pre-approved

A pre-approval letter shows sellers your offer can close. Your agent will need one before writing an offer.

WHEN

Before your first tour

YOU'LL NEED

Two years of W-2s or tax returns

30 days of pay stubs

Two months of bank statements

Photo ID

Notes on large deposits

WHO'S INVOLVED

A lender or mortgage broker

Prequalification

An estimate based on what you tell a lender. Useful early, but sellers give it little weight.

Pre-approval

The lender has checked your credit, income and assets. This is the letter that goes with your offer.

Common loan types

Conventional	Down payments from about 3%. Mortgage insurance until you reach 20% equity.
FHA	Down payments from 3.5%, with more flexible credit requirements.
VA	For eligible veterans and service members. Often no down payment.
USDA	For eligible rural areas and incomes. Often no down payment.

Until you close, avoid

- New credit cards or loans
- Financing a car or furniture
- Changing jobs
- Undocumented transfers
- Missed payments



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03

STEP 03 OF 08

Choose your agent

Your agent is your guide and negotiator from the first tour to the day you get the keys.

WHEN
Before touring homes together

YOU'LL SIGN
A written buyer agreement

WHO'S INVOLVED
You and your agent

Buyers now sign a written agreement with their agent before touring homes together. It states how your agent is paid, how long the agreement lasts and how to end it. Read it before you sign.

What your agent handles

- Sets up your search and books showings
- Pulls recent sales to guide your price
- Writes and negotiates your offer
- Tracks every contract deadline
- Coordinates inspectors, lender and escrow
- Gets you to the closing table

Ask before you sign

How are you paid, and by whom?

How long does the agreement last?

How do I end it if it isn't working?

Who will I talk to day to day?



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04

WHEN

A week to a few months

YOU'LL NEED

Your pre-approval letter

A short must-have list

STEP 04 OF 08

Shop and tour

Write down the few things your home must have and what you could live without. Rate each home the same day you see it, while it's fresh. On every tour, look closely at the items that cost the most to fix or insure in California:

Foundation. Look for cracks, sloping floors and sticking doors

Hazard zones. Ask about flood, fire and earthquake zones

Solar. Find out if panels are owned or leased

Roof. Ask its age and whether it has been replaced

Insurance. Homes in fire zones can cost more to insure

HOA and taxes. Ask about dues, rules and any special assessments

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05

STEP 05 OF 08

Make an offer

When the seller accepts, your offer becomes the contract, escrow opens, and the deadlines below begin.

WHEN
Day 0

YOU'LL NEED
Pre-approval letter
Earnest money

WHO'S INVOLVED
Your agent, the listing agent, the escrow company

Most California resale homes are bought on the standard California Residential Purchase Agreement. Your offer sets:

- Price
- Earnest money
- Loan type and down payment
- Closing date
- Seller credits
- Items that stay

Typical deadlines after acceptance

Your contract sets the exact dates

Day 0
Accepted
Escrow opens; earnest money due within 3 business days

Day 7
Disclosures
Seller delivers the TDS, SPQ and NHD report

Day 17
Investigations
Request for Repair, or remove the contingency

Day 17
Loan and appraisal
Remove these contingencies or cancel

COE
Closing
Often 30 to 45 days after acceptance

Deadlines are firm. By each deadline you either remove the contingency in writing or cancel. Once a contingency is removed, backing out for that reason can put your earnest money at risk. Your agent tracks every date with you.

**Pricing and compensation may vary.*

06

STEP 06 OF 08

Investigation period

Seventeen days to inspect the home, read every disclosure, and decide whether to move forward.

WHEN
Days 1 to 17

YOU'LL NEED
Inspectors booked on day 1
An insurance quote

WHO'S INVOLVED
Inspectors, your agent, an insurance agent

Inspections

General home. Structure, roof, heating and AC, plumbing, electrical

Termite. A wood-destroying pest report

Sewer scope. A camera check of the line to the street

Pool. Equipment, surface and safety barriers

Specialists. Foundation, roof, chimney or septic if flagged

Documents

TDS and SPQ. What the seller knows about the home

NHD report. Flood, fire and earthquake hazard zones

HOA documents. Budget, rules and any pending assessments

Insurance quote. Confirm the home is insurable

Solar lease. Terms and transfer, if any

CALIFORNIA NOTE · REQUEST FOR REPAIR

Before the investigation contingency ends, you tell the seller what you found. You have three choices:

Accept
Remove the contingency and move forward as is.

Request
Send a Request for Repair for repairs or credits.

Cancel
End the contract and get your earnest money back.

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07

STEP 07 OF 08

Appraisal and loan approval

Your lender confirms the home is worth the loan and gives your file a final review.

WHEN
Usually within 17 days

YOU'LL NEED
Quick replies to your lender
Homeowner's insurance

WHO'S INVOLVED
An appraiser, an underwriter

An independent appraiser compares the home with recent nearby sales. At the same time, an underwriter reviews your income, assets and credit and may ask for updated documents. Answer the same day when you can.

If the appraisal comes in low

Renegotiate
Ask the seller to lower the price to the appraised value.

Meet in the middle
Split the difference with the seller.

Cover the gap
Pay the difference in cash at closing.

Cancel
Before you remove the appraisal contingency.

Clear to close

When underwriting signs off, you'll get a Closing Disclosure at least three business days before signing. Compare it with your Loan Estimate and ask about anything that changed.



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08

STEP 08 OF 08

Walk-through and closing

One last look at the home, a signing appointment, and then the keys.

WHEN
The last few days before closing

YOU'LL NEED
Photo ID
Verified wiring instructions
Insurance in place

WHO'S INVOLVED
Escrow officer, lender, your agent

At the walk-through, confirm

- Agreed repairs are done, with receipts
- Faucets, toilets and drains work
- No new damage from moving out
- Heating, AC, appliances and pool equipment run
- Items in the contract are still there
- Remotes, codes and keys are handed over

FIRST
Sign
With escrow or a mobile notary, a few days before closing.

THEN
Fund
Your lender sends the loan money to escrow.

FINALLY
Record
The deed records with the county. The home is yours.

PROTECT YOUR CLOSING FUNDS
Wire fraud targets home buyers. Before you wire money, call your escrow officer at a number you already know. Never follow wiring changes sent by email or text.

After you move in

Change the locks and garage codes, keep your closing documents together, and file for California's homeowners' property tax exemption.

**Pricing and compensation may vary.*

GLOSSARY

Terms, A to Z

Appraisal
An independent estimate of the home's value, ordered by your lender.

Closing Disclosure
Your final loan terms and costs, delivered at least three business days before signing.

COE
Close of escrow. The day the deed records and the home becomes yours.

Contingency removal
Your signed notice that you're moving forward without a given contingency.

Earnest money
Your good-faith deposit, held by escrow and credited at closing.

Escrow
A neutral company that holds funds and documents and carries out the contract.

NHD
Natural Hazard Disclosure. A report on flood, fire and earthquake zones for the property.

Request for Repair
Your written list of repairs or credits after inspections.

SPQ
Seller Property Questionnaire. Extra details about the home beyond the TDS.

TDS
Transfer Disclosure Statement. What the seller knows about the home's condition.

Title insurance
Protects you and your lender against past ownership claims.

Underwriting
The lender's final review of your finances and the property.

READY TO START LOOKING?

Talk to a buyer's agent.

Call us to talk through your budget, your search and your next steps. No obligation.

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READY WHEN YOU ARE

Let’s find your home.

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