

THE FIRST-TIME BUYER'S GUIDE TO HOMEOWNERSHIP

Everything You Need to Know — From Pre-Approval to Keys in Hand

A step-by-step guide written for real people, not real estate textbooks.

"Not Just Your Agent, Your Advocate"

East Valley Phoenix, Arizona

Gilbert • Mesa • Chandler • San Tan Valley • Queen Creek • Apache Junction • Florence

A Message From Brian

If you're reading this, you're probably thinking about buying your first home. That's exciting — and I know it can also feel overwhelming. There's a lot of information out there, and honestly, some of it is confusing on purpose.

I wrote this guide to cut through the noise and give you a clear, honest picture of what the home buying process actually looks like — from start to finish, with no sales pitch attached.

My philosophy is simple: I'm here to help you find a home YOU choose, on YOUR timeline, at a price that makes sense for YOUR life. No pressure, no pushing. Just guidance and protection.

Let's get started.

Step 1: Get Your Finances in Order

Before you start browsing Zillow (we've all been there), the smartest move you can make is understanding your financial picture first.

Understanding Down Payments

This is the #1 question I hear from first-time buyers: "How much do I need for a down payment?" The answer might surprise you — it's probably less than you think.

- **Conventional loans:** Typically 3–5% down for first-time buyers. On a \$350,000 home, that's \$10,500 to \$17,500.
- **FHA loans:** As low as 3.5% down with more flexible credit requirements. Great for first-time buyers.
- **VA loans:** 0% down if you're a veteran or active-duty military.
- **USDA loans:** 0% down for rural areas — some East Valley areas may qualify (parts of San Tan Valley, Queen Creek, Apache Junction, and Florence).
- **Down Payment Assistance (DPA) programs:** Arizona has several state and local programs that can help with down payment and closing costs. Ask your lender about the Home Plus program and the Pathway to Purchase program.

Brian's Tip: Don't drain your entire savings for the down payment. You'll want reserves for closing costs, moving expenses, and the inevitable surprises that come with homeownership (like when the AC breaks in July in Arizona).

Understanding Closing Costs

Closing costs are the fees and charges you pay on the day you officially become a homeowner. They're separate from your down payment, and a lot of first-time buyers don't know about them until late in the process.

Typical closing costs in Arizona run 2–3% of the purchase price. On a \$350,000 home, that's roughly \$7,000 to \$10,500. Here's what's included:

- **Lender fees:** Origination fees, underwriting, credit report, appraisal (\$400–\$600 for the appraisal alone)
- **Title fees:** Title search, title insurance, escrow/settlement fees
- **Prepaid items:** Homeowner's insurance premium, property taxes (prorated), prepaid interest
- **Recording fees:** County charges to record the deed
- **HOA transfer fees:** If the home is in an HOA community (most East Valley homes are)

Brian's Tip: You can often negotiate for the seller to cover some or all of your closing costs as part of your offer. This is called a 'seller concession' and it's especially common when the market favors buyers. I'll help you strategize this when the time comes.

Getting Pre-Approved

Pre-approval is the single most important step you can take before starting your home search. Here's why:

1. You'll know your real budget — not a guess, not what Zillow says you can afford, but what a lender will actually give you.
2. Sellers take your offer seriously. In a competitive market, an offer without pre-approval often gets passed over.
3. You won't fall in love with a home that's out of your price range.
4. It identifies any credit issues early, giving you time to fix them.

The pre-approval process typically takes 1–3 days. You'll need to provide pay stubs, tax returns, bank statements, and ID. It's not scary — I promise. I work with several great local lenders who are patient and will walk you through everything.

Step 2: The Home Search

This is the fun part. Once you're pre-approved, we'll set up a custom MLS search based on exactly what you're looking for. You'll get real-time alerts when new homes hit the market — before they show up on Zillow or Redfin.

What to Think About Before You Search

- **Location:** Commute times, school districts, proximity to shopping/dining, neighborhood feel
- **Home size:** Bedrooms, bathrooms, garage, yard — what do you need now vs. 3–5 years from now?
- **Must-haves vs. nice-to-haves:** Single-story? Pool? Updated kitchen? Separate from your wish list.
- **HOA:** Most East Valley communities have HOAs (\$50–\$300+/month). Factor this into your monthly budget.
- **New construction vs. resale:** New builds often have builder incentives; resale homes may have larger lots and mature landscaping.

East Valley Market Overview

The East Valley is one of the most popular areas in the Phoenix metro for good reason: great schools, abundant amenities, and a range of price points. Here's a quick snapshot of each major area:

City	Known For	Price Range*	Best For
Gilbert	Top-rated schools, family-friendly, dining scene	\$380K–\$600K+	Families, young professionals
Chandler	Tech corridor, great parks, vibrant downtown	\$350K–\$550K+	Tech workers, families
Mesa	Diverse inventory, affordable options, arts district	\$280K–\$480K+	Budget-conscious , first-timers
San Tan Valley	Newer homes, space, lower prices	\$300K–\$450K+	Families wanting more space
Queen Creek	Rural feel, newer communities, growing rapidly	\$380K–\$550K+	Families, new construction
Apache Junction	Mountain views, affordable, outdoor recreation	\$250K–\$400K+	Budget-friendly, outdoors lovers

City	Known For	Price Range*	Best For
Florence	Most affordable, large lots, small-town feel	\$220K-\$350K+	Maximum space per dollar

**Price ranges are approximate and based on current market conditions. Contact Brian for the latest data.*

Step 3: Making an Offer

When you find the right home, we'll put together a strong offer. Here's what goes into it:

- **Offer price:** Based on comparable sales, market conditions, and the home's condition. I'll advise you on what's competitive without overpaying.
- **Earnest money deposit:** Typically 1–2% of the purchase price. Shows the seller you're serious. This money goes toward your down payment at closing.
- **Contingencies:** Inspection contingency (always keep this), appraisal contingency, and financing contingency protect you if something goes wrong.
- **Closing timeline:** Typically 30–45 days from accepted offer to closing.
- **Seller concessions:** We can ask the seller to cover some of your closing costs.

Step 4: Under Contract — What Happens Next

Once your offer is accepted, the clock starts ticking. Here's the timeline:

Timeframe	Milestone	What Happens
Days 1–3	Earnest money	Your earnest money deposit is delivered to the title company.
Days 1–10	Home inspection	A professional inspector examines the home for issues. This is your chance to renegotiate or walk away if major problems are found.
Days 1–14	Appraisal ordered	Your lender orders an appraisal to confirm the home is worth the purchase price.
Days 7–21	Loan processing	Your lender processes your loan. Respond quickly to any requests for documents.
Days 21–30	Clear to close	Your lender issues final loan approval. You'll review and sign your closing disclosure.
Day 30–45	Closing day!	Sign the paperwork, get your keys, and officially become a homeowner!

Brian's Tip: During this period, do NOT make any big financial changes: don't open new credit cards, don't make large purchases, don't change jobs, and don't move money around between accounts without talking to your lender first. Any of these can delay or kill your loan.

Step 5: Closing Day

This is the day you've been working toward! Here's what to expect:

1. Final walkthrough: We'll walk through the home one last time (usually the morning of closing) to make sure everything is in the condition you agreed to.
2. Signing: You'll meet at the title company to sign your loan documents and closing paperwork. Bring a valid photo ID and any funds due (cashier's check or wire transfer).
3. Funding: Once everything is signed and your lender funds the loan, the title company records the deed with the county.
4. Keys: You get your keys! Congratulations — you're officially a homeowner.

The entire closing appointment typically takes 45–60 minutes. I'll be there with you to make sure everything goes smoothly.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Skipping pre-approval and shopping above your budget.
2. Making big financial changes during the loan process.
3. Waiving the home inspection to 'win' a bidding war — this is almost never worth the risk.
4. Falling in love with a home before doing the math on total monthly costs (mortgage + taxes + insurance + HOA).
5. Not factoring in maintenance costs — budget 1–2% of your home's value per year.
6. Going it alone without a buyer's agent. Working with me costs you nothing as a buyer — the seller typically pays the commission.

Ready to Get Started?

Whether you're 6 months out or ready to start looking this weekend, I'm here whenever you are. No pressure, no timeline, no pitch. Just a conversation about your goals and how I can help you achieve them.

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