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Get preapproved for a mortgage

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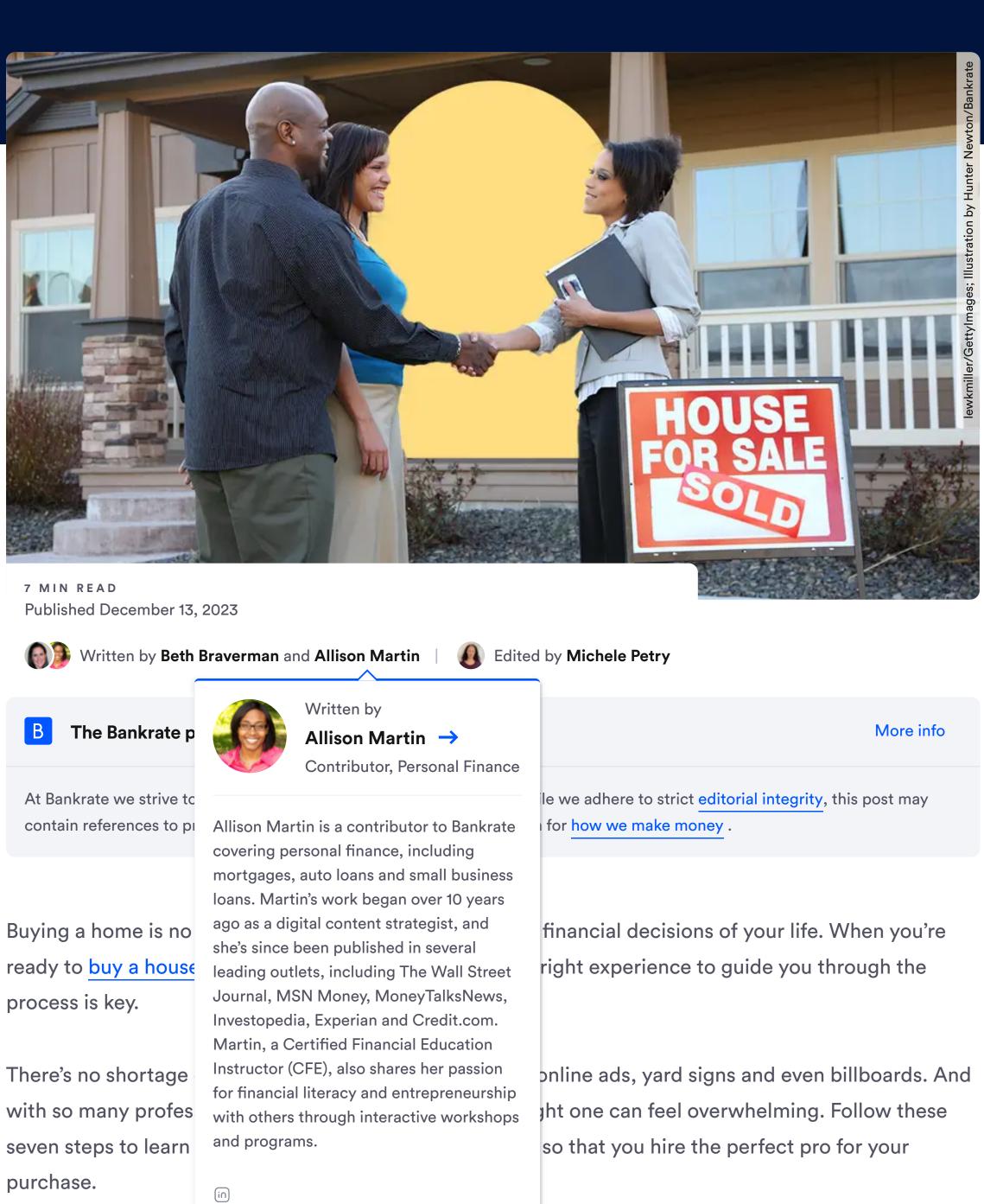
Trust your instinct

**FAQs** 

Examine your contract

## REAL ESTATE

# How to find a good real estate agent: A buyers' guide



### Sometimes, home shoppers hire a real estate agent and dive into their home search before they ever talk to a mortgage lender. But it's smart to talk to a lender first, before you talk to anyone else, to learn how

1. Get preapproved for a mortgage

much you can afford to spend on a home.

Getting preapproved for a mortgage educates you on the maximum amount you can borrow and

the right price range for you. In addition, it will show both agents and sellers that you're a serious,

qualified buyer. In competitive markets, you'll likely need a preapproval letter for sellers to even consider your offer. 2. Ask friends and family for referrals

Ask people in your network if they can recommend an agent with whom they've had a good experience.

identifies any issues that may need to be worked on early in the process. This helps you stick to homes in

#### Ideally, you want someone who has experience working with clients in circumstances similar to yours. The needs of first-time homebuyers, for example, are different from those of repeat buyers or

completed training in a certain area of expertise. Designations include:

homeowners who are looking to downsize. And a condo specialist will have a different type of knowledge than an agent whose expertise lies in single-family homes. Many consumers look for a real estate agent who is a Realtor — with a capital R. That means they're a member of the National Association of Realtors (NAR) and have formally agreed to abide by the group's

code of ethics, among other things. Some Realtors also have certifications to show that they've

• CRS (Certified Residential Specialist): Completed additional training in handling residential real estate • ABR (Accredited Buyer's Representative): Completed additional training in representing buyers in

- transactions • SRES (Seniors Real Estate Specialist): Completed training aimed at helping buyers and sellers
- aged 50 and older
- Buyer's agents vs. seller's agents

But regardless of whether an agent is also a Realtor, he or she will be a licensed professional with the

Also, familiarize yourself with the difference between a buyer's agent and a seller's agent. A buyer's agent represents a homebuyer in a real estate transaction, while a seller's or listing agent is responsible

specialize in one or the other. Sometimes, a single agent can represent both parties, a practice known as

for the seller's side, including pricing and marketing the home. Many agents do both, but some

### dual agency. Some states don't allow dual agency, and it can have some inherent risk, so keep that in mind if you're considering agreeing to this arrangement. You might also encounter a referral agent, who

ability to facilitate your home purchase.

provides leads to other agents for a fee. 3. Research potential candidates If you're considering a particular agent, start by examining their online presence. Check their website and social media accounts, noting whether they have closed deals in your specific area.

# Take a look at their online reviews, as well. Don't worry about one or two negative reviews, but more

than that could be a red flag. And be sure to check with your state's real estate regulator to confirm that the agent is licensed and find out whether they have any disciplinary actions. You might also vet candidates you're interviewing on your local Better Business Bureau's website to see if they've received

any complaints.

# "See how polished and professional their proposal is," says Katherine Hutt, president and founder of

during the week, you'll want an agent who's happy to do the same.

6. Trust your instinct

commission fees are.

4. Interview at least three agents

Nautilus Communications and former chief communications officer with the Better Business Bureau. "The more effort they put into a presentation for you, the more effort they'll put into presentations when they're working for you. You want someone who is really savvy."

An interview is your opportunity to get a sense of the agent's work style and experience. You want to

find someone who is familiar with your particular area and understands your budget and needs.

Questions to ask Realtor candidates include how long they've been a real estate agent, whether they work full-time or part-time, how many clients they currently have and how long they typically work with buyers to close on a home. It's also a good idea to ask the typical price range and neighborhoods of homes they help their buyers find, how they help buyers stay competitive in this market and what their

If you're a first-time buyer, inquire about their experience helping others who fall into this category and the type of guidance you can expect during the process. The same applies to other unique scenarios, like out of state relocation or foreclosure purchases. Interviews also give you a chance to find out the agent's preferred method of communication and their

availability. For example, if you're most comfortable texting and expect to visit homes after work hours

5. Request references — and check them Ask the agents you're interviewing to provide information on homes they've listed and sold in the past

year, with contact information for at least a few recent clients. Reach out to those clients to find out their

## experiences and what type of support the agent provided throughout the process. Ask whether they'd hire that agent again for their next real estate transaction.

Above all, go with an agent you trust and will feel comfortable with if the road to closing gets a little bumpy. If someone gives you a bad vibe during your interview, that's unlikely to change when you start working together.

"It's just like dating — sometimes it just comes down to chemistry," says Herman Chan, an associate

broker and Realtor with Golden Gate Sotheby's International Realty in Berkeley, California. "If everything

checks out, but you just don't vibe with that person, don't go with them. There are plenty of other real

estate agents out there that will be happy to help you and might be a better personality fit."

7. Take a close look at your contract Once you select an agent, your contract should spell out all the terms to which you've agreed, including the real estate commission. Traditionally, though, the seller pays this fee, not the buyer — between 5

and 6 percent of the sale price of the home, with half going to each agent. The commission rate is often

if possible. According to NAR data, homes that sold in October 2023 typically remained on the market

for just 23 days, and 66 percent stayed on the market for less than a month. If you haven't found the

In a challenging housing market like today's, where low inventory and high prices can restrict your

buying options significantly, having a trusted agent by your side really makes a difference. Follow the

steps above to find the best real estate agent for you, and together, you can start your journey toward

## negotiable, however. Another factor to look at: the length of the contract itself. Aim for a contract limited to six months or less

What should you look for when choosing a real estate agent?

What percentage commissions do most Realtors make when you buy a home?

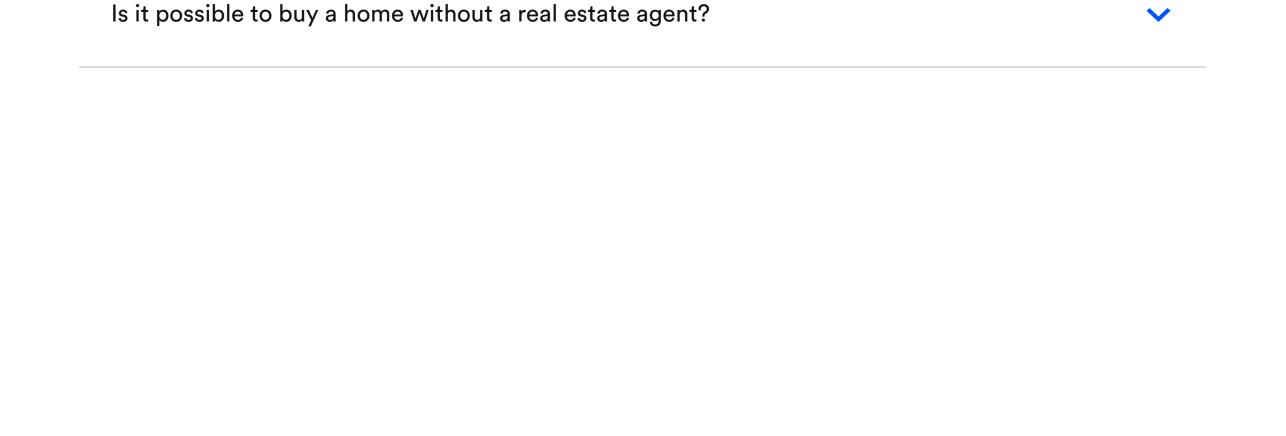
home you want within a few months, it's helpful to keep your options open. **Bottom line** 

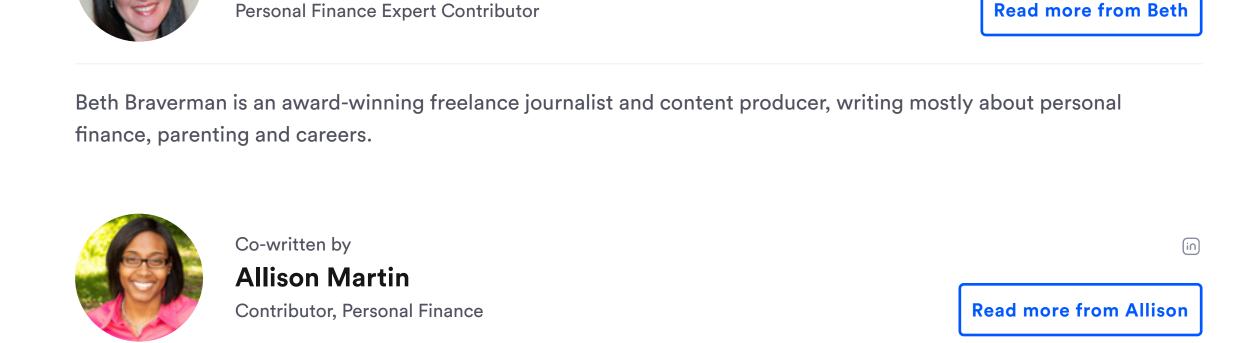
# **FAQs**

finding the right home at the right price.

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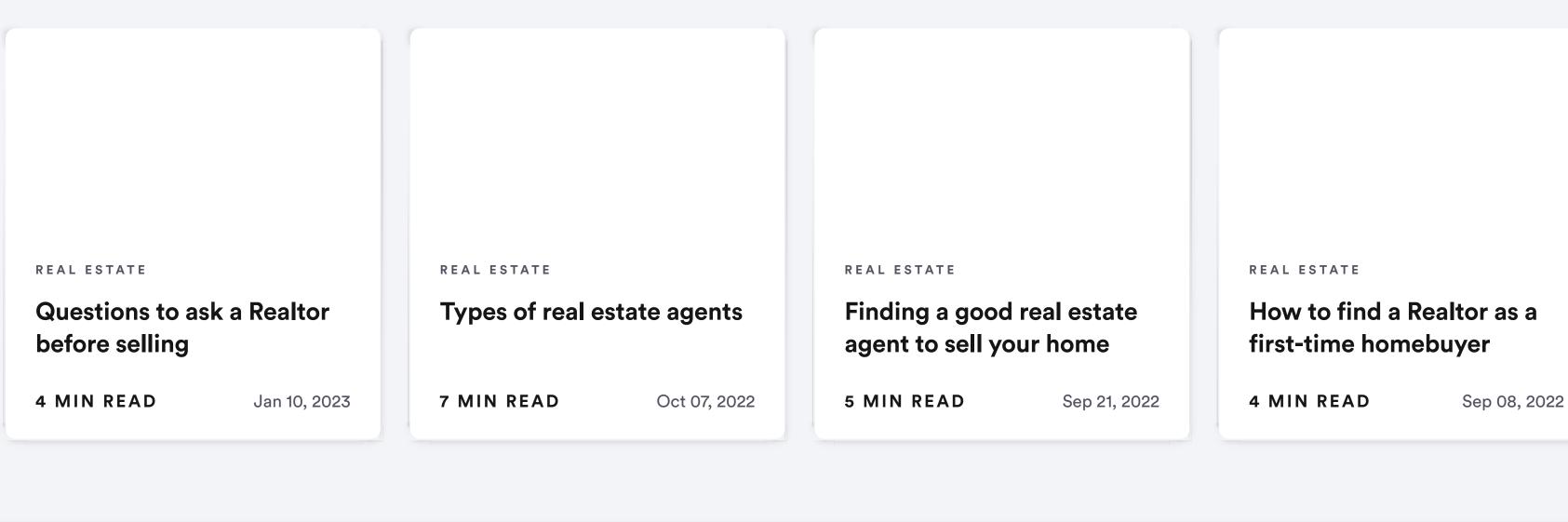
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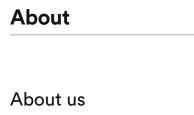
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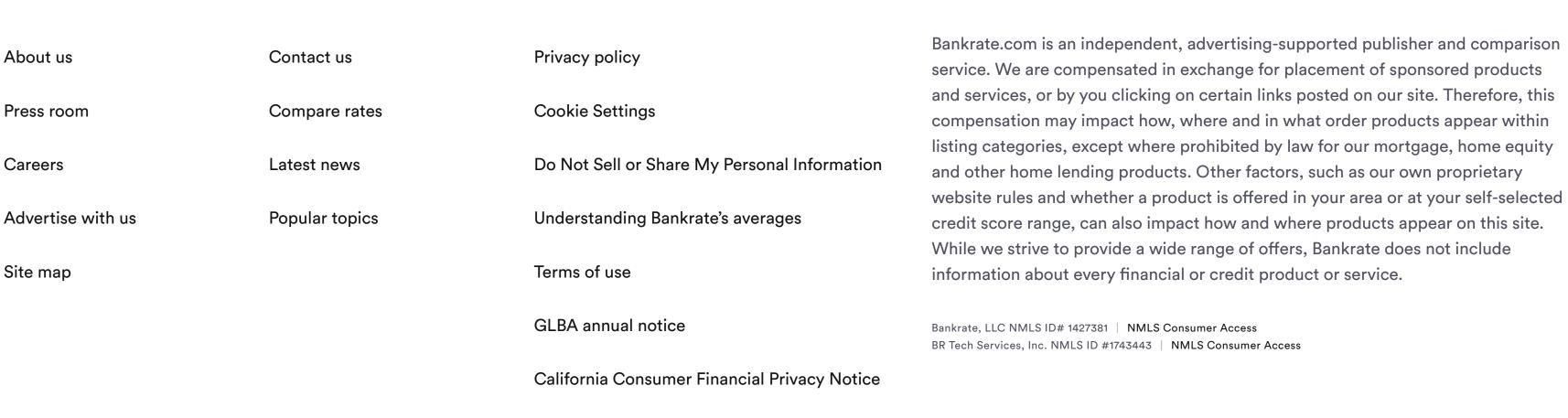
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