

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



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Allison Martin is a contributor to Bankrate covering personal finance, including mortgages, auto loans and small business loans. Martin's work began over 10 years ago as a digital content strategist, and she's since been published in several leading outlets, including The Wall Street Journal, MSN Money, MoneyTalksNews, Investopedia, Experian and Credit.com.

le we adhere to strict [editorial integrity](#), this post may for [how we make money](#).

Buying a home is no ready to [buy a house](#) process is key.

Martin, a Certified Financial Education Instructor (CFE), also shares her passion for financial literacy and entrepreneurship with others through interactive workshops and programs.

financial decisions of your life. When you're right experience to guide you through the

There's no shortage with so many profes seven steps to learn purchase.

online ads, yard signs and even billboards. And hlt one can feel overwhelming. Follow these so that you hire the perfect pro for your

1. Get preapproved for a mortgage

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 much you can afford](#) to spend on a home.

Getting preapproved

for a mortgage educates you on the maximum amount you can borrow and identifies any issues that may need to be worked on early in the process. This helps you stick to homes in 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. 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 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 completed training in a certain area of expertise. Designations include:

- **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

But regardless of whether an agent is also a Realtor, he or she will be a licensed professional with the ability to facilitate your home purchase.

Buyer's agents vs. seller's agents

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 for the seller's side, including pricing and marketing the home. Many agents do both, but some specialize in one or the other. Sometimes, a single agent can represent both parties, a practice known as [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 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.

4. Interview at least three agents

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.

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

[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 commission fees are.

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

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.

6. Trust your instinct

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 negotiable](#), however.

Another factor to look at: the length of the contract itself. Aim for a contract limited to six months or less 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 home you want within a few months, it's helpful to keep your options open.

Bottom line

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 finding the right home at the right price.

FAQs

What should you look for when choosing a real estate agent? [▼](#)

What percentage commissions do most Realtors make when you buy a home? [▼](#)

Is it possible to buy a home without a real estate agent? [▼](#)



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