

A FIRST-TIME BUYER GUIDE

The Down Payment *Playbook*

Cut what you don't need, find a payment that feels comfortable, and shop your loan like a pro.

Prepared for you by

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START HERE

Your 3-step *plan*

01

Cut what you don't need

Small monthly costs add up to real down payment money. Pages 3–6 give you 25 ideas and a tracker to watch your savings grow.

02

Find your comfortable payment

What a lender approves and what feels good every month aren't always the same number. Pages 7–8 help you find yours.

03

Shop your loan

Two lenders can quote very different costs for the same home. Pages 9–10 show you what to compare.



A note from me

Buying a home doesn't start with a showing. It starts with a plan. This playbook is the same one I walk my buyers through: a few easy cuts, a payment you can live with, and a loan you shopped with confidence. Fill it in, then let's talk about what's possible for you.

— Julie Herrmann

STEP 01 · CUT WHAT YOU DON'T NEED

25 ways to cut *monthly costs*

Check off the ones you'll try and write in what each one saves you.

PHONE + TECH

- [ ] **Review cloud storage**
  Check what you use before changing plans. Keep a reliable backup for important files.
  $_____ /mo
- [ ] **Switch to a carrier on the same network**
  Some prepaid unlimited plans start around $15–$25 a month.
  $_____ /mo
- [ ] **Drop device insurance you never use**
  Check if a credit card you already have includes phone protection.
  $_____ /mo
- [ ] **Keep your phone one more year**
  Skip the new upgrade payment.
  $_____ /mo

SUBSCRIPTIONS

- [ ] **Do the 10-minute subscription sweep**
  Settings → Subscriptions. Cancel what you forgot about.
  $_____ /mo
- [ ] **Rotate your streaming**
  Keep one service at a time and switch each month.
  $_____ /mo
- [ ] **Cancel unused apps and memberships**
  Fitness apps, monthly boxes, extra storage.
  $_____ /mo
- [ ] **Use family plans**
  Music, streaming and storage plans for your household.
  $_____ /mo

STEP 01 · KEEP GOING

25 ways to cut *monthly costs*

HOME + CAR

- [ ] **Shop your car insurance** — $_____ /mo
  Compare quotes at least once a year.
- [ ] **Bundle renters and auto insurance** — $_____ /mo
  Many insurers offer a discount for both.
- [ ] **Trim your utilities** — $_____ /mo
  Adjust the thermostat, switch to LED bulbs, unplug extras.
- [ ] **Pause or downgrade the gym** — $_____ /mo
  Walk, run or use free workout videos for a few months.
- [ ] **Call your internet provider** — $_____ /mo
  Ask about a lower plan or a better rate.

FOOD

- [ ] **Cap delivery at once a week** — $_____ /mo
  Fees, service charges and tips add up fast.
- [ ] **Plan five dinners each week** — $_____ /mo
  Fewer last-minute takeout runs.
- [ ] **Brew your coffee at home** — $_____ /mo
  Save the coffee shop for a treat.
- [ ] **Use grocery pickup with a list** — $_____ /mo
  Fewer impulse buys in the aisles.

STEP 01 · ALMOST THERE

25 ways to cut *monthly costs*

BEAUTY + SELF-CARE

- ☐ **Stretch nail appointments** — $_____ /mo
  Every 4 weeks instead of 2, or at-home press-ons.
- ☐ **Ask for lower-maintenance color** — $_____ /mo
  A softer grow-out means fewer visits.
- ☐ **Swap one paid service for DIY** — $_____ /mo
  Brows, lashes or blowouts, even just for now.

MONEY MOVES

- ☐ **Automate a transfer on payday** — $_____ /mo
  Pay your down payment first, before you can spend it.
- ☐ **Save raises, bonuses and tax refunds** — $_____ /mo
  Put windfalls straight into savings.
- ☐ **Sell what you don't use** — $_____ /mo
  Furniture, clothes, gear, the treadmill-turned-closet.
- ☐ **Pay down a high-interest card** — $_____ /mo
  It frees up monthly cash, and lenders look at your debts.
- ☐ **Try a 24-hour rule** — $_____ /mo
  Wait a day before any purchase over $50.



STEP 01 · TRACK IT

My savings *tracker*

MY DOWN PAYMENT GOAL

$

I WANT TO BE READY BY

What I cut	Saves me / month	Start date

TOTAL I'M SAVING EACH MONTH: $

MONTHLY CHECK-IN

Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
$	$	$	$	$	$
Month 7	**Month 8**	**Month 9**	**Month 10**	**Month 11**	**Month 12**
$	$	$	$	$	$

PROGRESS TO MY GOAL — color one in for every 10%

STEP 02 · FIND YOUR COMFORTABLE PAYMENT

What feels good *every month*

What a lender approves and what fits your life aren't always the same number. Here's how to find yours.

WHAT LENDERS LOOK AT

28%

Housing costs
A common guideline: keep your full house payment around 28% of your monthly income before taxes.

36%

All monthly debts
The house payment plus car, student loan and card payments, kept around 36% of income before taxes.

Example: Earn $6,000 a month before taxes? 28% is about $1,680 for housing, and 36% is about $2,160 for all debts together. Many loan programs allow more, but more isn't always comfortable.

WHY YOUR NUMBER MIGHT BE LOWER

- ☐ **Childcare or school costs**
  Keep these in your household budget.
- ☐ **Savings you want to keep**
  An emergency fund, retirement, or the next goal.
- ☐ **The life you like**
  Travel, hobbies, dinners out, giving.
- ☐ **Home costs after you move in**
  Utilities, repairs, furniture and lawn care.

WHAT'S INSIDE A MONTHLY PAYMENT

P	I	T	I	+
Principal Pays down your loan	**Interest** The cost to borrow	**Taxes** Property taxes	**Insurance** Homeowners insurance	**HOA / PMI** If they apply

In the Spokane area, compare the full payment: principal, interest, property taxes, insurance and any HOA or mortgage insurance.

STEP 02 · DO THE MATH

My comfortable *payment*

Use real numbers from your bank app. Round up when you're not sure.

1. My monthly take-home pay (after taxes)	$ _____

2. MY MONTHLY COSTS TODAY (SKIP RENT)

Car payment	$ _____	Car insurance + gas	$ _____
Phone + internet	$ _____	Student loans	$ _____
Credit cards	$ _____	Childcare	$ _____
Groceries	$ _____	Subscriptions	$ _____
Health + medical	$ _____	Other	$ _____
Total I spend			$ _____

3. WHAT I WANT LEFT OVER

Savings each month	$ _____	Fun money	$ _____
Emergency cushion	$ _____	**Total left over**	$ _____

Take-home pay - what I spend - what I want left over =

My comfortable payment is $_____ /month

Check it: Income before taxes $_____ × 0.28 = $_____. If your comfortable payment is lower, go with yours. Bring both numbers to your lender.

STEP 03 · SHOP YOUR LOAN

How to shop your *loan*

Rates and fees can be very different from one lender to the next, even for the same home and the same buyer.

01 **Get at least 3 Loan Estimates**
Try a mix: a bank, a credit union and a mortgage broker. A lender has to send you a Loan Estimate within 3 business days of your application.

02 **Shop in a short window**
Mortgage credit checks within about 14–45 days usually count as one inquiry. Aim to finish in 2 weeks to be safe.

03 **Compare the same loan**
Ask each lender for the same loan type, term and down payment, on the same day, so the numbers line up.

04 **Look past the rate**
Compare the APR, points, Section A origination charges and estimated cash to close. Low rate + high fees isn't always a deal.

05 **Ask about down payment help**
Ask every lender which assistance programs or grants you might qualify for.

QUESTIONS TO ASK EVERY LENDER

- ☐ Which loan types fit me?
- ☐ Are there points in this quote?
- ☐ Is there a fee to lock or extend?
- ☐ How fast can you close?
- ☐ What are your lender fees?
- ☐ How long is the rate lock?
- ☐ What credit score helps me most?
- ☐ Can I get pre-approved, not just pre-qualified?

This guide is for general education. Talk with a licensed lender about your situation.

STEP 03 · COMPARE

Lender comparison *chart*

Copy these from page 1 and 2 of each Loan Estimate.

	Lender 1	Lender 2	Lender 3
Lender name			
Loan officer + phone			
Date of estimate			
Loan type + term			
Interest rate			
APR			
Points			
Origination (Section A)			
Principal + interest			
Total monthly payment			
Cash to close			
Rate lock length			
Down payment help?			

The one I'm choosing: _____

Why: _____

YOUR NEXT STEPS

A home that fits *your number*

- [ ] **Pick your cuts** · Choose 2 or 3 from pages 3–5 and start this month.
- [ ] **Track it** · Write your savings on page 6 and check in monthly.
- [ ] **Know your number** · Fill in page 8 before you talk to a lender.
- [ ] **Shop 3 lenders** · Use the chart on page 10 to compare.
- [ ] **Call me** · We'll look at homes that fit the payment you chose.



Ready when you are

Buying in Spokane, Cheney or Spokane Valley? I bring the home search and financing conversation together. Let's build a plan around your life.

LET'S TALK
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