Home Buying Decision Kit

Free working edition 0.1 | November 2, 2026 | David Tom Publishing

A practical guide for general US readers. Read the worked case, complete one sheet, and keep the supporting record with it. Examples and worksheet prompts are original DTP material; all example households and figures are fictional.

Print and write by hand, or use the editable Word file. The PDFs are not fillable. Copy a worksheet for another task or use a continuation sheet labeled with its code, question and date. Unknown is a valid answer when paired with a next step.

Keep completed records private. Use aliases and record locations instead of full account numbers, identification numbers, passwords or access codes. This is an organizer, not personalized financial, legal, lending, mechanical or repair advice.

Working edition: reader, physical-print, native Word and assistive-technology acceptance remain open. PDFs are untagged; no PDF/UA compliance or professional signoff is claimed. Print one sample page before a full run.

Define the decision that is actually in front of you

Buying a home involves several decisions that should not be collapsed into one. You may be deciding whether to investigate a neighborhood, whether to request a loan estimate, whether to make an offer, or whether to proceed with a particular transaction. Write the current decision at the top of the page. Information sufficient for an early comparison may not be sufficient for a commitment.

Describe the household needs that prompted the search. Separate requirements from preferences. “A workable route to an essential appointment” is a different kind of statement from “a larger kitchen would be pleasant.” Both can matter, but they should not compete in a list without explanation.

End this opening with the conditions under which you would pause. A pause condition might be an unexplained cost, an unresolved property issue, or an assumption that has not been checked. Writing it early gives you something to return to when the process becomes busy.

Separate available cash from cash committed to the purchase

Begin with the amount actually available for this decision, then identify the money you intend to retain for other purposes. Keep moving expenses, planned work, other savings goals, and your chosen cushion visible rather than treating every available dollar as a down payment. CFPB's preparation guide makes these separate parts of the upfront review. [R04]

Use dated estimates. A preliminary allowance and a documented charge should not look identical in the worksheet. Add a source column and label each item estimated, quoted, documented, or still unknown. Do not replace an unknown with a convenient percentage merely to complete the page.

The worksheet does not choose your cushion or tell you what you can afford. It shows what remains after the choices and assumptions you enter.

Worked case: trace the deposit once

Taylor and Morgan use a fictional starting amount of $50,000 before paying a deposit. They set aside $12,000 as their chosen retained cushion and $3,000 for moving and initial setup. That leaves $35,000 assigned to the purchase decision in this simplified exercise.

The fictional transaction calls for a $25,000 down payment and $8,000 in closing costs. A documented seller credit is assumed to reduce the amount by $2,000, and a $3,000 deposit has already been paid and will be credited at closing. On these deliberately simplified assumptions, the remaining cash to close is $28,000: $25,000 plus $8,000 minus $2,000 minus $3,000.

Total buyer cash contributed to this simplified purchase is the $3,000 deposit plus the $28,000 still due, or $31,000. It is not $34,000. The deposit is part of the transaction, not an extra purchase cost to add again. The $35,000 purchase allocation therefore has $4,000 unassigned within this example, while the separately retained $15,000 remains outside that allocation.

Actual cash-to-close statements can include additional adjustments. CFPB explains that down payment, closing costs, deposits, credits, and other adjustments interact in the cash-to-close calculation. Use the actual documents and ask the responsible professional to explain a discrepancy. This example is not a substitute closing statement. [R05]

Compare cash outlays without calling them total economic cost

Place the housing options on the same time basis. For an ownership illustration, identify principal and interest, property-related charges, insurance, association charges where applicable, and the allowance you have chosen for maintenance. For a rental illustration, identify rent and any separately paid recurring items. Avoid counting the same charge twice when it is already included elsewhere.

Label the result a comparison of the entered cash outlays. It does not, by itself, account for equity changes, future sale proceeds, transaction timing, opportunity costs, or uncertain property values. Write those exclusions next to the comparison so a reader cannot mistake the monthly difference for a final verdict.

Write the next decision, not a premature conclusion

A useful ending may be: “We have reconciled the deposit in this example, but the maintenance allowance and final transaction adjustments remain unverified.” That is more informative than a green check beside a large total. The kit should make the next question easier to ask before another commitment is made.

Use the three sheets together

Begin with BUY-01 before copying figures to BUY-02. The opening amount must be measured before the deposit if you want to use the fictional example's reconciliation. If your balance is from after the deposit, identify that difference explicitly; do not subtract the same deposit from available cash twice.

In the example: $50,000 - $12,000 - $3,000 = $35,000 allocated; $25,000 + $8,000 - $2,000 - $3,000 = $28,000 still due; $3,000 + $28,000 = $31,000 total contribution; $35,000 - $31,000 = $4,000 unassigned. These are checks on the invented inputs, not estimates for a real purchase.

BUY-03 compares the cash amounts actually entered. If a payment already includes taxes or insurance, mark those included amounts so you do not add them again. Keep unknown charges in the questions list; an incomplete total cannot resolve a purchase decision.

BUY-01 — Decision and cash boundary

Short notes are enough. Use a labeled continuation for longer answers; keep supporting records in their private location.

Current decision, date and household alias

Required needs, preferences and pause conditions

Cash available BEFORE any deposit; date and source

Retained cushion, moving/setup and other separate allocations

Amount allocated to purchase; calculation and assumptions

Open question, responsible person and next confirmation

BUY-02 — Trace purchase cash once

Short notes are enough. Use a labeled continuation for longer answers; keep supporting records in their private location.

Transaction reference and dated estimate/document used

Down payment and closing costs; source and estimated/documented status

Credits and other adjustments; signs and explanation from source

Deposit already paid and evidence of where it is credited

Remaining cash to close per document; reconcile unexplained differences

Deposit plus remaining due; compare with purchase allocation

Other charges or unknowns; question for lender/closing professional

BUY-03 — Compare entered recurring cash outlays

Short notes are enough. Use a labeled continuation for longer answers; keep supporting records in their private location.

Options compared and same comparison period

Principal/interest or rent; source and date

Taxes, insurance, association and other charges; identify any included elsewhere

Chosen maintenance allowance; basis and uncertainty

Total entered outlays per option; missing or estimated entries

Excluded economic factors; this is not an affordability decision

Next document, question and review date

Sources and keeping useful records

R04 — CFPB: Determine your down payment

https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/prepare/determine-your-down-payment/

Supports separating purchase cash from retained money and moving expenses. No recommended cushion or lending threshold is adopted.

R05 — CFPB: Loan Estimate Explainer

https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/loan-estimate/

Supports cash-to-close components and asking the lender about discrepancies. The example is simplified and fictional.

Sources checked November 2, 2026. References support only the narrow points described above; they do not endorse DTP or its examples.

Label amounts and dates estimated, confirmed or unknown. Retain the underlying document and its date. A completed worksheet does not verify the records entered into it.

Keep one current master and identify older copies. Before closing an item, record the evidence of completion; carry unresolved questions forward with an owner and next action. Download updates at davidtompublishing.com/home-life-guide-downloads/.