

REALISTELY

FREE STARTER GUIDE

Real Estate *From Zero*

Know nothing about property? Start here. The plain-language crash course in buying, selling, investing — and staying on the right side of the law.



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REALISTELY.COM · REAL ESTATE, MADE READABLE

You don't need to know *anything* yet

By the last page, you'll understand how buying, selling, investing, and the legal side of real estate actually work — in plain English.

Real estate feels like a members-only club with its own secret language. It isn't. It's a handful of simple ideas wrapped in confusing words — and once someone slows down to explain them, the whole thing turns calm and manageable. That's all this guide does. No jargon left unexplained, no hype, no pressure. Just the essentials, fast.



This is what good real estate help feels like: someone calm opening the door and walking you through, one plain step at a time.

What's inside — four short sections

1

Buying, without the fear.

The words you need, the seven steps of a purchase, and how the money really works.

2

Selling, done right.

The three moves that decide every sale: price, prep, and patience.

3

Investing, the calm way.

The four ways property pays you — and the one number that tells you if a deal is any good.

4

Staying legal & protected.

What you actually own, the contracts that protect you, and when to call a professional.

ONE PROMISE

Every term is explained the first time it appears. If a word ever feels like a wall, keep reading — the plain-English box right next to it is the door.

A quick, honest note: this guide is educational, not legal, tax, or financial advice. Real estate rules vary by place and change over time, so for your actual decisions, confirm the specifics with a licensed professional. We'll point out exactly when to do that.

Buying, *without the fear*

A home purchase looks like chaos from outside. Inside, it's a simple sequence — and a handful of words unlock all of it.

The reason buying a first home feels overwhelming is that you see all of it at once: money, searching, paperwork, deadlines. But a purchase is a sequence, not a pile. Learn a few words, walk the steps in order, and each step is small.

The only words you need to start

PLAIN ENGLISH

Mortgage

A loan to buy a property, paid back monthly over many years. The home itself is the security — which is why a lender cares so much about it and about you.

PLAIN ENGLISH

Down payment

The slice of the price you pay yourself, up front. The mortgage covers the rest. A bigger down payment usually means a smaller loan and a cheaper monthly payment.

PLAIN ENGLISH

Equity

The part of the home you truly own — its value minus what you still owe. It grows as you pay down the loan or the value rises. This is how property quietly builds wealth.

PLAIN ENGLISH

Contingency

A condition in your offer that lets you walk away — usually with your deposit back — if something's wrong. Your main safety net as a buyer.

The seven steps of buying a home

1 Get pre-approved.

Before you look, a lender checks your finances and tells you, in writing, what you can borrow. It sets your real budget and makes sellers take you seriously.

2 Search with a filter.

Decide your non-negotiables (location, space) versus nice-to-haves. The market makes you trade; knowing your line keeps you calm.

3 Make an offer.

A price plus the conditions (contingencies) attached. It's a small contract, not just a number.

4 Go under contract.

The seller accepts; your deposit goes into safe-keeping and your protected checking window begins.

5 Inspect & appraise.

You check the home's condition; the lender checks its value. Either can reopen the price.

6 Finalise the loan.

Keep your finances boringly stable — no new debts or big purchases right now.

7 Close, and get the keys.

You sign, the money moves, ownership transfers, and it's yours.



The path to a home is a series of stepping stones. You don't leap — you take the next stone, then the one after.

The money, in one minute

Your monthly payment is usually four things at once, remembered as **PITI**: **P**incipal (repaying the loan — this builds your equity), **I**nterest (the cost of borrowing), **T**axes (property taxes), and **I**nsurance. Early on, most of your payment is interest; over the years that flips toward principal. That's normal — and it's why paying a little extra toward principal early is such a powerful move.

WATCH OUT

Don't shop on the monthly payment alone. A comfortable monthly figure can hide a longer loan or a higher rate. Compare the **total cost** over the years you'll keep the loan — and never skip the inspection to win a bid.

ASK A PRO

Before you fall in love with anything, sit with a **lender** and get a real pre-approval, and choose an **agent who represents you** (the buyer). These two relationships, set up early, make every later step cheaper and calmer.

QUICK REFERENCE — BUYING

- ☐ Get pre-approved before you start looking.
- ☐ Know your four words: mortgage, down payment, equity, contingency.
- ☐ Walk the seven steps in order — don't improvise.
- ☐ Keep your contingencies; they're your safe exit.
- ☐ Compare total loan cost, not just the monthly payment.

Selling, *done right*

Selling well isn't luck or a hot market. It's three controllable moves — price, prep, and patience.

When you sell, you switch sides of the table, and the instincts that helped you buy can betray you. Sellers overprice out of attachment, skip preparation out of haste, and panic at the first offer. Get three things right and the rest follows.



An empty sign and a tidy home — the moment a place goes on the market. What you do in the weeks before that sign goes up decides most of the outcome.

1 • Price it right — the first weeks matter most

The most common selling mistake is overpricing out of emotion. A home gets the most attention in its first weeks. Price it too high and you waste that window; then you cut the price and it looks stale. Price it sensibly from day one and you invite competition — which is what actually pushes the price up.

PLAIN ENGLISH

Comparable sales (“comps”)

Recently sold, similar nearby homes. Comps are how the market — and a buyer's appraiser — set value. Price against honest comps, not against what you wish your home were worth.

2 • Prepare it properly

1 Declutter and depersonalise.

Buyers need to imagine their life there. Clear the surfaces, pack away the personal.

2 Fix the small stuff.

The dripping tap, the sticking door. Minor alone; together they whisper “neglect.”

3 Mind the first impression and the photos.

Most buyers meet your home on a screen first. Bright, honest photos are the cheapest high-return move in selling.

3 • Negotiate with patience

The first offer isn't an insult or an emergency — it's the start of a conversation. Read the whole offer, not just the price: the conditions, the timeline, and how solid the buyer's financing is all matter. A slightly lower offer from a strong, flexible buyer can beat a higher one that's fragile.

WATCH OUT

“We can always come down later” works against you. Overpricing burns your best weeks and can leave the home selling for *less* than a sensible price would have. Anchor to comps from day one.

ASK A PRO

Selling carries a real legal duty in most places: you must **disclose known problems** with the property. A **real estate agent or attorney** can tell you exactly what your region requires — ask before you list.

QUICK REFERENCE — SELLING

- ☐ Price to honest comps from day one.
- ☐ Declutter, fix the small things, invest in real photos.
- ☐ Read whole offers — terms and financing, not just price.
- ☐ Confirm your legal disclosure duties before listing.

Investing, *the calm way*

A home shelters you. An investment property pays you — in four ways at once. And one simple number tells you if a deal is any good.

Most people think real estate makes money one way: buy low, sell high someday. That's the slowest, least reliable return — and betting on it alone is how beginners get hurt. Seasoned investors look for property that pays them in four ways at the same time, so even if one disappoints, the others carry the deal.



One property, four directions of return. The art isn't chasing one big win — it's stacking several modest, reliable returns until they add up.

The four ways property pays

1

Cash flow.

The rent left over each month after *every* expense. Positive cash flow means the property pays you to own it — the return that keeps you safe in bad times.

2

Appreciation.

The property gaining value over the years. Real, but never guaranteed. Treat it as a bonus, not the plan.

3

Loan paydown.

Your tenant's rent pays down your mortgage. Every month a little more of the property becomes truly yours — funded by someone else.

4

Tax treatment.

In many places, property ownership comes with tax advantages. The rules vary and change, so confirm them with a professional.

The one number to learn first

THE MATH, SLOWLY

Does the rent beat the costs? (cap rate)

$$\text{Cap rate} = (\text{Yearly rent} - \text{Yearly expenses}) \div \text{Price}$$

It tells you, in one figure, the return a property produces on its own — and lets you compare very different properties fairly. *Illustration with round, invented numbers:* a property earning 8 a year after expenses, priced at 100 → an 8% cap rate.

The trick is honest expenses. Beginners forget maintenance, vacancy between tenants, and management. Run conservative numbers — if a deal only works when nothing ever breaks, it doesn't really work.

Amateurs buy hoping the price goes up. Professionals buy so they win even if it doesn't — and treat appreciation as the *bonus*, never the plan.

WATCH OUT

The most dangerous phrase in investing is "it'll appreciate." If a deal only makes sense *because* you assume prices rise, you don't have an investment — you have a bet. Make it work on cash flow and loan paydown first.

ASK A PRO

For your first deal, have an experienced **investor, agent, or accountant** sanity-check your numbers. A second set of eyes catches the missing expense — the small error that turns a “great deal” into a slow leak.

QUICK REFERENCE — INVESTING

- ☐ Look for all four returns; make it work on cash flow + paydown.
- ☐ Treat appreciation as a bonus, never the plan.
- ☐ Always include maintenance, vacancy, and management in expenses.
- ☐ Learn cap rate as your first quick filter.
- ☐ Have your first analysis checked by someone experienced.

Staying legal & *protected*

The paperwork is where real estate quietly goes right or wrong. A few ideas keep you protected without a law degree.

When you buy property, what really changes hands isn't bricks — it's a bundle of legal rights, recorded in a government office. You don't need to be a lawyer, but you do need to know what protects you, what to verify, and the exact moments to call a professional.



Everything from the offer onward runs on what's written on the page. The protection is in the documents — which is why every line deserves a careful read.

What you actually own

Title

Legal ownership of a property — the right to use, sell, or pass it on.

Deed

The signed document that transfers ownership from seller to you.

Lien

A legal claim against a property for an unpaid debt. Must usually be cleared before a clean sale.

Easement

Someone else's right to use part of your land — a shared driveway, a utility line.

PLAIN ENGLISH

Title insurance

A one-time policy that protects you if someone later surfaces a valid claim against your ownership — an old forged deed, a missed heir, an unpaid lien. Quiet, boring, and worth every cent.

The contracts that protect you

Your offer is a small contract, and its **contingencies** are your exit ramps: the conditions that, if unmet, let you renegotiate or walk away with your deposit. The three core ones are the **inspection**, **financing**, and **appraisal** contingencies. Keep them unless you fully understand what waiving one gives up.

WATCH OUT

Get everything in writing. Verbal promises about boundaries, repairs, or what's "included" carry no weight later — the signed contract is what counts. If it matters, it belongs in the document.

FROM THE FIELD

A buyer skipped a careful title review to "move fast" and learned after closing that a previous owner's unpaid contractor still had a claim on the property. A title search and title insurance would have caught it for a fraction of the cost — and saved years of headache.

ASK A PRO

Two moments to always involve a professional: have a **title/escrow company or real estate attorney** confirm clean ownership before closing, and — where customary — have an attorney review your contract. If getting something wrong would cost real money or break a law, confirm it with a licensed professional **before** you act.

QUICK REFERENCE — LEGAL & PROTECTION

- ☐ Know the basics: title, deed, lien, easement.
- ☐ Get a title search and title insurance — always.
- ☐ Keep your inspection, financing, and appraisal contingencies.
- ☐ Put every promise in writing, in the contract.
- ☐ Confirm anything legal or costly with a pro before acting.

5 mistakes that cost beginners the most

Learn these here, for free, instead of paying tuition for them later.

Almost all real estate pain comes from a short list of avoidable mistakes. None of them are exotic — they're ordinary, repeated, and easy to dodge once you can see them coming. Read this before any big decision.

1 • Skipping pre-approval or the inspection

The two shortcuts that feel efficient and cost the most. *The fix: never skip either to "move faster."*

2 • Falling in love with one specific house

The buyer who can't walk away always overpays. *The fix: love the idea of a home; stay willing to leave any single one.*

3 • Shopping on the monthly payment alone

A comfortable monthly figure can hide a worse loan. *The fix: compare the total cost over the years you'll keep it.*

4 • Investing on hope, not numbers

"It'll appreciate" is a bet, not a plan. *The fix: make the deal work on cash flow and loan paydown first.*

5 • Not asking a professional the one key question

The costliest mistakes are usually one phone call away from being avoided. *The fix: when the stakes are high, pay for the expert — it pays you back.*

Almost every expensive mistake in real estate is a calm decision skipped under pressure. Slow down at the big moments — that single habit is worth more than any tactic.

You've got the map. *Ready for the whole journey?*

This guide is the crash course. The complete book is the field manual you'll keep coming back to.

If these pages made real estate feel readable, you'll love what we built next. **Real Estate, Made Readable** is the full, plain-language field guide — every step from your first home to your first portfolio, with the jargon explained, the math walked through slowly, and the legal traps flagged. It's organised in three levels so it grows with you.

THE COMPLETE GUIDE

Real Estate, *Made Readable*

17 in-depth chapters · diagrams and worked examples · a full glossary, decision cheat-sheets, and "ask a pro" flags throughout. One book, three levels:

Foundations

The words, the people, and how the money really works.

The Transaction

Buying, the offer, inspections, closing, and selling — step by step.

Building

How investors think, analysing deals, financing, and scaling.

Everything in this starter guide — and the hundred questions it left you with — answered calmly, in one place.

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Plus free tools, fresh guides, and checklists at **realistely.com** — kept current by the Realistely team as rules and markets change.

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You started at zero.
Look how far that already goes.

You don't have to be an expert to make good real estate decisions. You have to know the words, run the numbers, read the documents, and call a professional at the right moments. You've just learned how all four begin.

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