PERSONAL FINANCE × AI · GUIDE 07

Buy a House
You Can Actually Afford

What you can afford and what a lender will approve are two different numbers. These prompts find the first one, then stress test it before you sign.

WHAT'S INSIDE

— What house can I actually afford?

— Rent or buy?

— The true cost of owning this house

— Build my down payment savings plan

— Compare these mortgage offers

— Review my closing costs

— ...and 2 more

8 PROMPTS · 2 INTERVIEW-STYLE

WORKS WITH CHATGPT AND CLAUDE · NO CODING REQUIRED

How to Use These Prompts

The biggest number in most people's lives. Worth being slow and specific about.

> START HERE
>
> **What house can I actually afford?** is the one to run first. It's an interview prompt — instead of dumping a wall of questions on you, the AI asks one question at a time and uses each answer to decide what to ask next, the way a good advisor would. Everything else in this guide builds on what that conversation produces.

Six rules that make these work

Use real numbers

Vague inputs get vague outputs. Pull up your actual bank app before you start.

Net, not gross

Use what lands in your checking account after taxes and deductions — not your salary.

Turn on memory

In your ChatGPT or Claude settings. Then you stop re-explaining your situation every chat.

Stay in one chat

Keep this topic in its own conversation so context builds instead of resetting.

Answer honestly

These prompts tell the AI to push back on you. That only works if your inputs are real.

Don't stop at the first answer

Ask follow-ups. The second and third response is usually where it gets specific.

GUIDE 07 · BUYING A HOUSE

The Prompts

01	What house can I actually afford?	INTERVIEW PROMPT
02	Rent or buy?	DECISION PROMPT
03	The true cost of owning this house	ANALYSIS PROMPT
04	Build my down payment savings plan	INTERVIEW PROMPT
05	Compare these mortgage offers	DECISION PROMPT
06	Review my closing costs	ANALYSIS PROMPT
07	Stress test this purchase	ANALYSIS PROMPT
08	Bigger down payment or keep the cash?	DECISION PROMPT

PRO TIP

Paste the prompt exactly as written, including the bracketed placeholders. The instructions telling the AI to ask one question at a time, push back on vague answers, and give you a specific deliverable are doing most of the work — deleting them is why generic prompts return generic advice.

01

What house can I actually afford?

INTERVIEW PROMPT

The flagship. What you can afford, not what you'll be approved for.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
Help me figure out what house I can actually afford. I want the number that fits my life,
not the maximum a lender will approve me for — those are very different.

Interview me one question at a time. One question, wait for my answer, then decide what to
ask next based on what I said. Don't send me a list.

Find out: my take-home income and whether it's stable, my full monthly budget, my current
savings and how much I'd put down, my credit score range, my existing debts and payments,
where I'm looking and what property taxes and insurance run there, whether I'd need HOA or
PMI, my job stability, whether my household size is likely to change, and what I currently
pay for housing.

When you have enough, give me:
1. A maximum purchase price and a comfortable target price that's likely lower
2. A full monthly cost breakdown at that price: principal, interest, taxes, insurance, PMI
if applicable, HOA, plus a realistic maintenance reserve
3. The gap between what a lender would approve and what I should actually spend, in
dollars, and why the gap exists
4. Cash needed at closing, all in — down payment, closing costs, moving, and immediate
move-in expenses
5. What this does to my other financial goals, stated plainly
6. Whether I'm actually ready, or whether waiting 12 to 18 months would put me in a much
stronger position

Assume a current-ish mortgage rate but tell me to verify the actual rate, and show me how
the numbers shift at one point higher and one point lower.
```

02

Rent or buy?

DECISION PROMPT

Run the real comparison before assuming renting is throwing money away.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
Help me decide whether to rent or buy. My situation:
- Current rent, all in: [amount]
- Home I'd be considering: [price, location, property tax rate, insurance estimate, HOA]
- Down payment available: [amount]
- Likely mortgage rate: [rate]
- How long I'd realistically stay: [years]
- Income and tax situation: [details]
- What I'd do with the down payment money if I kept renting: [invested / spent / other]

Give me a year-by-year comparison over my expected stay:
1. Total cost of renting, with a realistic rent increase assumption
2. Total cost of owning — mortgage, taxes, insurance, PMI, HOA, maintenance at a realistic
percentage, and closing costs on both ends
3. Equity built versus what the down payment could have earned invested instead
4. Net position at the end under each path
5. The break-even year — the point at which buying pulls ahead

Then tell me the honest answer for my timeline. If I'm not staying long enough for buying
to make sense, say so.

Also cover what doesn't show up in the math: flexibility, maintenance responsibility, and
control over my housing costs.
```

03

The true cost of owning this house

ANALYSIS PROMPT

Everything the mortgage calculator leaves out.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I'm considering this property:
[address or details — price, square footage, year built, property taxes, HOA, condition,
any known issues]

Build me the complete monthly and annual cost of owning it. Include everything a mortgage
calculator leaves out:
1. Principal and interest at [rate] with [down payment]
2. Property taxes, and what happens when it's reassessed after purchase
3. Homeowners insurance, and flag if this location has flood, wind, or wildfire exposure
that raises it
4. PMI, if applicable, and when it drops off
5. HOA dues and their history of increases
6. Utilities — estimate based on the size and age of the home, and note if it's likely to
be expensive to heat or cool
7. Maintenance reserve at a realistic percentage of home value per year
8. A capital expenditure schedule — roof, HVAC, water heater, windows — with expected
lifespan and replacement cost given the home's age

Then give me the total realistic monthly cost, and compare it to what a lender would tell
me the payment is. That difference is what I need to actually plan for.
```

04

Build my down payment savings plan

INTERVIEW PROMPT

Interview-style, ends in a date.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I want to buy a house and I need a plan to save the down payment. Interview me one
question at a time to build it — one question, wait for my answer, then decide what to ask
next.

Find out: my target price range and location, my target timeline, what I have saved now,
my monthly budget and what I can realistically set aside, my credit score, my current
debts, whether I'd qualify for any first-time buyer or state-level programs, and whether I
have access to a gift or other lump sum.

Then give me:
1. The full cash target — down payment plus closing costs plus moving plus a reserve for
immediate repairs, because arriving at closing with zero left is a bad position
2. Whether a smaller down payment with PMI would get me in sooner and what that costs
versus waiting
3. A monthly savings number and my target date
4. Where to keep this money given my timeline
5. Everything else I should be doing in parallel — credit, debt-to-income, documentation,
avoiding new credit lines
6. Milestones so I can tell if I'm on track

If my timeline and my savings rate don't match, tell me directly and give me the options:
save more, buy less, or wait longer.
```

05

Compare these mortgage offers

DECISION PROMPT

Points, credits, and rate are one decision, not three.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I have multiple mortgage offers. Compare them properly.

[paste each offer: lender, rate, points, lender credits, term, loan type, all fees,
monthly payment, APR]

For each offer:
1. Total cost over five years and over the full term
2. The real cost of any points, and the break-even month — how long I'd need to stay for
points to pay off
3. Every fee, separated into lender fees, third-party fees, and prepaid items, with which
are negotiable
4. Whether the APR difference reflects real cost differences or just fee structure

Then:
- Rank them by total cost at my realistic time in the home, not at 30 years
- Tell me which offer is best and by how many dollars
- Tell me what to ask each lender to try to improve their offer, and whether it's
reasonable to take the best offer back to another lender

Flag anything that looks unusual, and anything I should be asking about that isn't on
these sheets.
```

06

Review my closing costs

ANALYSIS PROMPT

Some of these are negotiable. Some are not.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
Here's my loan estimate or closing disclosure. Review it line by line.

[paste]

For each charge, tell me:
1. What it actually is, in plain language
2. Whether it's a lender fee, a third-party service fee, a government charge, or a prepaid item
3. Whether it's negotiable, shoppable, or fixed
4. Whether the amount is normal, high, or unusual for my area and loan size

Then give me:
- Total closing costs as a percentage of the loan
- The specific line items I should question or push back on, with what to say
- Anything that appears to be duplicated or padded
- Any charge I could shop for a better price on, and where
- What changed from my original loan estimate, if I paste both, and whether the lender is allowed to change it

Be specific about dollar amounts I could realistically save.
```

07

Stress test this purchase

ANALYSIS PROMPT

Before you sign, not after.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I'm about to buy a house at [price] with [down payment] at [rate], giving me a total
monthly housing cost of [amount]. My take-home income is [amount] and here's the rest of
my budget: [paste].

Stress test it. For each scenario, tell me exactly what happens month by month and what
breaks first:
1. I lose my job — how many months can I cover the mortgage, and what do I cut?
2. My income drops 25% permanently
3. A $15,000 repair lands in year two — roof, HVAC, foundation
4. Property taxes get reassessed upward after purchase
5. Insurance premiums rise sharply, which is happening in many areas
6. Interest rates change, if any part of my loan is variable

For each, tell me whether I survive it, survive it painfully, or don't survive it.

Then give me the honest verdict: is this purchase price safe for me, tight, or reckless?
And what price would make it comfortable instead?

Don't be diplomatic. I'd rather hear it now.
```

08

Bigger down payment or keep the cash?

DECISION PROMPT

More down isn't automatically better.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I have [amount] in cash. I'm buying a house at [price] with a rate of [rate]. Help me
decide how much to actually put down.

Model these options: [list — for example 5%, 10%, 20%, and everything I have]

For each:
1. Monthly payment, and whether PMI applies and what it costs
2. Total interest over the loan
3. Cash left over after closing costs and moving
4. When PMI would drop off, and what it costs me in total until then

Then the part that matters: what my emergency fund looks like under each option after
closing. Buying a house with no cash left is a common and expensive mistake — tell me the
minimum reserve I should keep and why.

Also compare putting extra down against investing that money at a reasonable expected
return, and against paying off any higher-interest debt I have.

Give me a recommendation with a specific number, and tell me what reserve you're
protecting.
```

THE BIG IDEA

Most people get bad answers from AI because they ask bad questions — one vague sentence, no numbers, no context. These prompts fix that by making the AI gather the context first.

The output is only as good as what you feed it. Give it real numbers, answer the questions honestly, and let it tell you things you'd rather not hear. That's the whole point.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This guide and any output generated from these prompts are for informational and personal budgeting purposes only. They do not constitute financial, legal, tax, or investment advice. Any figures, projections, categorizations, or recommendations produced by an AI tool should not be relied upon for making financial decisions. AI-generated content may contain errors or omissions, and details about loan programs, tax rules, and lending terms change frequently — always verify against the official source. Please consult a qualified financial advisor, accountant, or attorney before making major financial choices, tax filings, or investment decisions. Use these prompts as one input in your own thinking, not as a substitute for professional advice.