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Getting pre-approved for a mortgage lets you know how much money you can borrow, the range of interest rates you qualify for and the different mortgage options available to you. According to Zillow's Consumer Housing Trends Report 2022, 85% of sellers say that they prefer to accept an offer from a buyer that is pre-approved. In many cases, buyers' agents also prefer you to have a pre-approval letter before they start showing you potential properties. By getting pre-approved, you can feel confident about making an offer on a home and be one step ahead when it comes time to finalize your mortgage approval after your offer is accepted. A mortgage pre-approval is documentation that shows you're a good candidate for receiving a home loan. To get pre-approved, you'll complete an application and the lender will review your financial information, which includes pulling your credit. Once pre-approved, you'll receive a pre-approval letter with an estimate of how much money you may qualify to borrow, the types of loans available to you and the interest rate you may be able to secure. While a mortgage pre-approval is not a guarantee that you'll receive a loan or a specific interest rate, a pre-approval letter will provide you with enough information to confidently continue your home search. Your lender will also have many of the necessary financial and personal information on-hand to be able to process your loan approval once you have a purchase contract in place. No, a mortgage pre-qualification is not the same as a pre-approval. Unlike a pre-approval, getting pre-qualified doesn't require an in-depth review of your finances. When it comes to choosing between getting pre-qualified versus pre-approved, a pre-approval is going to be more comprehensive and give you a more accurate look at the types of mortgages you qualify for. If you're curious about buying a house, get pre-qualified first to check your buying power. Talking to a lender will give you a reasonable idea about your estimated closing costs, rates, payment, loan amount and so on. Then once you're ready to get serious about buying a home or have already found a home you love, start the mortgage pre-approval process. The mortgage pre-approval process is essentially the start of your loan application. You'll need to provide some key details to the lender in order for them to process your loan. If you have a co-signer, they'll also need to provide their financial information to the lender. Below are a few steps to help get you started. One of the main requirements for mortgage pre-approval is being in good financial standing. Lenders will want to see proof of income, assets and credit history. You'll also need to provide identification and verify your employment. Some of the most common documents that are required of each borrower include: W2 statements (from the last 2 years) Paystubs (from the last 3 to 6 months) Bank statements Driver's license Social security number or individual taxpayer identification number Tax returns A good credit score is key to getting pre-approved. Each lender and loan type has a minimum credit score requirement that will apply to both you and any co-applicant. For conventional loans, lenders usually require a credit score of 620 or higher. Before applying for a pre-approval, take some time to request a free credit report to ensure there are no errors on your report that could be negatively affecting your score. Since completing a pre-approval application may affect your credit score, depending on the lender's pre-approval process, getting a free check that won't impact your credit will give you a rough idea of your current score. You can then use the estimate as a baseline for checking if you meet a lender's mortgage qualifications. Before contacting a lender to get pre-approved, you'll want to compare rates and also interview each of the lenders you plan to work with. You can start by reading lender reviews online or asking friends and family members if they have any recommendations. Another great way to check if a lender is right for you is by talking directly to them. Ask the lender questions about themselves, the lending process, and the loans they offer. Loan requirements vary by lender, along with the interest rates they offer, origination fees, points and closing costs. Shop around for a lender that fits all your loan needs. During the mortgage pre-approval process, your lender will also look at your debt-to-income ratio (DTI), which compares your monthly debt obligations to your monthly income. DTI requirements can vary by lender and loan type, but generally speaking, the lower your monthly debt compared to your income, the better. You can use Zillow's DTI calculator to get an idea of your current debt-to-income ratio. You've collected all your documents, found three or so lenders that meet your needs and are confident about your chances of getting pre-approved. Now it's time to officially start the mortgage pre-approval process. Zillow Home Loans® makes it easy to start the pre-approval process. You can apply and submit all your documents online. Once you finish your application and meet all the necessary qualifications, you'll get a pre-approval letter and a Loan Estimate. The letter will include how much money you're pre-approved to borrow. The Loan Estimate will provide details about your loan, including your monthly mortgage payment, interest rate and closing costs based on your pre-approved loan amount. Keep your pre-approval letter handy. Real estate agents often ask to see your letter before showing you houses, as it demonstrates that you're a serious buyer. You'll also need to include the letter with your offer to the seller when you make an offer on a house. The general guideline is to get a mortgage pre-approval at least 90 days before you plan to buy to give you enough time to find a home and close on your loan. While you can wait to get pre-approved until you've found a home you're ready to make an offer on, a pre-approval can help you during your home search some agents even prefer it. Presenting a pre-approval letter along with your offer will also make your offer stand out among the rest in a more competitive housing market. You'll need to provide a variety of documents and information that demonstrate your creditworthiness to start the pre-approval process. This includes your social security number or individual taxpayer identification number (so the lender can pull your credit reports), pay stubs, bank statements and W2s or tax returns. If you're applying with a co-applicant, they'll need to provide the same information. Because getting pre-approved may require a hard inquiry, depending on the lender's pre-approval process, completing the application may lower your credit score by a few points. The impact you see may vary depending on the total number of inquiries you've had over the past year. If you've had several inquiries, you may see a larger impact on your credit. If your lender does hard inquiries, they will generally stay on your credit report for a year or two, which is why if you're shopping around and comparing multiple lenders, you'll want to apply to each lender within 14 to 45 days of starting the mortgage pre-approval process. Within this time period, all credit inquiries related to pre-approvals will be consolidated into a single hit to your credit score. Remember, the benefits of a mortgage pre-approval typically outweigh the disadvantages of a temporarily lower score. A credit report is good for 180 days, so if you find a home within that time, your credit will not need to be checked again. By continuing to take steps to maintain or improve your credit score, you can reverse any negative impacts. Most lenders can process a pre-approval in less than a day. Make sure you have all the necessary documents handy or the process may take longer. Your mortgage pre-approval amount will depend on your credit profile. Lenders will take into consideration your credit history, credit score, income, debt-to-income ratio and the size of your down payment. Yes, it's possible to get denied a loan after receiving a pre-approval. A mortgage pre-approval doesn't guarantee a loan, but rather lets you know if you'd qualify for a loan based on the information you provide at the time of application. Before you receive a formal loan approval, your lender will need to verify the information you've provided, see the home's appraised value, check for a clear title, and ensure that the home's condition meets the standards of the loan. If you don't end up getting approved, your lender will provide an explanation, alongside some guidance on what you need to do to improve your chances of being approved. The best way to increase your loan approval odds is to ensure your financial profile is as strong as possible. Work to establish good credit, and correct any errors you find on your credit report. Lowering your debt and trying to maintain a steady income will also help. Because your down payment amount is also a factor, make sure you have a plan in place to save for a down payment on your home purchase in order to qualify for a loan amount that fits your goals. The most important reason to get pre-approved is to get an accurate idea of how much you'll be allowed to borrow and what your home budget will be. A pre-approval letter also helps you show real estate agents and sellers that you're serious about buying. In a competitive market, offers with a pre-approval letter included can stand out among the competition. Continue reading these frequently asked questions if you're still curious about home loan preapproval. Why should I get a mortgage preapproval? Mortgage preapproval is beneficial for home buyers for a number of reasons. It helps buyers search for homes within their budget, making for a smoother and more efficient house hunt. It also makes an offer more enticing to a seller, and gets a bulk of the mortgage process done early on. How long does preapproval last? If you're preapproved, you'll receive an approval letter offer that lasts for 60 to 90 days, depending on the lender. After that, you'll need to apply again for a mortgage with bad credit? The credit score needed to buy a house depends on the type of mortgage you're looking to get. For example, conventional loans usually require a credit score of 620, while FHA loans only require a score of 580. If your score is below the minimum, you may not get approved. However, you can still get approved with bad credit. Your chances of getting approved for a mortgage can increase with a bigger down payment or a low DTI. Switching to an FHA loan or taking time to repair your credit before applying can also make homeownership possible. How far in advance should I get approved? You should get approved for a mortgage as soon as you're ready to start searching for homes. More importantly, you should get a mortgage approval as soon as you're financially ready to buy a house. Keep in mind that the better your financial situation is, the more likely you are to get approved. A mortgage is a loan used to purchase or maintain a home, plot of land, or other real estate. The borrower agrees to pay the lender over time, typically in a series of regular payments divided into principal and interest. The property then serves as collateral to secure the loan. A borrower must apply for a mortgage through their preferred lender and meet several requirements, including minimum credit scores and down payments. Mortgage applications undergo a rigorous underwriting process before they reach the closing phase. Mortgage types, such as conventional or fixed-rate loans, vary based on the borrower's needs. Mortgages are loans used to buy homes and other types of real estate. The property itself serves as collateral for the loan. Mortgages are available in a variety of types, including fixed-rate and adjustable-rate. The cost of a mortgage will depend on the type of loan, the term (such as 30 years), and the interest rate that the lender charges. Mortgage rates can vary widely depending on the type of product and the applicant's qualifications. Zoe Hansen / Investopedia Individuals and businesses use mortgages to buy real estate without paying the entire purchase price upfront. The borrower repays the loan plus interest over a specified number of years until they own the property free and clear. Most traditional mortgages are fully amortized. This means that the regular payment amount will stay the same, but different proportions of principal vs. interest will be paid over the life of the loan with each payment. Typical mortgage terms are for 15 or 30 years, but some mortgages can run for longer terms. Mortgages are also known as liens against property or claims on property. If the borrower stops paying the mortgage, the lender can foreclose on the property. For example, a residential homebuyer pledges their house to their lender, which then has a claim on the property. This ensures the lender's interest in the property should the buyer default on their financial obligation. In the case of foreclosure, the lender may evict the residents, sell the property, and use the money from the sale to pay off the mortgage debt. Would-be borrowers begin the process by applying to one or more mortgage lenders. The lender will ask for evidence that the borrower can repay the loan. This may include bank and investment statements, recent tax returns, and proof of current employment. The lender will generally run a credit check as well. If the application is approved, the lender will offer the borrower a loan up to a certain amount and at a particular interest rate. Thanks to a process known as pre-approval, homebuyers can apply for a mortgage after they have chosen a property to buy or even while they are still shopping for one. Being pre-approved for a mortgage can give buyers an edge in a tight housing market because sellers will know that they have the money to back up their offer. Once a buyer and seller agree on the terms of their deal, they or their representatives will meet at what's called a closing. This is when the borrower makes their down payment to the lender. The seller will transfer ownership of the property to the buyer and receive the agreed-upon sum of money, and the buyer will sign any remaining mortgage documents. The lender may charge fees for originating the loan (sometimes in the form of points) at the closing. There are hundreds of options for where you can get a mortgage. You can get a mortgage through a credit union, bank, mortgage-specific lender, online-only lender, or mortgage broker. No matter which option you choose, compare rates across types to make sure that you're getting the best deal. Mortgages come in various forms. The most common types are 30-year and 15-year fixed-rate mortgages. Some mortgage terms are as short as five years, while others can run 40 years or longer. Stretching payments over more years may reduce the monthly payment, but it also increases the total amount of interest that the borrower pays over the life of the loan. Various term lengths include numerous types of home loans, including Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) loans, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) loans available for specific populations that may not have the income, credit scores, or down payments required to qualify for conventional mortgages. The following are just a few examples of some of the most popular types of mortgage loans available to borrowers. The standard type of mortgage is fixed-rate. With a fixed-rate mortgage, the interest rate stays the same for the entire term of the loan, as do the borrower's monthly payments toward the mortgage. A fixed-rate mortgage is also called a traditional mortgage. With an adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM), the interest rate is fixed for an initial term, after which it can change periodically based on prevailing interest rates. The initial interest rate is often below market, which can make the mortgage more affordable in the short term but possibly less affordable in the long term if the rate rises substantially. ARMs typically have limits, or caps, on how much the interest rate can rise each time it adjusts and in total over the life of the loan. A 5/1 adjustable-rate mortgage is an ARM that maintains a fixed interest rate for the first five years and then adjusts each year after that. Other, less common types of mortgages, such as interest-only mortgages and payment-option ARMs, can involve complex repayment schedules and are best used by sophisticated borrowers. These loans may feature a large balloon payment at the end. Many homeowners got into financial trouble with these types of mortgages during the housing bubble of the early 2000s. As their name suggests, reverse mortgages are a very different financial product. They are designed for homeowners age 62 or older who want to convert part of the equity in their homes into cash. These homeowners can borrow against the value of their home and receive the money as a lump sum, fixed monthly payment, or line of credit. The entire loan balance becomes due when the borrower dies, moves away permanently, or sells the home. Within each type of mortgage, borrowers have the option to buy discount points to lower their interest rate. Points are essentially a fee that borrowers pay upfront to have a lower interest rate over the life of their loan. When comparing mortgage rates, compare rates with the same number of discount points for a true apples-to-apples comparison. How much you'll have to pay for a mortgage depends on the type (such as fixed or adjustable), its term (such as 20 or 30 years), any discount points paid, and the interest rates at the time. Interest rates can vary from week to week and from lender to lender, so it pays to shop around. Mortgage rates sank to historic lows in 2020 and 2021, recording their cheapest levels in almost 50 years. From roughly the start of the pandemic (April 2020) to Jan. 2022, the 30-year fixed-rate average hovered below 3.50% (including an ultimate low of 2.65%). But 2022 and 2023 saw mortgage rates skyrocket, setting records in the opposite direction. The 30-year fixed-rate average breached the 7% threshold for the first time in 20 years in Oct. 2022. This past October, the rate was closer to 8%, notching a 24-year peak reading of 7.79%. In the months since then, the 30-year mortgage rate has fluctuated, dropping by more than a percentage point by the end of 2023 and surpassing 7% again in April and May 2024. According to the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp., average interest rates looked like this as of April 2025: 30-year fixed-rate mortgage: 6.83% 15-year fixed-rate mortgage: 6.03% Banks, savings and loan associations, and credit unions were once virtually the only sources of mortgages. Today, however, a burgeoning share of the mortgage market includes nonbank lenders such as Better, loanDepot, Rocket Mortgage, and SoFi. If you're shopping for a mortgage, an online mortgage calculator can help you compare estimated monthly payments based on the type of mortgage, the interest rate, and how large a down payment you plan to make. It can also help you determine how expensive a property you can reasonably afford. In addition to the principal and interest you'll be paying on the mortgage, the lender or mortgage servicer may set up an escrow account to pay local property taxes, homeowners insurance premiums, and other expenses. Those costs will add to your monthly mortgage payment. Also, note that if you make less than a 20% down payment when you take out your mortgage, your lender may require that you purchase private mortgage insurance (PMI), which becomes another monthly cost. If you have a mortgage, you still own your home (instead of the bank). Your bank may have loaned you money to purchase the house, but rather than owning the property, they impose a lien on it (the house is used as collateral, but only if the loan goes into default). If you default and foreclose on your mortgage, however, the bank may become the new owner of your home. The price of a home is often far greater than the amount of money that most households save. As a result, mortgages allow individuals and families to purchase a home by putting down only a relatively small down payment, such as 20% of the purchase price, and obtaining a loan for the balance. The loan is then secured by the value of the property in case the borrower defaults. Mortgage lenders must approve prospective borrowers through an application and underwriting process. Home loans are only provided to those with sufficient assets and income relative to their debts to practically carry the value of a home over time. A person's credit score is also evaluated when deciding to extend a mortgage. The interest rate on the mortgage also varies, with riskier borrowers receiving higher interest rates. Mortgages are offered by a variety of sources. Banks and credit unions often provide home loans. There are also specialized mortgage companies that deal only with home loans. You may also employ an unaffiliated mortgage broker to help you shop around for the best rate among different lenders. Many mortgages carry a fixed interest rate. This means that the rate will not change for the entire term of the mortgage, typically 15 or 30 years, even if interest rates rise or fall in the future. A variable- or adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM) has an interest rate that fluctuates over the loan's life based on what interest rates are doing. Lenders generally issue a first or primary mortgage before allowing a second one. This additional mortgage is commonly known as a home equity loan. Most lenders don't provide for a subsequent mortgage backed by the same property. There's technically no limit to how many junior loans you can have on your home as long as you have the equity, debt-to-income ratio, and credit score to get approved for them. The word "mortgage" comes from Old English and French, meaning "death vow." It gets that name since this type of loan "dies" when it is either fully repaid or if the borrower defaults. Mortgages are an essential part of home buying for most borrowers who aren't sitting on hundreds of thousands of dollars of cash to buy a property outright. Different types of home loans are available for whatever your circumstances may be. Different government-backed programs allow more people to qualify for mortgages and make their dream of homeownership a reality, but comparing the best mortgage rates will make the home-buying process more affordable.

Mortgage approval. Criteria for mortgage approval. Mortgage guidelines. Mortgage approval in principle. Income guidelines for mortgage approval. General guidelines for mortgage approval.