

First-Look Home Inspection Checklist

Here's what to look for in your initial house visit, and why it's important to take a special look at these items. Jot down your findings on the little form that follows.

- Examine the roof.** If the roofline is sagging, be prepared for foundation problems. Ask how old the roof is. A roof ten years old or older will probably need replacing soon, a \$10,000-plus job. Loose, curling, or missing tiles or shingles also indicate a new roof is needed, as do shafts of light in the attic. Complex roofs with lots of gables, intersecting surfaces, and multiple roofing materials are difficult to maintain and expensive to replace.
- Listen for squeaks when you walk.** Squeaks are caused by loose nails, often loosened by sagging or movement in the structure, which may mean settling problems.
- Take cues from your feet.** They'll tell you whether the flooring feels unstable, or the house has started to settle unevenly. As you walk up stairs, make sure the heights feel uniform. And step close to the toilet and tub. If the floor feels soft, leakage may be occurring, possibly caused by the owner's failure to change the seals on the toilet or caulk the wall tiles.
- Use your nose.** At worst, fusty odors or your sudden sniffing may mean a mold problem. Other odors, such as cat urine or cigarette smoke, are also a bother to get rid of and reduce the value of the house. (Or maybe you'll just smell a lot of air freshener, which should make you wonder what's being covered up.)
- Turn on the faucets.** What does the water look like? If you see rust particles or discoloration, the pipes may be rusted, and need replacement. What do you hear? Knocking sounds may mean old, leak-prone pipes. Try turning the faucet to its maximum. If the underlying problem turns out to be low water pressure, this is tough to solve—but should be fixed if you plan on enjoying your showers. Also make sure the hot water arrives within a reasonable length of time.
- Open windows and doors.** If you can't do so easily, that too may be a repair issue.
- Look for signs of water damage.** Look for stains or puddles on the ceiling, around the window frames, by the water heater, under the sink, and all over the floor of the basement, if there is one. Not only are these repairs costly, but because of scares over toxic mold, they can make a house expensive to insure.
- Find the electrical panel.** Is it an old style one, small, and with fuses rather than circuit breakers? That's a several-thousand-dollar upgrade. If you suspect old wiring, look at the plugs near the bathroom and kitchen sinks. If they've been modernized at all, you'll see special plugs with little rectangular "TEST" and "RESET" buttons (these help protect you from water-related electrocution).
- Take note of peeling paint.** A paint job is an easy, cosmetic repair—but nevertheless can mean your paying someone several thousand dollars. And peeling paint can be especially problematic if it's old and lead-based or contains asbestos texturing material.

First-Look Home Inspection Checklist, continued

- Turn light switches on and off, or try turning on many lights and appliances at once.** If the lights flicker, or the electricity goes, there may be a bad connection or a circuit overload. These aren't expensive fixes, but are safety priorities.
- Examine the appliances.** Ask whether the refrigerator, stove, dishwasher, washer and dryer, and other appliances come with the house. Then look to see whether they add value or will require a trip to the dump. Test to make sure they're functional; open the refrigerator door, and light the stove's burners.
- Ask whether the house has a furnace or air conditioner.** You'd be surprised at how many houses still operate on small units that work in only a few rooms. Ask that the furnace or A/C be turned on.
- Look for unprofessional repairs or upgrades.** If the house has been in the hands of unqualified do-it-yourselfers, some work may have to be redone.

Item or Area	Okay	Problem
Roof		
Flooring		
Odors		
Water and plumbing		
Windows		
Doors		
Electrical		
Paint and walls		
Appliances		
Furnace		
Air conditioning		
Exterior		
Other		
Other		

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