UniqueStoreMarket.com

HOME & PRACTICAL | EVERYDAY PRACTICAL

# How to Prepare Your House for Sale

Turn your house into a clean, well-kept, uncluttered home that photographs well and makes a good first impression at every showing, without paying for a renovation.

6-day guide · 6 chapters · Self-Directed Learning Framework

Read this guide online, or browse dozens more, at
uniquestoremarket.com

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Every guide on this site is produced with the Self-Directed Learning Framework: instead of an article that explains a topic at you, it turns the topic into a structure you work through — each chapter with one outcome, a starting action under twelve minutes, the minimum you actually need to know, a worked example, a checklist, and exercises using your own situation. No filler, no re-reading required.

## WHAT'S INSIDE


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 | Walk Through It Like a Buyer and Make Your Fix List | Day 1 · 30 min |
| 02 | The Small Repairs Buyers Actually Notice | Day 2 · 45 min |
| 03 | Declutter So Every Room Looks Bigger | Day 3 · 45 min |
| 04 | Deep Clean, Including the Smell | Day 4 · 60 min |
| 05 | Set Up the Rooms and the First Impression Outside | Day 5 · 45 min |
| 06 | Ready for Photos and Showings | Day 6 · 30 min |

# Walk Through It Like a Buyer and Make Your Fix List

> **Outcome:** "I have one written list of everything a buyer would notice, sorted into fix it, clean it, clear it, or call a professional."

## Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Go outside, then walk in through the front door as if you'd never been there before. Write down the first three things you notice, good or bad.

## The minimum you need to know

You've stopped seeing your own house. The crack above the door, the cable under the desk and the pile on the stairs have been there so long they've become invisible to you. Buyers see all of them, and they read small signs of neglect as a hint that bigger things might be neglected too. So the first job isn't fixing anything. It's seeing the house fresh, room by room, and writing it all down in one list. Walk the route a buyer would take: the street, the entrance, the living areas, the kitchen, the bathrooms, the bedrooms, storage, then the garden. In each room, look for three kinds of problem: things that are damaged or don't work, things that are dirty, and things that are simply in the way. Then put every item into one of four groups: fix it, clean it, clear it, or call a professional. Anything involving wiring, gas, damp, mould or the structure goes into the last group. Don't plan to hide known defects either. In many places sellers are required to disclose known problems, so ask your agent what applies where you live.

## Worked example

**Worked example: the list from one walkthrough.** A couple selling a three-bedroom house do the walkthrough together and write 31 items. Sorted, it comes to 9 to fix (a dripping kitchen tap, two dead bulbs, a loose cupboard door, scuffed hallway walls and more), 8 to clean, 11 to clear (mostly the hallway, the garage and the kitchen counters), and 3 for a professional (a bathroom extractor fan that doesn't work, a damp patch under a window, and a socket that sparked once). The list looked overwhelming until it was sorted. Then 28 of the 31 items turned out to be jobs they could do themselves within two weekends.

## Checklist

- [ ] Walked in from the street as if for the first time
- [ ] Every room visited in the order a buyer would see it
- [ ] Damaged, dirty and in-the-way items all written down
- [ ] Every item sorted into fix, clean, clear or professional
- [ ] Wiring, gas, damp, mould and structural issues marked for a professional
- [ ] Asked your agent what you must disclose where you live

## Exercises

1. Do the full walkthrough and write one list for the whole house.
2. Sort the list into the four groups and count each group.
3. Ask a friend who rarely visits to do the same walk and add anything you missed.

# The Small Repairs Buyers Actually Notice

> **Outcome:** "I have finished the quick repairs from my fix list, the ones a buyer sees or touches during a showing."

## Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Take the fix group from your list and replace every dead light bulb in the house. Most homes have at least one.

## The minimum you need to know

During a showing, buyers open doors, turn on lights, run taps and look closely at walls. The repairs worth your time are the ones they see or touch in those moments. A door that sticks, a light that doesn't come on, a tap that drips or a cupboard handle that wobbles costs little to fix and removes a reason to doubt the house. Expensive upgrades, such as a new kitchen, rarely pay for themselves before a sale. Work through the fix group in this order. Start with anything that doesn't work (bulbs, sticking doors and windows, dripping taps, a running toilet). Then fix anything loose (handles, hinges, skirting boards, a toilet seat). Finish with anything marked (holes and scuffs in walls, cracked sealant around the bath or sink). Small holes take filler and a touch of paint. If a wall needs more than touching up, a fresh coat of a neutral colour is one of the few bigger jobs that usually helps. Leave anything electrical beyond changing a bulb, and anything involving gas or water pressure, to a professional.

## Worked example

**Worked example: one afternoon of repairs.** Working through the 9 fix items from Chapter 1 takes one Saturday afternoon. A new washer stops the kitchen tap, two bulbs are replaced, and the loose cupboard door needs one screw tightened. The hallway scuffs mostly come off with a damp cloth, and the rest are covered with leftover paint. The only item that takes real time is the cracked sealant around the bath: removing it, cleaning the edge and applying a new bead takes about an hour, plus a day to cure before the shower can be used. Total cost: a washer, two bulbs and one tube of sealant.

## Checklist

- [ ] Every dead bulb replaced
- [ ] Sticking doors and windows freed
- [ ] Dripping taps and running toilets fixed or booked in
- [ ] Loose handles, hinges and skirting boards tightened
- [ ] Holes and scuffs filled or touched up
- [ ] Cracked sealant around bath, shower and sink replaced
- [ ] Anything electrical, gas or structural left to a professional

## Exercises

1. Finish every item in the fix group that takes under 15 minutes.
2. List the materials you need for the rest and buy them in one trip.
3. Book the professional jobs from your list, starting with anything to do with safety.

# Declutter So Every Room Looks Bigger

> **Outcome:** "I have cleared each room down to what makes it look spacious and lived-in, with the extras boxed or gone."

## Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Clear the kitchen counters completely, then put back only three things you use every day.

## The minimum you need to know

Buyers are trying to picture their own life in your house. A lot of belongings makes rooms look smaller, makes storage look too small, and keeps reminding them that it's someone else's home. The goal isn't an empty house. A room should look calm and lived-in, with clear surfaces, clear floors and space between the furniture. Go room by room with three boxes or bags: keep out, pack away and get rid of. Keep out only what you use daily and a few things that make the room look finished, such as a lamp or a plant. Pack away the rest, especially personal photos, collections, kids' artwork and most of the clothes in wardrobes. Buyers do open cupboards, and half-full storage looks bigger than full storage. Store the packed boxes neatly in one place, such as the garage, a spare room or a storage unit, rather than spreading them around.

## Worked example

**Worked example: the living room before and after.** A living room has a large sofa, two armchairs, a coffee table covered in magazines and remote controls, three shelves of ornaments and twelve family photos. After the decluttering session, one armchair has gone into storage and the coffee table holds a single bowl. One shelf keeps a few books and a plant, and the photos are packed away. Nothing new was bought, but walking through the room no longer means stepping around furniture, and it looks visibly larger in a phone photo.

## Checklist

- [ ] Three boxes or bags used in every room: keep out, pack away, get rid of
- [ ] Counters and tables cleared to a few items each
- [ ] Floors and walkways completely clear
- [ ] Personal photos and collections packed away
- [ ] Wardrobes and cupboards about half full
- [ ] Packed boxes stored together in one place
- [ ] Unwanted items donated, sold or thrown away

## Exercises

1. Declutter one room completely today, using the three boxes.
2. Take a phone photo of that room before and after, and compare them.
3. Book a charity pickup or a tip run for the get-rid-of pile.

# Deep Clean, Including the Smell

> **Outcome:** "I have deep-cleaned the rooms buyers judge hardest, and the house smells fresh because I removed the causes of bad smells."

## Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Clean the inside of the kitchen sink and the tap until they shine. It takes five minutes and sets the standard for the rest.

## The minimum you need to know

Buyers judge kitchens and bathrooms most closely, so put most of your cleaning time there. Clean from top to bottom so that dust falls onto surfaces you haven't done yet. Do the details people touch or look at closely: taps and limescale, the oven door, the extractor hood, the grout, mirrors, light switches, door handles and skirting boards. Clean windows inside and out where it's safe to reach. More daylight makes every room look better. Smell matters more than most sellers think, and you're the person least able to notice it in your own home. Remove causes rather than covering them with air freshener: empty and clean the bins, wash the pets' bedding, clean the drains, air the house every day and deal with damp. Strong scented products make buyers wonder what's being hidden. When cleaning, never mix products. Bleach combined with ammonia or with acidic cleaners releases toxic gas.

## Worked example

**Worked example: a bathroom that was fine but looked tired.** A bathroom has nothing wrong with it, but limescale on the taps and shower screen, grey grout and a spotty mirror make it look old. One focused session uses a descaler on the taps and screen, a grout brush, a mirror cleaner and an hour of time. The same bathroom now photographs as clean and well looked after, without a single new fitting.

## Checklist

- [ ] Kitchen cleaned top to bottom, including oven, hood and sink
- [ ] Bathrooms descaled, grout cleaned, mirrors spotless
- [ ] Windows cleaned inside and out where safe
- [ ] Switches, handles and skirting boards wiped
- [ ] Floors vacuumed and mopped
- [ ] Sources of smells removed: bins, drains, pet bedding, damp
- [ ] House aired every day instead of using strong scents

## Exercises

1. Deep-clean the kitchen or the main bathroom completely.
2. Ask someone who doesn't live with you to tell you honestly what the house smells like.
3. Write a short daily cleaning routine you'll keep up while the house is on the market.

CHAPTER 5 OF 6 · DAY 5 · 45 MIN

# Set Up the Rooms and the First Impression Outside

> **Outcome:** "I have arranged every room so its purpose is obvious and it looks light and spacious, and the outside invites people in."

## Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Stand across the street from your house for two minutes and note the first thing a passer-by would notice.

## The minimum you need to know

With the house clear and clean, set up each room so a buyer understands it straight away. Every room should have one obvious purpose: a spare room full of boxes should become a bedroom or an office again. Arrange furniture so there's a clear path through each room, and pull it slightly away from the walls if that makes the room feel more open. Open curtains and blinds, and make sure every room has working light. A few finishing touches go a long way: a made bed, fresh towels in the bathroom, a plant, a bowl of fruit in the kitchen. Outside, buyers decide before they reach the door. Mow the lawn, pull weeds, trim back anything that blocks the path or the windows, and sweep the path and driveway. Clean the front door, the doorbell and the house number, and make sure the outside light works. Put bins, tools and toys away. Like the inside, the aim is well kept, not newly landscaped.

## Worked example

**Worked example: turning a box room back into a bedroom.** The third bedroom has been a storage room for years. The listing would call it a bedroom, but the photos would show boxes. After the boxes move to the garage (Chapter 3), the room gets the single bed from the loft, a bedside table, a lamp and a plain cover. Ten minutes outside follow: the hedge is trimmed back from the front window, the path is swept and the door is wiped down. Both the room and the front of the house now match what the listing says.

## Checklist

- [ ] Every room has one clear purpose
- [ ] Clear walking path through every room
- [ ] Curtains and blinds open, all lights working
- [ ] Beds made and fresh towels out
- [ ] Lawn mowed, weeds pulled, path and drive swept
- [ ] Front door, bell and house number clean, outside light working
- [ ] Bins, tools and toys put away

## Exercises

1. Pick the room with the least clear purpose and set it up as one thing.
2. Spend 30 minutes on the front of the house, then photograph it from the street.
3. Move one piece of furniture in the living room and check whether the room feels more open.

# Ready for Photos and Showings

> **Outcome:** "I can get the house photo-ready in one session and reset it for a showing in about 15 minutes, every time."

## Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Take one photo of the living room with your phone, held level from a corner, on a bright day with all lights on. Look at it for anything distracting.

## The minimum you need to know

Most buyers see your listing photos before they ever see your house, so photo day deserves its own preparation. Choose a bright day and open all curtains. Turn on every light, including lamps. Clear the last small items from counters and sinks, close toilet lids, hide bins, cables and cleaning products, and remove cars from the drive. Photos should show the house as it really is. Buyers who feel misled by the photos start the showing disappointed. Showings are harder than photo day because they repeat while you're living there. Make a short reset routine and keep everything for it in one place: clear the counters, wipe the kitchen and bathroom, make the beds, empty the bins, open the curtains, turn on the lights and air the house. Have a box ready for the day's clutter. Put away valuables and anything with personal information, such as post, keys and medicines. Then leave during the showing if you can, so buyers can talk freely.

## Worked example

**Worked example: a 15-minute reset before a showing.** A seller gets a call: a buyer wants to come in an hour. They follow the routine taped inside a kitchen cupboard. Dishes go into the dishwasher, the counters are wiped, and the bathroom sink and mirror get a quick clean. Beds are pulled straight, the bins emptied and the windows opened. Everything left on surfaces goes into the clutter box, which goes into the car. Curtains open, lights on. It takes 14 minutes, and they leave for a walk with the dog ten minutes before the buyer arrives.

## Checklist

- [ ] Photo day set for a bright day, with curtains open and all lights on
- [ ] Counters, sinks and drive cleared before the photos
- [ ] Photos checked for honesty and distracting details
- [ ] Reset routine written down and kept in one visible place
- [ ] Clutter box ready for showing days
- [ ] Valuables, post, keys and medicines put away before every showing
- [ ] Plan to be out of the house during showings

## Exercises

1. Photograph your three most important rooms and pick the best shot of each.
2. Write your reset routine and time yourself doing it once.
3. Do a final walkthrough with your Chapter 1 list and tick off what's done.

## MORE FROM THIS LIBRARY

This guide is one of dozens of free, self-paced guides at uniquestoremarket.com/library. Every guide follows the same structure and is produced with the Self-Directed Learning Framework — see the prompt behind it at uniquestoremarket.com/craft.