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FOR HOME BUYERS

7 Homebuyer Strategies

TO THE LOWEST PAYMENT WHEN RATES ARE HIGH — 2026

Hey there! I’m Nehemias Lugo-Cheverez. When interest rates are high, the smartest buyers don’t just chase a lower purchase price — they lower their *total cost of ownership*. Here are seven strategies I use to help my buyers get the lowest possible monthly payment.

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THE BIG IDEA

It’s not just the price — it’s the payment.

Two homes at the exact same price can cost hundreds of dollars a month apart once you factor in taxes, insurance, and financing. There’s no bad time to buy the right home at the right payment — and if rates come back down later, you can always refinance. These seven strategies help you find that payment now.

1 Put Your Best Credit Foot Forward

In today’s market, a higher credit score can mean a meaningfully better rate. Monitor your real FICO score (not a “fake-o” score) and apply when it’s at its peak — a pulled report is typically good for 4–6 months. Hold off on big purchases, new credit cards, or a new car before and during the buying process. Pay your card balances down *before* the statement closes so a low balance gets reported, and ask for credit-limit increases on cards you carry a balance on. Pay on time and avoid collections.

2 Shop Around for Home Insurance

Insurance is part of your total cost of ownership — and it varies a lot by property. Identify your insurance agent early, and get quotes during the inspection period while you still have leverage. Roof age, plumbing, electrical wiring, and an unfenced pool all drive premiums up. If a quote comes back high, you can ask the seller to make repairs (a new roof, updated wiring, a pool fence) — or walk away.

3 Request an Audit of Past Utility Bills

You can’t tell how efficient a home is just by looking at it. During the inspection period, ask the seller for utility bills across multiple seasons — winter *and* summer. Older homes, poor insulation, and older appliances can mean a much higher bill than you’d expect. If the numbers are concerning, negotiate for a new AC unit, water heater, insulation, or windows — or look at a different home.

4 Understand the Fixed Costs You Can’t Fix

Property taxes, HOA/condo dues, and flood insurance can add hundreds a month even between similarly priced homes. Don’t rely on last year’s tax bill — a sale can trigger a reassessment to current market value, especially if the seller held a longtime tax exemption. Check FEMA flood maps early; a home doesn’t have to be coastal to sit in a flood zone. And if you’re ever over-assessed after closing, you can challenge it with the county.

5 Get the Best Mortgage Deal

Talk to more than one lender — quotes can vary significantly when rates are high. Consider buying down your rate with discount points, and compare an adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM) to a fixed rate if this might be a stepping-stone home. A larger down payment lowers your payment and can eliminate mortgage insurance. VA loans carry no monthly mortgage insurance (a major benefit for veterans); FHA has a low down payment but higher insurance; conventional loans require mortgage insurance under 20% down.

6 Use Seller Contributions to Save

Ask the seller to help lower your *payment*, not just the price. A temporary buydown (2-1 or 3-2-1) has the seller cover part of your rate for the first year or two. A permanent buydown has them pay discount points for your full loan term. And if you're putting down less than 20%, having the seller buy out your mortgage insurance instead of cutting the price can save more per month than the equivalent price reduction. Also ask about assumable loans — many VA loans can be assumed at the seller's original (often much lower) rate.

7 Negotiate for the Right Things

A price cut isn't always the best use of your negotiating power. Using your inspection-period leverage to fund a rate buydown, a mortgage insurance buyout, or repairs that lower your insurance and utility costs usually saves you more, every single month, than the same dollar amount taken off the purchase price. The goal isn't the lowest price — it's the lowest total monthly cost of ownership.

READY TO BUY SMARTER?

Let's find your payment.

I'll walk you through every one of these strategies as we shop — so you get the lowest possible payment on the home that's right for you.

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