

- How to Buy 1st Home
- Home Staging Advice
- Buyers' Market Offers
- Sellers' Worst Mistake
- Interview Your Agent

- Buying a Home
- Finding a Lender
- Selling a House
- Offers & Negotiations
- Financing Advice
- Real Estate Agents
- Home Inspections
- Home Disclosures
- Investment Properties
- Foreclosures & Short Sales
- Market Facts & Trends
- Second Homes
- Home Styles
- Real Estate Vendors

- Before You Buy
- Top Picks
- Home Buying Books
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Doing the Final Home Inspection Walk-Through



From [Elizabeth Weintraub](#),
Your Guide to [Home Buying / Selling](#).
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What's a Final Walk-Through?

Final walk-throughs are not a home inspection. It's not a time to begin negotiations with the seller to do repairs, nor is it a contingency. A final walk-through is an inspection performed anywhere from a few hours to five days before closing, and its primary purpose is to make certain that the property is in the condition you agreed to buy -- that agreed-upon repairs, if any, were made and nothing has gone wrong with the home since you last looked at it.

Buyers are often pressed for time as the day draws near for closing, which means buyers can be tempted to pass on the final walk-through. It is never a good idea to forego the final walk-through.

Vacant Homes

Sellers often move out before closing. Ever watch HGTV's [House Hunters](#) and try to guess which home the buyers will choose? Well, I'll let you in on a secret.

It's the vacant house! Trust me, nine times out of 10, it's the vacant one. That's because they film the show backwards, starting with the house the buyer purchased, just before it closes escrow.

Now, in situations where the seller has already moved out, it is even more imperative that buyers conduct a final walk-through. Problems arise when homes sit vacant for any period of time. For example, when termite companies test showers, they plug the shower drain and let the water run. Guess what happens if the termite inspector forgets to remove all the paper over the drain and doesn't completely turn off the shower handle? A small drip, drip, drip can turn into a flooded bathroom. You don't want to find out your home is flooded after you buy it.

Case Example



Flooded Bathrooms are Disasters
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Let's call these clients Angie and Carl. They were a few days away from closing on an adorable California bungalow. This house was owned by a local sportswriter who had been transferred to Phoenix, and the owner left shortly after putting the home on the market. The home inspection went smoothly, and the home inspector did not note any items that required immediate attention. In fact, there was nothing about this situation that was cause for alarm.

The day Angie and Carl arrived for the final walk-through, they were advised to turn on all the lights, run water and make sure the stove worked, all those sorts of logical precautions, but these buyers were engrossed in other spur-of-the-moment distractions and "new home" excitement. Instead of listening to their agent's advice, they were discussing their sofa placement and which window treatments they should buy for the living room. Although it is not within my scope to perform a final walk-through for clients, it was apparent that the buyers had no interest and would likely, if given the chance, have waived the final walk-through. I could hear them in the back yard talking about how far the present decking could extend before striking the fence as I wandered around the house turning on lights, and then I hit the handle on the toilet. All of a sudden Angie screamed. I dashed into the back yard in time to witness a geyser -- water gushing from the ground! And it smelled.

If I hadn't depressed the flushing mechanism on the toilet, we would never have had subsequently discovered that the sewer line had tree roots growing in it. The following day we received an estimate of \$5,000 to fix it. Since we were a few days away from closing, we had time to withhold that money from the seller's proceeds and order the work completed.


Here is a list of items to check on a final walk-through:

- Turn on and off every light fixture
- Run water & look under sinks for leaks
- Test all appliances
- Check garage door openers
- Open and close all doors
- Flush toilets
- Inspect ceilings, wall and floors
- Run garbage disposal and exhaust fans
- Test heating and air conditioning
- Open and close windows
- Make sure all debris is removed from the home


When the Home is Occupied

Sometimes sellers don't move out until the day the transaction closes or even a few days after closing. In those situations, I recommend that buyers do a final walk-through in the presence of the seller. Why? Because the seller knows all the little quirks about the home and can answer questions the buyers may have.

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A good question to ask a seller is:

- What is the one improvement you've always wanted but never got around to implementing?




This is also a good time to ask the seller for a forwarding address so the buyers can send mail. It's smart to stay on good terms with the seller and, in some parts of the country, like California, buyers almost never meet the sellers. Moreover, because you never know when you might need to get in touch with the former owners, the final walk-through is an excellent opportunity, as strange as this may sound, for the parties to say hello.

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