



Shaper's First Home Field Guide

July 2025

Welcome.

You've probably heard the story:

"You need 20% saved."

"You missed the market."

"Rates are too high."

It's mostly noise. And it's mostly wrong.

The truth is, people are getting into homes every week with 5% deposits, average incomes, and little more than a plan and the right lender.

What holds most buyers back isn't money - it's misinformation.

This guide is here to arm you with the kind of insight most people don't get until it's too late. The kind of stuff banks won't explain. The stuff most brokers never mention. The stuff that actually moves the needle.

Not fluff. Not filler. Just what you need to move forward — and not get stuck.

Let's get into it.

- The Brokerage Team at Shaper

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1. What Actually Matters When Buying Your First Home

Not everything matters equally.
And not everything the bank asks for... actually matters to your success.

Here's what does.

a) Your Deposit

“One in three first home buyers took up the scheme in FY2023–24”

Housing Australia Home Guarantee Scheme Trends & Insights Report 2023–24

Not 20%. Not even 10%.

Many people buying their first home today are using 5% deposits, backed by government guarantees that waive lenders mortgage insurance (LMI).

The secret is knowing which lenders support it - and which ones actually mean it.

Pro tip: Some banks say they support the 5% scheme, but quietly filter out most applicants. Don't be disheartened after one disapproval. But do try to keep your credit file healthy saving your applications for only banks that truly support the scheme.

b) Your Income

It's not just what you earn - it's how you earn it.
Salaries are easy to review. But what if your income includes:

- ▼ Bonuses
- ▼ Overtime
- ▼ Commission
- ▼ Parental leave or casual hours?

Some lenders ignore these. Some count half.
Many big lenders will consider parts of it, but only with minimum timelines, i.e 2 years of consistency.

The good news is there are still some great lenders who are much more lenient, or will consider career and whether additional income is 'normal' in that field.

For example, one large bank still accepts at face value, a certain amount of overtime for careers 'expected' to have it, like in Medical fields, or 'expected' commissions for some careers, without needing 2 years of proof.

TL;dr, some lenders will count additional income properly - if you know how and who to present it to.

c) Timing

Trying to "time the market" is usually code for doing nothing.

And in that time, property values, interest rates, and policies shift. Often not in your favour.

The better move? Know your position now, so you're ready when the right moment finds you.

Median House Price (Sydney)

Buyer	Bought In	House Price	2025 Value	Growth	Growth
Buyer A	2015	\$870,000	~\$1,260,000	~+45%	\$390,000
Buyer B	2020	\$1,100,000	~\$1,380,000	~+25%	\$280,000

Based on CoreLogic & Domain median Sydney house prices from 2015 and 2020, with 2025 forecasts by KPMG & Domain.

Even though Buyer B waited and bought just before one of the rarest property booms (COVID), they still couldn't beat time. Buyer A, who bought 5 years earlier, ended up with more equity - and avoided 5 extra years of rent too.

d) Structure

Think of your loan as just the financial 'tool'. The structure determines how useful that tool is, both across time and across different scenarios.

For example, if you are expecting to upgrade in 3–5 years?, you'll want to forgo some immediate benefits to instead avoid high break fees or fixed terms that limit future borrowing.

Structure isn't decoration - it's leverage.

e) **Your Risk Profile**

This is where most brokers get lazy.
Because lenders don't ask for it. But your risk tolerance changes everything.

- ▼ Hate variability? Fixed rate and offset might make sense.
- ▼ Happy with short-term discomfort for long-term gain? You could optimise for equity growth and refinance later.
- ▼ Want breathing room? Then maybe you go interest-only for a year or two.

The best loan isn't the one you can get - it's the one that won't box you in.

f) **In short?**

It's not about the biggest deposit, the highest income, or waiting for perfect timing.
It's about using the right levers, in the right order, with the right lender.

That's how you get in - and get ahead.

2. **The Real Guide to Schemes & Support in 2025**

More options than you think. Less fine print than you fear.

There's more support for first-home buyers in Australia than most people realise.
But each scheme comes with conditions, caveats - and a lot of confusion. You can review each in the following section.

a) First Home Guarantee (FHBG)

Buy with just 5%. Pay No LMI, as The Federal Government guarantees your loan.

You avoid lenders mortgage insurance (which can be \$15–30k)

You still need to qualify with a lender - but some banks are better than others

Key Facts:

- ▼ Must be an owner-occupied home
- ▼ Income cap: \$125k (single) / \$200k (couple)
- ▼ Property price caps apply by region
- ▼ You don't need to be a citizen – permanent residents are now included (from July 2025)

⚠ Some banks technically support this – but set stricter rules internally. The right lender makes or breaks this scheme.

b) Regional First Home Guarantee (RFHBG)

5% deposit. No LMI. Designed for regional postcodes. Same benefits as the First Home Guarantee

But with a separate, reserved pool of places just for regional buyers.

Key Facts:

- ▼ Must be buying in an eligible regional area
- ▼ You (or your partner) must have lived in the region for at least 12 months
- ▼ Income caps and property limits are the same as FHBG

💡 If you're buying regionally, applying through the Regional scheme often gives you a better shot at approval - since it's less competitive than the standard version.

c) Shared Equity Schemes (VIC only – Homebuyer Fund)

Buy with 2% – the government chips in 25–40%.

The VIC government co-buys part of your home. You pay no interest or rent on their portion

You'll eventually repay their share when you sell, refinance, or buy them out.

Key Facts:

- ▼ 2% minimum deposit
- ▼ Property price cap: \$950k in metro areas
- ▼ Income caps: \$93k (single), \$124k (couple)
- ▼ Must be an owner-occupier
- ▼ You need to be comfortable with giving up a share of your home's growth

🔍 This works best when you want to get in fast – but may cost more in the long term if the property grows quickly.

d) Super Saver Scheme

Withdraw voluntary super contributions to use as a deposit, up to **\$15,000 per financial year, capped at \$50,000 total.**

Key Info:

- ▼ If you're serious about buying in 12+ months and you're already saving, contributing via super can accelerate your deposit - while reducing tax.
- ▼ You need to plan ahead - it's not instant
- ▼ You can't use existing super (like employer contributions)
- ▼ You'll need to apply for a release and wait ~20 business days for funds.

💡 Smart use: Save through super for 1–2 years, claim your \$50k, then use it with a 5% deposit scheme to unlock a better deal - and avoid LMI.

e) Stamp Duty Concessions

Thousands in savings - if you qualify.

Stamp duty is one of the biggest upfront costs buyers don't plan for - often \$15–30k depending on the property and state.

But if you're a first-home buyer, you may be able to reduce or eliminate it.

Many people qualify for a concession without realising – especially when combining multiple schemes.

Getting this right can fast-track your timeline by 6–12 months.

VIC (Victoria)

- ▼ No stamp duty for homes up to \$600,000
- ▼ Concessions for homes up to \$750,000
- ▼ Applies to both new and existing homes
- ▼ Must live in the property for 12+ months

WA (Western Australia)

- ▼ No stamp duty for homes under \$430,000
- ▼ Concessions up to \$530,000
- ▼ Land-only purchases also supported

QLD (Queensland)

- ▼ No duty for homes up to \$500,000
- ▼ Discounts up to \$550,000
- ▼ Must move in within 1 year and live there for 1 continuous year

NSW (New South Wales)

- ▼ Choose: stamp duty exemption or annual property tax
- ▼ Full exemption for homes up to \$800,000 (new builds only)
- ▼ Concessions taper off up to \$1 million
- ▼ Annual tax works best for short-term ownership

TAS, NT & ACT

- ▼ Smaller programs, often means-tested or based on property value
- ▼ ACT gradually replacing stamp duty with land tax
- ▼ Always check local eligibility and timing

3. What Banks Don't Say Out Loud

Policies are public. But the approval process isn't.

Approvals aren't just about numbers - they're about narratives. How the bank interprets your situation. How your application feels to their system.

Here's what actually matters - and what no one ever explains.

a) Stated income isn't usable income.

Your payslip might say \$100k. But if:

- ▼ \$30k is bonus or commission
- ▼ You're new in the role
- ▼ You're casual or returning from leave

...some lenders will count only half - some will ignore it entirely. And no, they won't tell you upfront.

b) You're judged on behaviour, not just balance.

Online tools are generic, they can give false confidence, or false rejection.

But real applications have nuance. Lenders review your account history like a behavioural analyst.

- ▼ One missed Afterpay can hurt your borrowing power.
- ▼ Undocumented Parental gifts can get treated as loans
- ▼ A \$600 monthly "gym + streaming" combo can be flagged as excessive living cost

You're not just applying. You're being interpreted.

✦ You can have the same profile as your friend – and get a completely different answer, based on how the loan is packaged and who's reviewing it.

c) **Some banks favour certain borrower types - without ever saying so.**

Yes, discrimination exists. But more often, it's soft preference:

- ▼ Some banks are easier for PAYG employees
- ▼ Others understand self-employed or commission-heavy work
- ▼ Some quietly avoid applicants from certain industries or postcodes

A broker doesn't just find a lender - they find your lender.

d) **Two banks can give wildly different answers - for the same profile.**

One might offer \$700k.

Another: \$500k.

Same income. Same deposit. Same applicant.

Why?

Because banks build their own calculators. Use different buffers. Apply policy differently.

There's no single truth - only interpretation.

e) **Your postcode quietly changes everything.**

Some lenders flag entire suburbs as high risk - often without saying why. It could be due to:

- ▼ Oversupply
- ▼ Flood risk
- ▼ Unemployment
- ▼ Even media sentiment

A flagged postcode can:

- ▼ Lower your borrowing power
- ▼ Trigger higher LMI
- ▼ Lead to automatic declines - without ever showing up in policy

f) **Timing isn't just convenience – it's strategy.**

Lenders' approval times change constantly.
Some are 2 days. Others, 20.

The longer your loan sits in limbo, the more room there is for:

- ▼ Policy changes
- ▼ Interest rate shifts
- ▼ Trigger a re-assessment that resets everything
- ▼ Market value drops

Fast processing isn't a bonus. It's a shield.

g) **'Pre-approval' doesn't mean much - unless you know the rules.**

Some lenders issue auto pre-approvals that don't go through credit.

Others assess them properly - but expire in 60 days.
And none of them protect you from valuation issues or contract delays.

Real certainty isn't about having a letter. It's knowing what can go wrong - and being ahead of it.

h) **Approval isn't binary – it's tiered.**

You might be approved – but with:

- ▼ A lower property cap
- ▼ Reduced loan term
- ▼ LMI costs hidden in the total
- ▼ Extra conditions (like a co-borrower or savings buffer)

The real question isn't "can you get approved?"
It's "what version of approval are you walking into?"

Banks tell you any of this, because they don't have to.
Our clients don't just get a loan - they get a plan that makes sense.

4. The Lenders That (Actually) Work

Not all banks are created equal. And neither are brokers.

Most buyers assume lenders are interchangeable.
Pick one with a good rate, apply, done.

But behind the scenes, brokers see 40+ lenders. All with different products, hidden rules, and priorities that shift month to month.

The real skill? Knowing where to look - and why.

a) The Bank You Know Might Not Work for You

The Big 4 aren't always the best:

- ▼ Some ignore commission or bonuses
- ▼ Some refuse 5% deposit loans unless you meet hidden criteria
- ▼ Some reject applicants based on postcode, industry, or inconsistent savings

You could be the perfect buyer - and still get declined for no obvious reason.

b) Brokers Don't Just "Get You a Loan" - They Map the Terrain

When we scan lenders, we're looking for:

- ▼ Policy fit (do they actually support your income, deposit, structure?)
- ▼ Turnaround speed (can they approve before your contract falls over?)
- ▼ Risk appetite (do they like your profession, your postcode, your story?)
- ▼ Future flexibility (can you refinance or reuse equity without pain?)

It's not matchmaking — it's mission planning.

c) **Rate ≠ Cost**

Some lenders offer the lowest rate - but:

- ▼ Charge high application or annual fees
- ▼ Lock you in with break penalties
- ▼ Have inflexible redraw rules
- ▼ Don't allow offsets or split structures

A low rate that stops you upgrading later? That's not cheap - it's expensive in disguise.

d) **Some Banks Are Quietly Better**

Here's what we've seen across 18+ years:

- ▼ Some niche banks are fantastic with casual income, shift work, or commissions
- ▼ Some digital lenders have fast approvals — but reject for minor technicalities
- ▼ Some credit unions are generous with LMI waivers — but only in certain industries
- ▼ Some major banks are excellent... if you know which team to send it to internally

Don't fall into the trap of there being a single "best lender." It's about right fit for your profile - and your goals.

e) **Strategy > Selection**

You don't need 40 lenders.

You need the 2-3 that would genuinely say yes - and help you move forward now and later.

And that's where a smarter broker makes all the difference.

5. Be Smarter Than Just “Getting In”

Your first home isn't the finish line. It's leverage.
Most brokers aim to get you “in the door.”

But here's the truth: The real cost of a first home isn't what you pay - it's what it stops you doing next.

a) The trap: You buy once. And get stuck.

You take the first loan that says yes. Low rate. Minimal fuss.
You're in.

But 3 years later, when you're ready to upgrade, invest, or renovate - you find:

- ▼ Your equity isn't usable
- ▼ Your loan is cross-secured
- ▼ You're locked into fixed terms or tight redraw rules
- ▼ Your lender doesn't support what you want to do next

So you can't move. Or worse - you have to unwind the whole thing, at a cost.

b) The smarter move: Begin with the end in mind

Your first home shouldn't limit your second.
So if you want to structure your loan with long-term leverage, start by asking:

- ▼ Will I outgrow this property in 3–5 years?
→ If yes, focus on portability and equity access - not just repayments.
- ▼ Could I rent it out later?
→ Then consider offset accounts, IO vs P&I, and tax strategy from day one.
- ▼ Will I want to use this equity again - soon?
→ If so, avoid lenders who lock redraws or limit refinancing windows.

- ▼ Would I rather minimise repayments now - or build headroom for later?
→ That choice changes how you split your loan and structure your cash flow.
- ▼ Is this a first step or a forever home?
→ Because the loan that fits a forever plan might limit flexibility for growth.

Most people never ask these things - and end up paying to undo what was easily avoidable.

c) **Structure isn't admin. It's leverage.**

Great structure lets you:

- ▼ Access equity without reapplying
- ▼ Borrow against growth without selling
- ▼ Keep options open if you change jobs, start a family, or move
- ▼ Invest again — from position, not pressure

This isn't about choosing between fixed and variable.
It's about building a foundation that expands options - not limits them.

d) **Most people never get told this**

Because most brokers are trained to think in transactions - not trajectories.

But that's not how wealth gets built.

The fastest-growing clients we work with?
They planned from the first loan. Not the fifth.

6. The Playbook

Don't just get approved. Get ahead.

This is what we've learned helping thousands of first-home buyers, across every kind of income, lender, and goal.

Not the brochure version.
The real version.

a) Step 1: Decide what matters more - the home or the future.

This shapes everything. Really take the time to consider it, because it's going to be the biggest, longest lasting financial move you ever make. Are you buying:

- ▼ Your "one-day dream" home?
- ▼ Or a launchpad into your next 10 years?

They're rarely the same home, and rarely the same finance structure.

Consider where you'd sit if it was a scale between the two options. If you want future flexibility (renting it out, buying again, accessing equity), you need a structure-first plan - not just "whatever rate gets me in."

b) Step 2: Get your story straight - not just your savings.

Before you apply, make sure your accounts and documents tell a clean, **consistent** narrative.

- ▼ Savings history (no random gaps)
- ▼ Pay consistency (especially if casual or commission-based)
- ▼ Discretionary spending (cut Afterpay, clean up subscriptions, no mystery transfers).

Why it matters: Most declines don't come from low income - they come from invisible risk flags. There's usually more value in better signals, not more money.

c) **Step 3: Run a policy-first lender search - not a rate-first one.**

Most people go rate-hunting. It's intuitive, and it's normal. But really, smart buyers ask:

- ▼ Which lenders are optimised to my income structure?
- ▼ Who actually does the scheme I'm eligible for?
- ▼ Which ones are slow right now?
- ▼ Will this bank flag my property location?

The question becomes:

Is saving \$40/month worth locking yourself into a lender who'll say no next time?

What if it costs you the ability to move again, buy again, or refinance with freedom?

Really consider what's 'cheaper', don't get too swayed by a shiny initial rate. The wrong "great deal" today could cost you thousands in missed moves later.

Best-fit beats best-rate - every time.

d) **Step 4: Build the loan around your next move - not just this one.**

Good structure looks forward:

- ▼ Offset instead of redraw
- ▼ Access to equity, not lock-in clauses
- ▼ Avoiding cross-collateralisation traps

A loan with no escape plan isn't a deal - it's usually a trap.

Build it like you'll need to pivot. Because you probably will.

The most expensive loan isn't the one with the highest rate - It's the one you have to unwind later.

e) **Step 5: If you're using a broker - don't settle for a form-filler.**

Most brokers work like order-takers. You give them some numbers, they punch them into a system, and find you a loan that fits the checkbox.

But that's not where the value is. That's not how they'd do their own home loan.

You want someone who:

- ▼ Understands lender policy shifts - weekly
- ▼ Knows how to make your income work on paper
- ▼ Can structure today's loan to unlock tomorrow's options

A good broker gets you in. A smart one keeps the door open.

7. **What Now?**

You don't need to rush.
You just need to move with intent.

The best outcomes come from people who:

- ▼ Ask sharper questions
- ▼ Get a structure that fits them — not the bank
- ▼ Understand the path before they start walking it

So if you're not ready yet, that's fine.

But if you are, or close -don't waste that position on the wrong move.

Whether it's a 5% scheme, a regional grant, or just a smarter structure, the right plan now shapes everything later.

You don't need a loan.
You need a strategy.
And if we can help you build one — we will.



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