

The Real Estate Buy Box Cheat Sheet

Your quick-reference guide to defining and refining your investment criteria.

Use this checklist before every deal to stay disciplined, efficient, and profitable.

1. LOCATION

Goal: Stay close enough to control your projects.

- ✓ Buy within 1–2 hours of your home base
- ✓ Confirm at least 3 comparable recent sales (comps)
- ✓ Favor **urban** areas over rural for data reliability
- ✓ If your area is dry, move or expand your search radius

Quick Tip:

“Urban = Predictable. Rural = Guesswork.”

2. PROPERTY TYPE

Goal: Balance profitability with control.

- ✓ Start with **single-family** or **2–4 unit multifamily**
- ✓ Avoid land, condos, and large commercial early on
- ✓ Focus on owning the **land**, not just the structure

Remember:

McDonald’s uses burgers to buy land. You’re doing the same with rentals.

3. PROPERTY CLASS

Goal: Match your property class to your risk tolerance.

Class	Description	Ideal For
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|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| A | Upper-middle / luxury | Later diversification |
| B | Middle class / “Walmart” crowd | ✓ Best for beginners |
| C | Working class / Section 8 | Steady cashflow |
| D | Neglected / slumlord properties | Avoid early on |

- ✓ Prioritize **B-Class** neighborhoods
 - ✓ Use **C-Class** for cashflow stability (Section 8)
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4. SIZE (SQUARE FOOTAGE)

Goal: Minimize cost while maximizing rentability.

- ✓ Ideal range: **1,000–1,600 sq. ft.**
- ✓ 3 beds / 1–2 baths = sweet spot
- ✓ Rent is set by **bedrooms**, not square footage
- ✓ Smaller homes = lower maintenance, higher ROI

Flip Tip:

Bigger houses may profit more per project, but they’re riskier to hold.

5. AGE OF PROPERTY

Goal: Know what era you’re dealing with.

Era	Years	Notes
Historic	Pre-1950s	Cool, but unpredictable construction
Modern	1950s–2000s	Reliable systems and codes
New Builds	2000s–Present	Rarely a deal unless distressed

- ✓ Buy **modern** for balance
 - ✓ Avoid **historic** unless you deeply understand construction
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6. WORK LEVEL

Goal: Match project size to your experience.

Level	Description	Notes
1	Wholesale	Clean & list — minimal work
2	Cosmetic	Paint, floors, fixtures
3	Gut Renovation	Full systems (MEP) replaced
4	New Build / Add-On	For experts only

- ✓ Start with **cosmetic** flips
 - ✓ Move up to gut jobs once you have contractor relationships
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7. STYLE

Goal: Don't get distracted by design.

- ✓ Ignore architecture preferences
- ✓ Base all decisions on **data, comps, and margins**

“Style is for HGTV. Data is for investors.”

8. PRICE POINT

Goal: Buy below the median home price in your market.

- ✓ Median = your anchor point
- ✓ Buy **below** median for safety and liquidity
- ✓ Avoid high-end flips until experienced

Formula:

70% of ARV – Repairs = Max Offer

Safety = Longevity. Stay in the game long enough to win.

9. SCHOOL DISTRICT

Goal: Use it only to check your comps.

- ✓ Make sure your comps match the same school district
 - ✓ Don't overvalue it—it's already baked into the price
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WHY THIS MATTERS

Once your buy box is clear:

- You stop overanalyzing bad deals
 - You build instinct and speed
 - Agents and wholesalers take you seriously
 - You market smarter (“I buy 3/2s under 1,500 sq. ft. in East Ridge.”)
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ACTION STEPS

1. **Research your market** on Zillow and MLS.
 2. **Pick 3 neighborhoods** to specialize in.
 3. **Memorize** price per square foot and average rehab costs.
 4. **Build your ARV radar** using the 70% rule.
 5. **Create your direct marketing flywheel.**
 - Mail to specific streets.
 - Reference past flips.
 - Build reputation by repetition.
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Quick Reference Summary

Factor	Ideal Choice
Location	Urban, within 1–2 hours
Property Type	Single-family or 2–4 unit multifamily
Class	B-Class (plus a few C-Class for cashflow)
Size	1,000–1,600 sq. ft., 3 bed / 1–2 bath

Age	Modern (1950s–2000s)
Work Level	Cosmetic to moderate renovation
Style	Irrelevant — follow the comps
Price Point	Below median in market
School District	Verify, but don't overweigh

 **Print this out. Tape it to your desk. Memorize it.**

This is your **Buy Box Compass** — it keeps you from wandering into bad deals and reminds you exactly what a great one looks like.