

# 27 Housing Hacks

## Rent, Buy, or Pay Off Faster (2026)

The complete guide to making smarter housing decisions  
—with real numbers and calculators to prove it.

### ■ Key Takeaways

- **Renters:** Use the 9% Rule to find your break-even price
- **Buyers:** Aim for the 28/36 DTI ratio for safety
- **Owners:** Biweekly payments save 5+ years & \$90K+

### ■ HACK #0: THE ZERO BALANCE RULE

Set every credit card to auto-pay the **FULL STATEMENT BALANCE** each month. You'll pay zero interest, build credit, and never worry about cards again. If you can't pay it off this month, don't buy it.

## PART 1: RENT VS. BUY DECISIONS (Hacks 1-5)

#### #1: The 9% Rule (2026)

$(\text{Home Price} \times 9\%) \div 12 = \text{Break-even rent}$

**\$400K home → \$3,000/mo break-even**

Accounts for 6.5% interest + 1.5% tax + 1% maintenance.

#### #2: The 5-Year Horizon Test

Don't buy unless you'll stay 5+ years.

**Closing costs (3-6%) take ~5 years to recover**

Sell early = likely lose money.

#### #3: The True Cost Reveal

Rent = max you'll pay. Mortgage = minimum.

Add: P&I; + taxes + insurance + PMI + HOA + 1-2% maintenance

**\$2,023 mortgage → \$3,048 true cost**

#### #4: The Rent-Invest Gap

Rent cheaper, invest the difference.

**\$1,248/mo invested at 7% = \$216K in 10 years**

Only works if you actually invest it.

#### #5: The Break-Even Calculator

Find your exact month when buying beats renting for your specific situation.

→ [calclogix.com/rent-vs-buy-calculator](https://calclogix.com/rent-vs-buy-calculator)

## PART 2: AFFORDABILITY & DTI (Hacks 6-9)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>#6: The 28/36 Sanity Check</b><br>Housing $\leq$ 28% of gross income<br><br>Total debt $\leq$ 36% of gross income<br><br><b>\$8K income <math>\rightarrow</math> Max housing \$2,240</b>                                           | <b>#7: The Payment Payoff</b><br>Pay off small debts before applying.<br><br><b>\$800 card w/ \$50 payment <math>\rightarrow</math> Removes \$50 from DTI</b><br>Stack several = 2-3% DTI drop. |
| <b>#8: The Car Loan Countdown</b><br>For conventional loans, debts with $<10$ payments left may be excluded.<br><br><b>\$450/mo car <math>\times</math> 8 payments = \$0 DTI impact</b><br>FHA rules are stricter. Check with lender. | <b>#9: The Income Boost Document</b><br>Document ALL income: OT, bonuses, side gigs, rental.<br><br><b>Need 2 years of history for most sources</b><br>Start documenting now.                   |

## PART 3: MORTGAGE PAYOFF HACKS (Hacks 10-17)

Baseline Example: \$320K loan at 6.5% for 30 years = \$2,023/mo

|                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>#10: The 13th Payment</b><br>Biweekly half-payments = 26/year = 13 full payments<br><br><b>Saves \$91K+ and 5.5 years</b>                                                    | <b>#11: The Round-Up Rule</b><br>Round \$2,023 $\rightarrow$ \$2,100 (+\$77/mo)<br><br><b>Saves \$22K+ and 2.3 years</b>                                                 |
| <b>#12: The Ghost Payment</b><br>After refinancing to lower rate, keep paying your OLD payment.<br><br><b>Extra goes 100% to principal. 30yr <math>\rightarrow</math> ~22yr</b> | <b>#13: Dollar-A-Month Climb</b><br>Add \$1 more each month. By year 10: \$120 extra/mo<br><br><b>Saves \$65K+ and 7-8 years</b>                                         |
| <b>#14: The Recast Reset</b><br>Lump sum + re-amortize. Keep your rate, lower payment.<br><br><b>\$20K lump = \$150/mo lower. Fee: \$150-\$500</b>                              | <b>#15: Principal-Only Punch</b><br>ALWAYS specify 'apply to principal only'<br><br><b>Otherwise: \$0 interest saved</b>                                                 |
| <b>#16: Tax Refund Attack</b><br>100% of refund $\rightarrow$ mortgage principal annually<br><br><b>\$3K/year saves \$89K+ and 8.2 years</b>                                    | <b>#17: The Raise Redirect</b><br>50-100% of raises $\rightarrow$ mortgage. Never adjust lifestyle.<br><br><b>3% raises <math>\times</math> 5 years = \$960/mo extra</b> |

## PART 4: DEBT DESTRUCTION (Hacks 18-23)

### #18: Snowball Sprint

Pay smallest balance first. Quick wins = momentum.

**Best for: Motivation**

### #19: Avalanche Drop

Pay highest interest first. Saves most money.

**Best for: Math optimization**

### #20: Hybrid Hustle

Snowball first debt, then switch to avalanche.

**Get momentum AND savings**

### #21: Minimum+25 Rule

Always pay 25% more than minimum.

**\$5K debt: Saves 3 years + \$2,400**

### #22: Balance Transfer Sprint

0% APR card → divide balance by promo months → pay that.

**\$6K at 0% vs 22% saves \$1,800+**

### #23: Subscription Purge

Audit recurring charges. Cancel unused. Redirect to debt.

**Most find \$100-\$300/mo**

## PART 5: AUTOMATION & PSYCHOLOGY (Hacks 24-27)

### #24: Invisible Transfer

Auto-transfer X% of every deposit to savings/debt account.

**Start at 10-15%. No willpower needed.**

### #25: Found Money Rule

90% of windfalls → debt/savings. 10% → fun.

**Pre-decide before money arrives**

### #26: Coffee Redirect

\$5/day habit = \$150/mo = 4+ years off mortgage.

**Make abstract savings concrete**

### #27: Milestone Tracker

Celebrate every \$10K of equity built.

**Progress you see = progress you continue**

## ■ YOUR 2026 ACTION PLAN

**Deciding rent vs buy?** → Hacks #1-2, then [calclogix.com/rent-vs-buy-calculator](https://calclogix.com/rent-vs-buy-calculator)

**Preparing to buy?** → Hacks #6-7, then [calclogix.com/mortgage-calculator](https://calclogix.com/mortgage-calculator)

**Already own?** → Start with Hack #10 or #11, commit to #16, use [calclogix.com/mortgage-payoff-calculator](https://calclogix.com/mortgage-payoff-calculator)

**Clearing debt first?** → Pick #18 or #19, do #23, use [calclogix.com/credit-card-payoff-calculator](https://calclogix.com/credit-card-payoff-calculator)