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# About

## How To Measure Residential Square Footage

From Janet Wickell, Your Guide to Home Buying / Selling.

### Accurate Measurements Reduce Liability

Inaccurately reported square footage is the subject of numerous complaints made each year to state real estate commissions. A small percentage of cases involve willful misrepresentation (knowingly giving incorrect information), but a larger number of complaints occur simply because agents don't know how to measure a home.

If your state real estate commission has not established square footage guidelines, the following recommendations for North Carolina agents may be of help, because they are based on widely accepted standards.

Agents who follow guidelines and document their measuring procedures are better equipped to defend their calculations if a complaint is filed.

### Always Use Exterior Measurements

1. Start measuring at one corner of the house, then continue to measure the length of remaining exterior walls.
2. Make a sketch of the perimeter, recording all dimensions. Round measurements up to the next inch, or tenths of an inch for greater accuracy.

### What is Classified as Living Area?

- Space intended for human occupancy.
- It must be heated by a conventional, permanent heating system.
- It must be finished, with walls, floors, and ceilings of materials generally accepted for interior construction.
- It must be directly accessible from another portion of the living area.

### Separate the Living Area from Other Square Footage

If all interior areas qualify as living areas, calculate square footage for the entire shape of the dwelling.

If not, deduct space occupied by garages and other unheated or unfinished areas. Highlight these areas in your sketch so that you know later they are not to be counted as living space.

If you must determine the dimensions of some areas by measuring from the interior, add six inches for each exterior and interior wall you encounter during the process.

Add wall space again when measuring living areas that might not be easy to reach from the outside, such as dormers.

### SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

#### Rooms With Sloped Ceilings

An example of this type of room is the loft found in an A-Frame home. If you measure room dimensions where the sloped walls meet the floor, you are including space that isn't truly usable.

Include only the portion of the room where ceiling height is at least five feet. To be included at all, a minimum of one half of the finished area of the room must have ceilings at least seven feet high.

## **Bay Windows**

The area occupied by a bay window may be counted if it has a floor, a ceiling height of at least seven feet, and meets other criteria for living area.

## **Furnace Room**

If the furnace, water heater, or other similar item is located in a small closet within the living area, it should be included in the total square footage.

## **Hallways & Closets**

These areas are counted if they are a functional part of the living space.

## **Stairs**

There are several 'what ifs' for measuring stairways and their openings. In general, if the opening for the stairway is larger than its length and width, you must deduct the excess open space from the upper level's square footage.

## **Open Foyer & Other Open Space**

Be careful not to include open areas as part of the square footage for an upper level. This may seem obvious, but you'd be surprised how many agents forget to deduct them.

## **Other Considerations - Room Access**

Under North Carolina guidelines, you cannot count a room that is finished and heated if it is accessed through an unfinished area—for instance, laundry room with entry through a garage.

Your state may use different guidelines.

## **Buyer's Agents Held to Higher Standards**

If you have concerns that the stated square footage is not accurate, resolve those concerns before your client makes an offer.

You aren't expected to measure the home, but state real estate commissions do expect you to ask for confirmation if the stated size appears to be wrong.

## **Do the Math - Help With Calculations**

Use these [formulas for common shapes](#).