

**How do you calculate square footage?**

We use the ANSI standard (Z765-1996) for figuring square footage. These are standards for measuring and reporting square footage in single-family residences. This standard requires that square footage be listed separately for finished areas, unfinished areas, below grade finished areas, storage areas, porches, garages, patios, and decks. These figures are listed on every set of plans we sell. Wall thickness is included in the square footage. The space in cathedral ceilings or two story rooms is not considered square footage. Rooms, crawlspaces or attics with less than five-foot ceilings are not considered finished living space. Bay windows are not included in the square footage unless a floor extends into the bay

**Excerpt 2:**

The standard, which reconciles many differences in current methods for determining square footage, is voluntary but must be applied as a whole if used. It does not replace or supersede legal or otherwise required measurement methods.

The standard covers calculation and reporting of above-grade and below-grade space measured from the exterior surface of the house's exterior walls. The standard can be applied to proposed, new, or existing single-family homes of any style or construction. It does not cover the interior dimensions of rooms and does not apply to apartment/multi-family buildings.

In addition to measuring from the exterior surface of exterior walls, provisions of the standard include the following:

- Measure to the nearest inch or tenth of an inch, and report to the nearest whole square foot.
- Include only finished areas.
- Calculate and report above-grade and below-grade square footage separately. The standard does not provide for reporting "total square footage." A space is included in the below-grade total if any part is below the grade line.
- Stair treads are included. Floor openings are not included.
- Ceilings must be at least seven feet high except under stairs, beams, and sloping ceilings.
- Accessory apartments and other finished areas not within the house can be included if they are connected to the main house by finished hallways/stairways.
- Garages are not regarded as finished space, but can be calculated as unfinished square footage.

**Excerpt 3:**

**How to Measure a House**

Measuring a house is not that hard. For most houses, it's an easy one-person job. However, if someone offers to help, you can always let him or her hold the "dumb" end of the tape. All you need is a little practice and the following tools.

- A 100-foot measuring tape (fiberglass tapes work the best)

- A sturdy 25-foot retractable steel measuring tape (like the ones carpenters use)
- A letter-size tablet of graph paper (10 squares per inch works best for most houses)
- A pencil

If you measure a lot of houses, you should upgrade your tool kit with the following items.

- Measuring tapes graduated in tenths of a foot (instead of inches)
- An adjustable gauge for measuring unusual corner angles (such as the "Mite-R-Gage" by Nowlin, Inc.)
- A computer program such as "Apex" or "Winsketch"
- A medium-size standard screwdriver

Always start by measuring the outside of the house.

- Begin measuring from any corner and work your way around the house. Move counter-clockwise so the numbers on your tape will be right side up.
- Measure the exterior of the house to the nearest inch or tenth of an inch. Measure from the exterior face of the walls. Include any features that are on the same level as the floor, such as chimneys and bay windows. Do not include the thickness of any corner trim pieces or greenhouse windows that don't have a corresponding floor level.
- Use the 100-foot tape for long wall sections and the 25-foot tape for short sections.
- If you can't get close to a wall because of landscaping or other obstacles, use your screwdriver to anchor the 100-foot tape on the ground away from the wall.
- Draw the dimensions on the graph paper as you go, with each square representing one foot. If you measure correctly you should arrive at the exact point of beginning on your graph paper. If not, re-measure.
- Draw a separate floor plan for each level in the house. Don't assume that each floor is identical. Check for floors that overhang or are recessed.

When you are finished measuring the outside of the house, go inside and decide what to include and what not to include on each level.

- If there is an attached garage, exclude it. It's not part of the finished floor area. Use the interior wall surface of the garage next to the house as the outside wall of the house.
- If there are stairs, include them on every level they serve.
- When there are openings to the floor below, subtract the opening from that level.
- For split-level designs, measure each level. You can lump multiple floor surfaces into one level if they are within two feet of each other.
- Exclude any areas, such as porches and converted garages, which are not finished or heated the same as the rest of the house.

### **Basements and Below-Grade Floor Areas**

The ANSI standards make a strong distinction between above-grade and below-grade floor area. **The above-grade floor area is the sum of all finished square footage,**

**which is entirely above ground level. The below-grade floor area includes spaces, which are wholly or partly below ground level.**

Disregard the old rules of thumb that allow you to include below-grade areas if they are less than five feet below grade, or if less than half the area is below grade. If the house has any areas below the natural grade, measure that whole level separately. Even if the below-grade areas are fully finished, they are not part of the finished floor area according to ANSI standards.

### **Attics, Lofts and Low Ceilings**

Level ceilings must be at least 7 feet high, and at least 6 feet 4 inches under beams, ducts and other obstructions. There is no height restriction under stairs. If a room has a sloped ceiling, at least one-half of the finished floor area must have a ceiling height of at least 7 feet. Otherwise, omit the entire room from the floor area calculations. If a room with a sloped ceiling meets the one-half-of-floor-area-over-7-feet requirement, then include all the floor space with a ceiling height over 5 feet.

Lofts and finished attics must be accessible by a conventional stairway or other access to be counted. If you can only reach the loft by climbing a ladder, it's not part of the finished floor area regardless of the ceiling height.

### **Detached Rooms, Guest Cottages, Granny Units and Dwelling Units**

According to the ANSI standards, finished areas, which are not connected to the main residence by a finished hall or stairway, must be listed separately. If you have to leave the house to get to the room, it's not part of the finished floor area.

The Mendocino County Zoning Ordinance defines several types of detached living areas. The County calls these "detached bedrooms," "guest cottages," "family care units (granny units)" and "dwelling units."

A ***detached bedroom*** is a separate structure containing one room only without a kitchen or bathroom. It must be designed for and intended to be used as a sleeping or living facility for family members. It must be used in conjunction with the main house, which includes a kitchen and a bathroom. Detached bedrooms can't be located farther than 150 feet from the main house and can't exceed 500 square feet in floor area.

A ***guest cottage*** is like a detached bedroom with a bathroom, but no kitchen. It can't exceed 640 square feet in floor area and must be a permanent structure, not a trailer or mobile home. It can't have a kitchen, wet bar or any provision for appliances for the storage or preparation of food. It must be clearly subordinate and incidental to the main house. Guest cottages can't be rental units. They must be used without compensation by guests of the occupants of the main house.

A ***family care unit*** (sometimes called a ***granny unit***) is determined more by use than design. It is the temporary use of a building, structure or trailer to provide housing for the following.

- Not more than two adults who are 60 years of age or older; or
- Immediate family members who require daily supervision and care; or
- People who provide daily supervision and care for the people who reside in the main residence

A full *dwelling unit* is a single unit providing complete, independent living facilities for one or more people, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation. A dwelling unit can have only one kitchen.

### **Room Counts, Bedrooms and Bathrooms**

The real estate profession often describes houses by their total room count, the number of bedrooms and the number of bathrooms they contain. For example, the shorthand convention "5/2/1.5" describes a house with 5 rooms, 2 bedrooms and 1.5 bathrooms.

Local custom determines the definition of a "room." In general, a room is a kitchen, a bedroom, a living room, a dining room, and a family room, an office or a den. Bathrooms, laundry rooms, sunrooms, lofts, closets, storage rooms and entries are not usually considered to be rooms.

What is the difference between a den and a bedroom? If the den can function as a bedroom, there may be no difference at all. What is the difference between a dining area and a dining room? If you could add walls and it would remain functionally the same, a dining area can be called a dining room.

A bedroom is any room that you can fit a conventional bed into. Usually the local zoning, building or health codes establish minimum requirements for bedrooms. In general, bedrooms should be at least 90 square feet in size, with at least one bedroom in the house 120 square feet in size. Bedrooms should have a window, which provides an emergency exit, natural light and ventilation.

Bedrooms should have direct access to a hallway, living room or other common area. You should not have to walk through one bedroom to get to another. A bedroom should have a closet, but this is optional. Before closets, people stored their clothes in armoires and dressers.

Local custom also defines the bathroom. In most parts of the country, a full bathroom includes a toilet, a sink, a bathtub and a shower. A combination bath and shower counts as two fixtures. If the bathroom has only three fixtures it is a 3/4 bath. If it has only two fixtures it is a 1/2 bath, and if it has only one, it is a 1/4 bath.

### **Summary**

As more real estate listings are posted on the Internet, it's likely that consumers will expect some national standards for measuring houses and counting rooms. Also, the new EDI (electronic data interchange) technology being adopted by lenders will require some common standards. REALTORS® who measure houses correctly and accurately will help raise the standards of the profession and improve consumer confidence.