

# **50 TESTED AND PROVEN IDEAS FOR RESIDENTIAL APPRAISERS**

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## INTRODUCTION

This publication was compiled as part of a presentation for the Fall Conference of the Northern California Chapter of the Appraisal Institute. The Fall Conference was held October 22, 2004, in San Francisco.

The “50 Tested and Proven Ideas For Residential Appraisers” is not an official publication of the Appraisal Institute, nor is it endorsed or sanctioned by the Appraisal Institute. This booklet was written for residential real estate appraisers and is intended for their use only. I would like to thank all of the residential appraisers who shared their ideas in this not-for-profit effort to help one another become more productive. Please feel free to share this booklet with your colleagues. We need each other. We can help each other be more professional, work better and faster, and enhance our careers in real estate.

Steve Lederer, SRA  
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## **1. Hire an office assistant**

An office assistant is someone who can process orders, phone homeowners to set appointments, call on overdue invoices, track down document numbers, pull MLS listings, proof-read your work, and do all of the non-appraisal functions that will free up your time to enable you to make more inspections and write up more reports.

If you've ever tried to figure out what your time is worth in terms of billing on an hourly basis, you will find that hiring an assistant is the single most profitable move you can make. For example, if you calculate that you bill for Fannie Mae lenders at the rate of \$80 per hour and your assistant costs a total of \$20 per hour, you will profit by \$60 for every hour your assistant logs. That can really add up in a hurry.

It's easy to find employees who are willing to work part-time flexible hours. A classified ad in your local newspaper will attract several resumes from qualified applicants.

### Tips on hiring and keeping a good assistant:

1. Try to find someone who will last at least 5 years.
2. Find someone who will have a short commute to your office.
3. Use an accountant to prepare the quarterly and year end reports for State and Fed.
4. Use the State Fund for Workmen's Comp
5. Hire someone who will be comfortable on the phone talking to your clients.
6. Your assistant will learn everything about you, including your income and all of your bad habits. Do you really want to hire a friend or neighbor?
7. Train your employee slowly, there is a lot of tedious detail that we take for granted.
8. Be patient. It will take at least one year for your assistant to become perfect.
9. Try to find someone with a sense of humor that matches your sense of humor.
10. Be generous when times are good.
11. Be generous with compliments when they do a good job.

## **2. Buying a Computer**

Buy the biggest, fastest desktop computer you can afford; something that will last 3 years before becoming outdated. Reliability is more important than price. Spend extra for memory, (minimum of 512K.)

Buy your PC from a company that you trust, a company that uses brand name parts.

Make sure it has a huge hard drive, minimum of 80 gigabits. Even though you will never fill the hard drive it will run faster.

Buy the best monitor you can afford, (your eyesight isn't getting any better.)

Buy Windows XP Professional instead of the XP Home Edition. Windows XP Professional is far more stable and well worth the extra cost.

### **3. Backing Up the Hard Drive**

Have a plan for what you will do when your hard drive breaks down. You will lose a hard drive someday, so a back-up plan will be useful. (When your computer starts to make strange noises you will know that the end is near.)

Most people, at the minimum, would suggest regular back-ups to removable media such as CD or DVD or Zip cartridges. I strongly suggest an external hard drive with a USB or Firewire connection.

The back-up software that you use, and its Ease-of-Use, is pretty important. Most critics recommend Ghost or True Image. External hard drives come with software but it may not be as easy to use.

### **4. Internet Connection**

Pick a reliable ISP and stick with them. Changing e-mail addresses isn't as easy as it used to be.

DSL or cable speed is an obvious choice and is a real necessity.

This part is important: Make sure you have a router between the phone jack and your computers. Routers have built-in firewalls that are far more effective than software firewalls. Personal computers connected to the internet get "pinged" every 16 minutes.

### **5. Digital Cameras**

Picture quality in digital cameras is less important than ease-of-use. Certainly you need to take "average" or "good" pictures. But you don't really need anything better. 3 megapixels are adequate for lender work. Buy a camera that uses easy-to-find and inexpensive media.

Buy a battery charger, and use rechargeable NIMH batteries for your camera.

Those little memory cards wear out sooner or later, be sure to have a spare on hand. I have broken one digital camera, I've worn out one digital camera, and I've worn out 2 Smart Media cards.

## **6. Scanners**

Scanners are essential because you can use them to make location maps, copy building sketches, and paste other documents into your reports. Letter size is adequate, even for residential appraisers. Ease-of-use is more important than quality. Scanners have moving parts, therefore they have a limited life span. My first scanner broke after 3 years, but it did give me adequate warning by making a loud grinding noise for about 2 weeks. My new scanner cost about \$100.

## **7. Computer Guy**

Find a reliable Computer Guy in your community, someone who will come to your office, on short notice, on an hourly basis. Even though computers are getting easier to use, there will be times when you'll need professional computer help. Find someone close by and accessible. Word of mouth is the best way to find someone dependable.

For big projects or big problems use someone with special knowledge of your business. I recommend Marv Downey of Market Value Systems, (located in the Bay Area near San Francisco.)

## **8. Learn how to manipulate the local MLS database.**

The MLS (Multiple Listing Service) is set up for Realtors. They search for market data differently than we do. Learn to customize your comp searches. Almost every MLS will have some sort of custom search function that you can save and use over and over again.

Almost every MLS will allow you to use a Third Party software program. Check with your MLS. In my area we can use MLS For Windows, now known as Wildfyre.

I use Wildfyre to customize comp searches and data. I like to use one-line printouts, landscape style on legal sized paper, with a list of the pertinent features on each sale and listing and pending sale around my subject property. I can change the search criteria on the fly and set up templates for different types of properties.

If you have the ability to customize your MLS web-based program to do custom searches that are fast and accurate, then learn how. For real speed and efficiency, I recommend that you check out Wildfyre or other third party software programs.

## **9. Learn how to download MLS photos into your reports.**

There will be times when your camera or memory card will fail, or when human error will cause you to lose your photos. I have accidentally erased my Smart Media card

(more than once,) without first downloading the photos onto my hard drive. You can save a lot of time not having to drive those comparables a second time. Also, there are times when you just cannot get a good comp photo without trespassing. There will be times when your photos just don't turn out very good because the sun is in your face or the lighting is poor. The MLS photos will almost always be better than your photos. If you call your local MLS support department they can tell you how to do it. You still need to drive the comps, right?

## **10. Modify your tape measure**

Modify your tape measure by cutting off the useless piece of fold-out metal and attaching a "Measure-Mate." Measure-Mates are available from Forms and Worms, on line, and they cost about \$7 each. I bought 3 of them 10 or 15 years ago and still have two of them. They are the third best thing that ever happened to appraisers. (Computers and fax machines being #1 and #2.)

The Measure-Mate is a large cotter pin that is shaped to fit around a standard sized downspout. It also has a small stake that you can stick in a lawn or in the ground. It can attach to door jambs and window frames for easy indoor measuring, as well.

Also, make your tape measure last longer by putting duct tape around the plastic seams that attach the tape to the end piece.

Also, buy your measuring tapes from companies that offer lifetime guarantees. I have not paid for a new tape measure in over 15 years. We just mail the broken ones in twice a year and they send us new ones. See addenda for a picture of a Measure Mate.

## **11. Measure faster with better accuracy**

Always measure the outside of the house before going inside. It is easier to draw the interior walls if you have the footprint first.

It is easier to measure the front elevation of a house last. The side walls and rear walls will always be fewer and straighter because the front elevation has most of the architectural detailing.

Try to measure more than one wall at a time. For example, attach the tape measure to the outer edge of the garage, and measure across the front elevation, "East to West," stopping to note where each wall ends and starts. Then go back and measure each of the shorter "North to South" walls.

The most important measurements are the totals. If the north side of the house is 60 feet across and the south side is 58 feet across, you have a problem and need to remeasure.

Make sure your sketch squares off before you leave the property. (i.e. both North-South sides are of equal length, both East-West sides are of equal length.)

See the addenda for an illustration

### **12. For two story houses, always measure the lower level first**

I always find it easier to measure the lower level first, and then go back and do the second story. For really simple houses you can do both at the same time. Most of the upper level walls will match the lower level walls. But there will always be a few “over-hangs” or “under-hangs.”

If the homeowner is following you around, making conversation, you are more apt to make a mistake. Try to discourage him from following you around, in a nice way.

### **13. Trust your eye on those short, upper level walls**

How many times have you measured a 2 foot wall? At least 1,000 times, maybe 10,000. You should be pretty good at recognizing a 2 foot wall by now. I will usually eye-ball any upper level wall under 6 feet. When I get inside and upstairs I will try to measure it, if possible.

### **14. Are you Disto worthy?**

I have never used a Disto. Maybe I will someday, but probably not. When I walk into a house I'm usually carrying a tape measure, a digital camera, a clipboard, and a calculator. Often times I am also carrying an architect's scale or a sliding bevel. I want less stuff to carry around, not more. I don't feel like I really need one right now or that it would save me that much time. Plus they are expensive, around \$500. And they appear to be breakable.

If I had a Disto I would probably end up aiming it at squirrels, trying to measure how far they can jump between trees. God only knows what I might do with one on a really slow day.

At the Fall Conference I cracked a couple of jokes about Disto. Someone said that I “dissed” the Disto. If you are a Disto User, and were at the Fall Conference, please don't take it personally. I was only being spontaneous.

A few people have since told me how much they like Disto, especially in areas with steep terrain or snow. You should probably make up your own mind, which is what you were going to anyway, hopefully. Do your own research.

Are you ready for Disto? Am I ready for Disto? It might be a time saver.

(Editor's note: if the makers of Disto would like to send me one, and a two page manual on how to use it, I promise that I will try it out. And you may get a re-write in the next edition of this booklet.)

#### **14b. Rebuttal from a Disto User**

Retire your tape measure, to the glove box of the car, and get a Disto TODAY! I have been appraising for 25 years, or more, and have and found the Disto to be like the Digital Camera. It is a gift from the Appraisal Gods! Remember the difference between the Digital Camera and the 35mm camera? The Disto is to the tape measure what the digital camera is to the 35mm.

The Disto is different from the Echo style measuring things, if you tried that. The Disto has provided me with super fast measuring, which has allowed me to measure homes at a faster rate, twice as fast as using a tape measure. Plus, you will really impress the Homeowner with this high tech tool. You will actually learn to love to measure houses! LIKE A KID WITH A NEW TOY! Here's another Special Feature of the Disto: you can get cats and dogs to chase the laser beam all over the place. Kids love to watch that!

(Editor's note: special thanks to Curt Thor, Fall Conference attendee, for submitting this perspective on the Disto.)

#### **15. Saving building sketches**

If you are in a suburban subdivision, or condo complex, you should label each sketch with the Plan Number or Model Name, and then reference the square footage from the public records.

Save your sketches in a filing cabinet sorted by city, subdivision, neighborhood, street name, or geographical boundaries. Don't use map grids because Thomas Brothers changes the grids every 10 years or so.

I have 4 drawers filled with sketches and builder's literature.

## **16. Custom homes and blueprints**

If you are going to a large custom home, ask the owner if he could bring out the blueprints for you to look at while you are at the property. Carry an architect's scale in your car to help take the dimensions off the blueprints.

Be sure to give the homeowner advance warning that you would like to see the blueprints. They are usually stored in some hard to reach place, deep in a closet. Sometimes they will need to call their spouse on the phone to find out where they are stashed. Ask for them in advance.

My advice would be to never take blueprints with you, even if the homeowner offers. They are too valuable and too difficult to replace.

Always ask if any changes were made during construction or after. It doesn't hurt to ask the owner to take a quick look at the prints before you start to copy the dimensions. And when you are done, measure a few walls to make sure they line up OK.

By the way, I almost never trust another appraiser's building sketch. I have seen hundreds of inaccurate sketches over the years. Why let his problem become your problem?

## **17. Carry tracing paper for copying blueprints**

If you come across a large house with an unusual shape, it might come in handy to just copy the prints with tracing paper. You can buy blueprint sized tracing paper, single sheets or on a roll, at drafting supply shops.

To trace blueprints you will need some light-weight tape to hold the paper over the blueprints while tracing, and an architect's scale.

## **18. Learn to use a sliding bevel to measure oddly shaped houses.**

Any house with a wall other than 90 degrees, is oddly shaped. (I am not counting the short walls on a bay window.)

You can use a sliding bevel to measure these oddly shaped houses accurately. A sliding bevel is a carpenter's tool. Use it to duplicate wall angles for your sketches. (Don't bother with those flimsy plastic gizmos.)

Trace the angle into your field notes and then copy the angle into your sketch with your software program.

I have found that the sliding bevel is the best way, other than tracing the blueprints, to duplicate the foot print of oddly shaped houses. You can buy a sliding bevel at any lumber yard. See addenda for a picture of a sliding bevel.

### **19. A squared + B squared = C squared**

Remember that from geometry class?

For walls on a 45 degree angle, and there are a lot of houses with this feature, you can use this formula to make a chart that will help you recreate those walls in your sketch software. For our purposes, it's only good for walls with 45 degree angles.

On the wall in my office, over my computer, I have a chart that looks like this:

$$11.31 = 8 \times 8$$

$$12.02 = 8.5 \times 8.5$$

$$12.73 = 9 \times 9$$

$$13.44 = 9.5 \times 9.5$$

$$14.14 = 10 \times 10$$

and so on.

### **20. For extra-large or oddly shaped houses it will be difficult to be 100% accurate**

Protect yourself. Make a notation on your sketch that it is "For Lending Purposes Only." Or "Not a Survey." Or "Not To Be Used For Marketing Purposes." Put the notation somewhere where it would be difficult to white-out or erase.

### **21. Measuring houses for a fee**

Why not us? Who is better qualified?

But remember, if someone wants to hire you to measure a house, it will be a long afternoon. I always schedule these jobs at the end of my day. Could take 30 minutes, could take 2 hours.

They will only want to hire you for difficult houses, not easy ones.

One hour of measuring time will equal one hour on your computer. I charge by the hour with a minimum of 2 hours.

It will usually be a Realtor that will want to hire you. It's called Deflecting Liability.

They will probably complain about the fee. "If the whole appraisal would cost \$400 (or whatever,) why are you charging me \$200 just to measure?" My answer: "For \$400 (or whatever,) I take the good with the bad. Measuring this house is All Bad."

## **22. Use file numbers that mean something**

My file numbers are based on year, month, date, location and type of appraisal form.

For example: 40915WCC = Sept 15, 2004 Walnut Creek Condo

If a client calls to ask about a report and gives me my file number I can find the hard copy very quickly.

## **23. Use a geographical filing system rather than map grids**

Thomas Brothers change their grids every 10 years or so. Zip codes get added all the time, as well. Livermore, San Ramon, Walnut Creek have all added new zip codes in the last couple of years. We set up our filing system based on geographical boundaries. Like freeways or major streets other topographical features. If you appraise a lot of houses in Oakland you might want to divide the city into at least 6 geographical areas. File the hard copies in 6 folders in your cabinets, and then give each area a slightly different computer file name. They will be easier to find.

## **24. Do not appraise houses that belong to friends**

It's not a good business practice. Plus, you will spend three times the amount of time on your friend's house, and charge less.

Everyone, even appraisers, thinks they are being lo-balled. That's a fact. (I heard that a major bank did a study that showed 80% of borrowers overvalue their own house by 20%.) Do not lo-ball your friends. Let someone else do it. Friends are more important than one appraisal fee.

If you think that you can be unbiased and if you think it's OK to do appraisals for friends, you might be making yourself a target for legal problems. Even though you will absolutely not be biased, try to explain that to a lawyer should something go wrong down the road. Don't take my word for it, talk to your E&O company.

## **25. Do not be worried about being sued**

You have no control over that. You probably will be sued at least once in your career, maybe more than once. Be more worried about following good business practices, and following good appraisal protocol. That will be your saving grace when you have to defend yourself against the lawsuit.

Avoid the errors that can make you lose the lawsuit:

1. Ignoring physical defects in a house or soils problems at the subject site.
2. Overstating the gross living area of a house.
3. Overstating the value of a high-end home.
4. Violating USPAP.
5. Taking on a job that is over your head.

## **26. File URAR hard copies with page 2 on top**

It is easier to find file comps that way. Page 2 has the subject's address and the addresses of all three comps, and all their information. Save time by not having to remove and unfold the report.

## **27. Put a reasonable limit on your geographical territory**

I am almost embarrassed to say how far I would travel to appraise houses when I first started my private practice. Those days are over.

Remember, if you appraise it once, you will probably be asked to appraise it again. Either for a new loan, new lender, or an update. You can do it, I know, but it just takes too much time and you have to drive too many comps to get a handle on those outskirt properties.

## **28. Save digital photos on your hard drive for one year**

If you file your photos by date, you can easily save photos for one year before the file numbers repeat themselves. By then you probably will never use those photos for comps anyway.

### **29. Get a Lok-Box key**

Most MLS services will let appraisers own or rent lok-box keys. It really saves time when you are going to vacant houses. I have gotten comfortable using my lok-box key in occupied houses, as well, but I always make sure that the occupant knows I am coming and that it is OK with him. Always ask about animals; you don't want to let the cat or dog out.

### **30. Educate the homeowner**

I have a little monologue that I share with the homeowner when I arrive at the house. I explain that first I will measure the outside, then inspect the inside. I let him know that I will look in all the bedrooms and bathrooms when I come inside, and that I will be taking inside and outside pictures.

Before I leave I tell him that I will spend the next 30 minutes driving through his neighborhood, doing exterior inspections on houses that have recently sold.

I have found that a lot of owners do not really understand what we do or how we do it. They like it to be explained. It also gives them a chance to tell you about any nearby houses that have sold. With "For Sale By Owner" getting bigger and bigger, this can help you find good comps that are not in the MLS.

One other thing: I almost always tell them that there is only ONE way they can find out exactly how much their house is worth: sell it!

### **31. Interactive web sites are a waste of time and money**

All you really need is a billboard in cyber space. Use it to weed out the people who don't really need or want your services. Use it to encourage the real customers to call you on the phone or fax an order.

### **32. Never put your tape measure or camera on someone's formal dining room table**

I used to leave it there all the time. Then one day I picked it up and it slipped out my hand, and left a big ding in the table. That was a lousy day.

### **33. When setting appointments make sure it's OK to start early**

Sometimes the owner is late. Sometimes you are early. If it's OK with the owner, you might as well start measuring and taking photos. But if there is a mean dog in the back yard or if the gates are locked, you are out of luck with nothing to do until the owner gets home. Why squander that time with nothing to do?

### **34. Attend Appraisal Institute seminars and workshops**

You will always learn at least one thing that you can put to work immediately to become a better, more professional and more efficient appraiser.

### **35. Learn to deflect annoying questions from the homeowner**

If you are in a hurry then there is nothing worse than getting grilled by the homeowner. Almost every homeowner has been lo-balled or wronged by some other appraiser, at one time or another. Sometimes they want to share that with you and it leads nowhere. I'll say: "Sorry, I cannot really comment on what or why that appraiser did that."

It helps to have a prepared monologue about the appraisal process. See Tip # 30 above.

Some people want to learn about your job and what you do, because they think it would be cool to be an appraiser. Can you blame them? We have great jobs, most of us. But some people are just plain intrusive.

When homeowners ask me how many appraisals I do, per day, I usually give them an answer that goes something like this: "I don't really keep track of daily production. I keep track of how much I gross per year, and how much I net per year." That usually ends their line of questioning.

Having said all this, you should know that I have met a lot of really interesting people on my job. People have some really interesting stories to tell if you show some interest.

If you appraise a house with a super-sanitary garage, a garage you would eat a meal in (if you had to,) there is a pretty good chance that homeowner has a story to tell. Some stories are really sad. For example, I will never again ask an 80-year old man if he was in World War II.

### **36. When appraising 2-4 unit properties use “dead” listings for rental data**

In the old days we actually used to knock on doors for rental information. Those days have long passed. Now we use the MLS, as best we can, to get that data.

To find the most data you will need to search expired listings, cancelled listings, and every option for every kind of listing they have in there.

Copy a map page and hi-light all of the comps you want to drive, in advance, to make sure you don't miss one.

### **37. Always carry a “new” map book**

In the suburbs, where new construction is still under way, you really need the latest map book at all times. If you cannot find the house in the map book then you will obviously have to ask the owner or agent for directions. But what about finding the comps? Allow extra time in areas of new development for just this reason.

### **38. Your Tool-Box**

Spare tape measure.

Extra media card for camera.

Spare batteries for your camera.

Sliding bevel.

Architect's scale.

Calculator.

Calf-high rubber boots during rainy season.

Plastic sheet to protect trunk from muddy boots during rainy season.

Poncho during rainy season.

Lok-box key.

Cell phone.

Charger for cell phone.

Business cards.

Water bottle.

Handi-wipes or towelettes for when your hands get dirty.

Disposable 35mm camera, in case your digital camera breaks; (spare camera at office.)

### **39. Building a niche**

Become an expert at certain types of property that interest you. Horse properties, Victorian homes, historical homes, houses with acreage, view properties, houses with

stigma, houses that back to golf courses, deep water lots with boat docks, estate properties, houses with in-law units in the back yard, houses with student apartments. Whatever.

Save every comp you can find, especially data you find in the MLS. You usually find those Best Comps when you aren't even looking for them; (it's just always too late for the job when you need it most.) So save them for future reference.

And then, at every opportunity, let people know about your niche.

#### **40. Use narrative reports for non-lender work**

Non-lender work is becoming my niche. Divorces, court-appointed appraisal work, litigation, estate tax, estate valuation, construction defects, non-disclosure litigation, etc etc. (I don't think it's as profitable as lender work, but that could change.)

Believe it or not, these Fannie Mae forms are hard to understand for most people. The only people who understand the grid adjustments are other appraisers and some of the underwriters.

I try to use the form reports for lender work and relocation work only.

So I have developed templates in Microsoft Word for narrative reports that cover most types of non-lender assignments. The narrative reports are more professional looking, easier to read and easier for the public to understand.

#### **41. Use an Engagement Letter for all non-lender work**

You really need to spell out what you perceive the job to be and what you expect to deliver, and how much you expect to be paid, and when you expect to be paid.

The Fall Conference 2004 had a session titled "Before You Say Yes" with handouts that included three excellent samples of Engagement Letters. Build a template in your word processor. More importantly, spend some time carefully drafting each engagement letter for each assignment. The engagement letter is the most important part of assuring that you will earn a profit for the assignment.

#### **42. Go to Broker Open Houses**

Most Realtor Boards sponsor weekly tours for Brokers. You can attend. Not only can you attend, this is a pretty good networking opportunity. You don't even need to do much except hand your card out to people who ask.

But the best part is: you get to see the interior of future comps. This can be very beneficial if you appraise high-end homes. I have never taken interior photos at an Open House. I personally think it would be rude and unprofessional to do that. But I do make notes on the back of the flyer as soon as I get out to my car.

#### **43. Keep a file folder for odd-ball houses**

Keep track of houses with brick foundations, dirt foundations, adobe walls, dome-shaped houses, houses shaped like whales or butterflies. You can save these things forever and use them as comps forever. Sooner or later you'll be glad you have that one comp to match up that one odd-ball feature.

#### **44. Keep a file for damaged houses**

Keep a file folder for houses that were damaged and then fixed, and then sold. These comps will be useful for litigation work. You can use these comps for years.

#### **45. For file copies, print photos in Thumbnail mode**

All of your photos will be on one page. This will save paper and file space in your cabinets.

(Editor's note: please check record-keeping guidelines in USPAP.)

#### **46. Clone recent reports when applicable**

Rather than start a ground zero on every report, look for recent reports from the same neighborhood that can be cloned.

Or, try building templates for neighborhoods that you go to often. This is especially helpful for condo developments.

Remember to update your templates as market conditions change.

#### **47. Keep current with technology**

Subscribe to PC World and REAMUG. Even though you will not understand all of what you read it will help keep you abreast of the jargon and changing technologies.

Attend AI workshops in your community. If you are in the Bay Area in Northern California, take advantage of the numerous opportunities you have to see and hear Mary Dum, Marv Downey, Rick Betts, others.

#### **48. Keep current with construction and remodeling costs**

Homeowners, lenders and other clients expect us to know something about the cost of roofing, windows, remodeled kitchens, remodeled baths, French drains, carpet, paint, and room additions. Are you confident that your grid adjustments reflect real life costs? We all know that cost and market value are not the same, but they are very closely related in the eyes of buyers. You need to know this stuff. What is really great is that you have access to all of this information just by asking the homeowner how much he paid. They actually want to tell you how much it cost because they think it's pertinent. It is not rude to ask. I'm not talking about a new hot water heater or new air conditioning unit, but the big ticket items that buyers are interested in. Face it, how many times have you driven by a comp only to see that the new owner is already doing some of this remodeling.

#### **49. Glue a calculator to the back of your clipboard**

If your pockets are already overflowing with a cell phone, Blackberry, Disto, Laser tape, pager, digital camera, conventional tape measure, or whatever, you may not have room for a calculator. You always need one, at the very least in your glove box, to make sure your sketch squares off before you leave the house.

Try buying one of those cheap, razor thin calculators with flat buttons and then using Super-Glue to attach it to the back of your clipboard.

#### **50. Your next car**

Get a GPS Navigation Screen in your next car. Then program in the properties you plan to inspect each day. I have been told that it's easier and safer than trying to read a map book while you're driving.

## **51. Carry a multi-colored pen**

You can use multi-colored pens for drawing multiple levels of a house, (upper in red, lower in blue, basement in green.) Color code the rooms in your field notes. And when you drive your comps, you can put the addresses in blue and your own comments in red, for easy reference back at the office.

## **52. Your best comps**

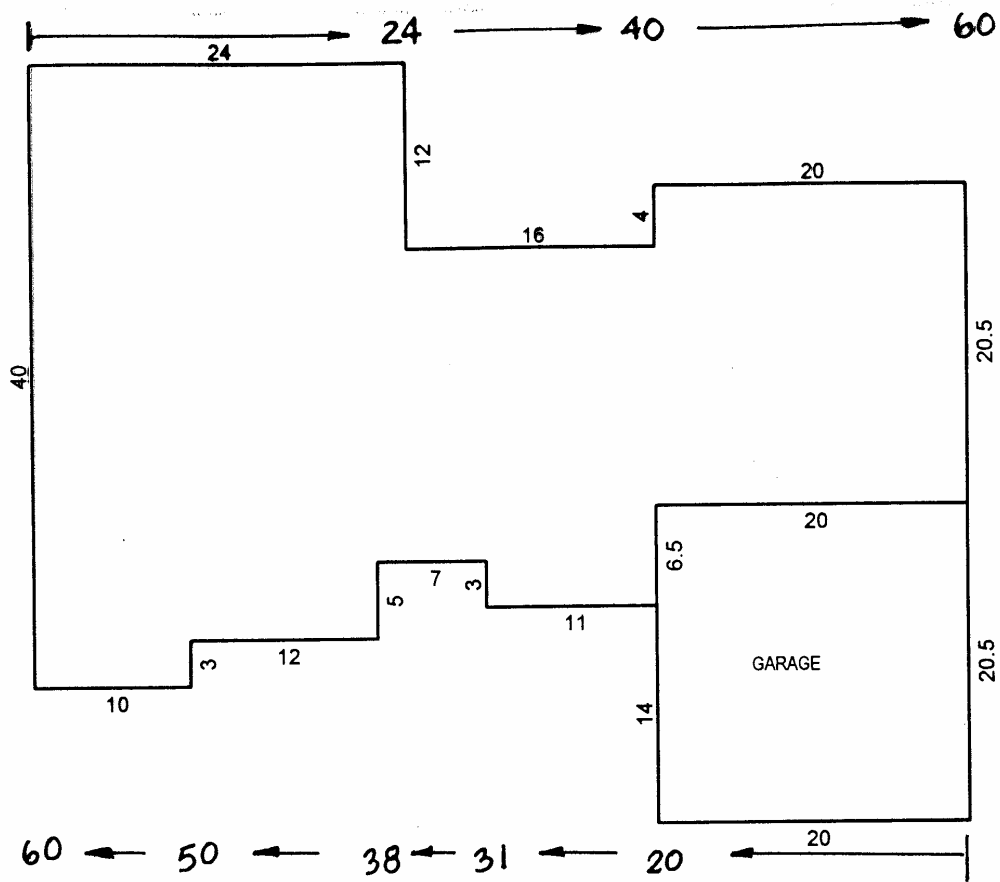
Your best comps are always the houses you just appraised for a lender, at the time they sold. You know that house inside and out, literally.

Even though I do not do review appraisals in my practice, I see a lot of reports that were done by other appraisers. Homeowners are always showing me their lender reports. They give me copies all the time. I say this because there are times when I am amazed and disappointed at how little some of these reports actually say about the subject property. Instead of commentary the appraiser says "See Attached Addendum." And many times the addendum is just generic, canned boilerplate that could apply to any house.

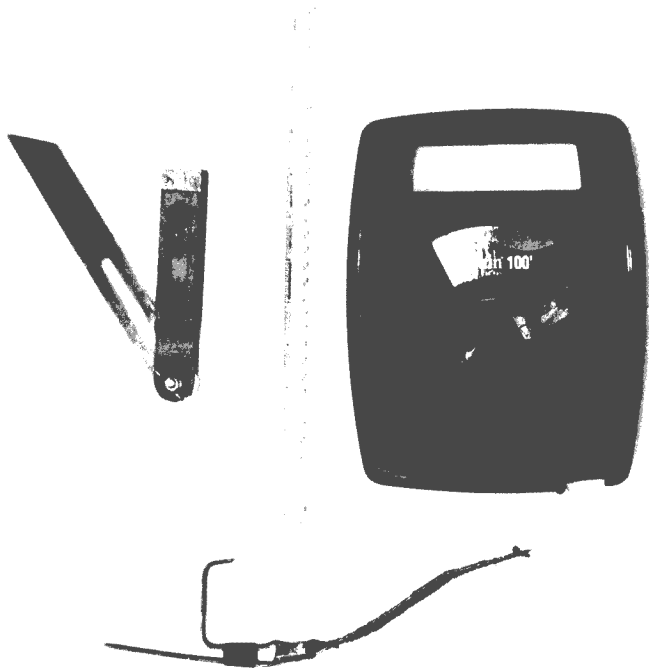
It's almost as if the author of the report would have to consult his field notes to see what the house was really all about.

When was the kitchen last updated? Are the baths original? Is the back yard fully usable, or not? How much hardwood flooring is there? I would think that users of the report would want to know these things. If it were my own report and I was using that property for a comp on a subsequent assignment, then I would want to know, and I wouldn't want to have to dig out my field notes.

And why can't these simple descriptions go on page one of the report where it is easy to find, instead of being buried in the addenda? It is my opinion that if you cannot use the hard copy of your own report for a comp then you have a problem.



This sketch goes with Tip # 11. I hooked my tape measure at the corner of the garage and noted each side wall along the way. The total length across the front elevation was 60 feet. This is the important number. Likewise across the rear elevation.



Pictured above are a sliding bevel and a 100 foot Lufkin tape measure with a Measure Mate attached at the end. Also pictured, but barely recognizable, is an architect's scale.

