

Staging Survey Report

Dear ASP® Participant,

Thank you for your interest in our staging project. The goal of this survey was to determine which principles of staging are widely agreed upon as being important. We were also interested in what kinds of theories people have about why certain principles are important.

Ultimately, our goal is to empirically test some of these principles in a controlled, scientific way in a real-life setting. So, for example, we might see how people react to a house (in terms of emotional response, or perceived sale value) when the house is furnished versus empty.

As far as we know, staging principles haven't yet received empirical testing. Rather, they most likely evolved over years of experience and practice, and very experienced practitioners develop an intuition about staging. But, it is probably the case that some staging "rules" are more effective than others in terms of changing buyer perception and behavior. Also, some rules likely give you more "bang for your buck" in terms of cost effectiveness. This is what we are trying to determine. As psychologists, we are also interested in the psychology behind effective staging principles, on both emotional and cognitive levels.

A few participants commented that our survey was too black-and-white, and that staging is an art that can't be captured in a handful of rules. While we recognize the artistry of staging, scientific testing invariably requires simplification, and we feel that our findings will be useful despite this necessary simplification.

Sincerely,
Andrea Angott, Ph.D.
Duke University
andrea.angott@duke.edu

The table below shows the staging principles that survey participants rated, in order of importance rating. The second column gives the average importance rating. Rating were made on a 7-point scale from 1 = “Not at all important” to 7 = “Extremely important.” The third column provides the standard deviation of the importance ratings; lower numbers in this column essentially indicate more agreement across participants. The final column summarizes participants’ explanations for why they consider the principle to be important. The data below are based on responses from the 457 responses we received by 10/25/10.

Staging principle	Mean Importance rating	Standard Deviation	Common justifications
Remove personal items from bathrooms such as used bars of soap, razors, toothbrushes, etc.	6.55	1.02	Disgusting, clutter, too personal, distracting, don’t want to remind buyers that the house is “used”, prevents buyers from imagining house as “theirs.”
Use rooms for their intended purpose (e.g., the dining room should contain dining furniture and not be used as an office).	6.49	0.86	Buyers can’t visualize/imagine things differently than what they see, implies there isn’t enough space in the house, confusing, may not realize intended purpose of room.
Remove evidence of pets (e.g., food bowls, litter boxes).	6.48	0.93	Makes buyers worry about lingering odors /contaminants / allergens / damage, may even cause buyers to imagine odors or allergic reactions when none exist, off-putting to people who don’t like pets.
Turn on every light in the house during showings.	6.39	0.91	Makes space look bigger, causes positive emotional reaction, indicates there’s nothing to hide (Note: many respondents said having <i>every</i> light on is not necessary).
A house on the market should be furnished rather than empty.	6.26	1.08	Empty houses feel cold, furnished houses feel warm and welcoming, furnishings can make spaces seem bigger, helps buyers picture how to use room or how their own furniture would fit in the space.
Remove garbage cans.	6.17	1.20	Smelly, unattractive, take up space, indicates there’s no hidden space (e.g., cabinet) for it.
Do not have any personal photographs (photographs of people) displayed in the house.	6.02	1.23	Buyers focus on photos rather than home, hard for buyers to imagine space as “theirs”, makes buyers feel invasive, buyers may be judgmental/prejudiced.

Remove art or accessories that are especially attention-grabbing or personal.	5.98	1.18	Buyers evaluate (and remember) art rather than house, negative reaction to art can generalize to evaluation of house.
Paint all walls neutral colors.	5.86	1.18	Inoffensive, appealing to widest population, helps buyers imagine own furniture in room, buyers less concerned with furniture matching wall color.
Remove coffee maker, toaster, etc. from kitchen counter.	5.30	1.37	Makes kitchen/counters look bigger, neater, shows off countertops, appliances out implies not enough cabinet space. (Note: several respondents said 1 or 2 appliances on counter is ok).
Do not have the back of furniture (e.g., couch) facing the entrance to a room.	5.12	1.61	Unwelcoming, creates awkward traffic patterns, interrupts "flow", makes room feel smaller.
"Tell a story" with your staging (e.g., a breakfast tray with coffee mugs on the bed).	5.03	1.64	Feels warm and homey, makes emotional connections, causes buyers to imagine their life will be different in ideal ways if they lived there. (Note: several respondents said that this can be overdone or too cute/cheesy).
Windows should have sheer coverings or no coverings at all.	4.54	1.69	Sunlight is emotionally uplifting, makes space feel bigger, shows off outdoor spaces.
Use scented candles, plug-in air fresheners, or potpourri.	3.63	1.98	Warm and inviting, masks unpleasant odors. (Note: many respondents said that smells should be subtle).
Have chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven during showings.	2.60	1.61	Creates emotional connection, makes house feel warm and homey.

Commonly reported additional rules (paraphrased):

1. House should be extremely clean ("Q-tip clean").
2. Improve curb appeal of house.
3. De-clutter the home.