

Tips for finding an Apartment

Checklist

Before committing yourself to a lease, the following items should be checked. Be certain of your choice before signing a lease or filling out an application because, once signed, these are both legally binding contracts.

- Do all the appliances work? (Ice in the freezer; an oven that heats adequately; burners that heat evenly.)
- Are the locks on the entrance door of the building and on the door to the apartment in reasonable condition? Check the doors for signs of break-ins. As it is impossible to determine who has a key to your apartment, the lock on the apartment door should be changed when you move in (this is usually at the tenant's expense).
- Check the taps for hot water and the water pressure. Are the drains clogged? Are the sinks and bath-tub cracked or leaking? Check for water damage.
- Do the pipes freeze in the winter? Rust in the sinks, and leaking faucets are all evidence of poor plumbing.
- If the apartment or room is furnished, is the furniture in reasonable condition? Does it belong to the landlord or to the previous tenant?
- Are there three-pronged electrical outlets in every room? Are there enough electrical outlets for all of your lamps and appliances? How would you shut off the electricity and the water in case of an emergency?
- Is heat included in the rent, or does the tenant pay for it? Is the apartment heated with gas or with electricity? Does the apartment have its own thermostat? Are there radiators or heating ducts in each room? If you are responsible for the costs of heating the apartment, make sure that you do not simply accept an approximation of what these costs are likely to be from the landlord.
- Is the dwelling well insulated? Check to see if the windows fit properly. The number of outside faces (roof, outer walls) the apartment has will also affect heating costs.
- Is there proper ventilation? Do all the windows in the unit open? Are there locks on windows that are at street level?
- Are there fire exits in the back and front of the building? How would one get out of the building in case of fire? Make sure that fire exits are not blocked or used as storage space. Is there a smoke detector in the apartment or hallway?
- Are janitorial services offered? Find out from someone in the building how responsive the landlord is to problems with the dwelling.
- Is there enough storage space? If there is a locker in the basement, find out who has access to that area, and what kind of lock is on the door.

Apartment Renting Tips

Finding a great apartment rental can be a bit stressful, so here are a few tips for keeping your sanity during your search.

Brainstorm first. Think about what you want, what you can sacrifice and what you definitely can't have. Think about location, size and amenities. Write these things down as they come to you and don't worry about organizing your thoughts just yet.

Organize your list into categories. It's a good idea to make one list of your apartment rental needs (dishwasher, two bedrooms, hardwood floors, etc.), and another list of your personality traits (independent, light sleeper, social, afraid of underground parking structures, etc.).

Analyze your lists. After making your lists, analyze what your needs and personality traits will require in an apartment rental. For example, if you're a light sleeper, you may not want your bedroom window facing a noisy street.

Prioritize your needs. Categorize your apartment rental list in order of "must have," "would like to have," and "could do without."

Learn about the neighborhood. Do your homework. Visit the neighborhood of your prospective apartment rental at different times of day and on weekends. Watch for activity levels, traffic and other issues that might affect how you would feel living in the area.

Pre-screen over the phone. Pre-prepare a list of questions to ask about a unit and call to find out

whether this apartment rental meets your criteria. If you have pets, or don't want a ground floor apartment, this is a good time to find out whether the apartment rental is worth seeing.

Know your apartment rental budget. Most financial experts say that your apartment rental should take no more than 25% of your gross monthly income. Knowing your total monthly bills and expenses will give you a much clearer idea of what you can afford for your new apartment rental. Pick a figure and stick to it. It'll save loads of headaches down the line.

Do a physical inspection of the apartment rental. Inspect both interior and exterior spaces, including parking, storage and laundry facilities. Keep in mind your needs for space, lighting, and storage. Check to see that the doors, carpet, laundry hookups, plumbing, appliances and other amenities are in good working order. And watch for insects or rodents.

Review and understand the lease. Make sure you understand and agree with the lease terms, such as security deposit refunds, which utilities are covered in your rent, and length of time before the first allowable rent increase.

Ask Questions. If you have questions about any issues, make sure to clarify them before signing the lease. Some important issues to cover are maintenance, landlord involvement, and neighbors. Make sure you know whom to call if there's a maintenance problem, and find out how present the landlord is. Knowing whether a landlord is available only when you need assistance, or if he or she is always dropping by unannounced will make a difference.

Questions to ask a prospective landlord before you sign a lease

- < How long did the last tenant stay, and what rent did she or he pay?
- < Are there other students living in the building?
- < Have there been any major repairs or renovations done in the past year?
- < Are any major repairs anticipated for the upcoming year?
- < Who will be responsible for repairs, including small ones?
- < Will any repairs, including small ones, that are to be completed before I move in, be put in writing?
- < Is there a phone number at which the landlord or superintendent can be reached in case of emergency?
- < How is rent payment to be made (by mail, by giving it to the janitor or directly to the landlord)?
- < Where are the laundry facilities and the nearest grocery stores located?
- < How often does the nearest bus run?