



CHECKLIST

What You Need To Know About Your Lease

- How much the monthly rent is
- The day of the month it is due
- Where to mail or deliver the rent
- What the penalty is for late rent
- Who pays utilities
- When the landlord can increase the rent
- Who to call if there are problems or repairs needed
- How much the security deposit is
- How much notice is required to terminate the lease
- What the rules of the apartment complex, if any, are



RENTING HOUSING IN THE UNITED STATES



One of the most important relationships in your new life in the U.S. is with your landlord, (the person or company that owns the place where you live). That relationship is governed by the lease or rental agreement, a legally binding contract, and by the laws of the state in which you live. This brochure provides tips on what you need to know about your lease, and what American landlords typically expect you to do or not to do. Good relations with your landlord are important if you want to keep a good credit rating and to get a good reference when you move to another apartment.

BE SURE TO READ YOUR LEASE TO LEARN THE SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO YOU.

Large apartment complexes often have additional "Rules and Regulations" that apply to everyone. If you do not abide by the lease and the rules, the landlord has the right to force you to leave the apartment or house you are renting.



YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES



Pay Rent

The lease tells you how much rent you must pay every month, when the rent is due, and where the rent is to be mailed or delivered. Your most important responsibility is to pay your rent by the due date (which is usually the first day of the month). If you don't pay on time, the lease usually requires you to pay more money as a late fee. Late payment may be a cause for eviction.

Tips: If you mail a check to the landlord, send it a few days in advance of the due date to be sure the landlord receives the check on time. If you deliver the rent to the landlord, get a written, dated receipt from the person who takes your money.



Pay Utilities

The lease specifies whether you or the landlord pays the cost of "utilities": heat, electricity, water. In some leases, the amount you pay the landlord for rent includes the cost of utilities. However, many leases require you to pay extra – either to the landlord or the utility company – for electricity and heat. Normally, you are responsible for obtaining and paying for the telephone. If the utility bill is not paid on time, the service will be cut off.

Tips: Avoid turning up the heat or air conditioning while the windows are open. Otherwise your utility bill will be very expensive. Try wearing sweaters and socks instead of turning up the heat.



Do Not Damage the Apartment or House

American landlords expect that you will keep the unit clean, that you will not break anything in the apartment (such as appliances, curtains, windows, doors, furniture, and light fixtures), that you will not leave spots or holes in the rugs and walls. If you don't know how to operate an appliance, ask the landlord to show you. Trash and garbage must be taken regularly to the containers outside the apartment designated for them. The landlord will require you to pay for any damage to the unit.

Tips to avoid charges for damage:

- Do not pour grease down the sink – put it in an empty can and throw it away in the trash.
- Don't take the furniture outside.
- Use only a small amount of soap for the dishwasher and washing dishes.
- Teach your children not to play in the curtains, to mark on the walls, or to stand on the furniture.
- Don't put too many clothes or lots of soap in the washing machine.
- Grind up a lemon in the garbage disposal once a month.
- Always run water while operating the garbage disposal.
- Don't put bones, fruit pits, onion peels or celery down a garbage disposal.
- Be careful hanging up pictures so the wall isn't damaged.



Be a Good Neighbor

Landlords expect you to respect your neighbors and their need for peace and quiet. Loud music, loud talking and children screaming, particularly after 10 pm are not appropriate. If you have problems with other tenants, try to work out a solution with the help of the landlord. Help keep the outside areas clean. Put away your children's toys so they are not in the hallway or on the lawn.

Avoid Too Many People in the Unit.

Some leases specifically limit the number of people who can live in the unit. Although friends or family are allowed to visit, they should not stay longer than a week or two unless the landlord specifically approves.



LANDLORD'S RESPONSIBILITIES



Make Repairs.

Typically the landlord is required to make repairs to the unit and to the outside of the building. If something breaks, even if you are at fault, notify the landlord at once. Do not try to repair it yourself. Delaying or trying to fix it yourself can make the problem, much worse, particularly when it involves plumbing.



Return the Security Deposit if there is no damage.

Most leases require you to pay a "security deposit" or a "damage deposit" when the apartment is first rented to you. The landlord keeps that money to use if you do not pay your rent or if the unit is damaged while you live there. The landlord can also keep the deposit if the apartment is not clean when you leave. If the landlord keeps all or part of the deposit, he is usually required to give you a letter explaining why.



MOVING OUT

A lease is for a specific period of time, such as one month or six months or one year. This is called the "term" of the lease. But most leases provide that the term of the lease automatically continues from month to month at the end of the term unless you notify the landlord in writing that you are terminating the lease. Many leases require that you give notice at least a month before the end of the term of the lease, so be sure to read the lease carefully to know how much advance notice is required to terminate the lease. If you do not give the right amount of notice, you may be required to pay additional rent, even though you are not living there. The lease also requires you to leave the apartment clean and in good condition when you leave, and that all the furniture is in place.

EVICITION

The landlord has the right to force you to leave the unit (to "evict" you) if you do not honor the terms of the lease. In some states, the landlord is required to post a notice on the door of the unit telling you what the problem is and how to fix it before you are evicted. Do not ignore notices from the landlord – often you only have a short period of time to comply with what is required. Talk to your landlord and try to work things out if at all possible, and get any agreement in writing. If the problem is not resolved, a landlord can go to court. If he proves you violated the lease, he can get a court order requiring you to leave. If necessary, the police will put your possessions on the street and force you to vacate the apartment.

HOW TO FIND HELP WITH LANDLORD-TENANT PROBLEMS

Call the resettlement agency that helped you when you first arrived in the country or a mutual assistance association. They can refer you to agencies in your area that work with tenants and landlords to resolve disputes.



601 E. 18th Avenue, Suite 150
Denver, Colorado 80203
Phone: 303-830-3300
Fax: 303-830-3301