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## 8 Tips for Renting the Right Apartment

By dan the roommate man

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So, you're looking for an apartment to rent or share with a roommate. Whether you're a first-timer or an experienced apartment-hunter, it's worth taking the time to decide what's most important to you in where you live and to plan your search strategy accordingly. With that in mind, here are eight tips to consider:

1. Make a list of your top housing priorities.

Do you need extra parking spaces? A place that welcomes pets? A large kitchen or linen closet? A ground-floor entrance to your home? Or what? Thinking through your needs ahead of time can help you find an apartment that meets those needs, instead of one that just strikes your fancy at first glance.

2. Check out the property.

In addition to examining the condition of the for-rent unit, walk through the property to see whether it appears to be well-maintained. Is the landscaping healthy or dying? Nicely trimmed or growing wild? Are any windows, steps or railings broken or dangerous? Do the access doors open easily and shut tightly? Walk through at night, too. Are the parking areas and pathways well lit? What about the stairwells and hallways?

3. Talk to the neighbors.

If you're serious about a particular apartment, knock on a few doors and ask your potential neighbors whether they're satisfied with the building's amenities, management's responsiveness to repair needs and other issues of concern to you. Ask: Would you tell a friend to move into this building?

4. Examine the lease.

A lease is a legal obligation to pay rent for a specified length of time, and every lease has variations on the terms and conditions of tenancy. How much notice must you give before moving at the end of the

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lease term? Can the rent be increased? Are pets allowed? What provisions cover your security deposit and end-of-lease cleaning costs? If the terms of the lease agreement don't suit your needs, negotiate or reconsider renting the apartment.

### 5. Consider security.

Does the building have controlled access? If so, are the exterior security gates and doors closed? Are the locks in working order? Does your individual unit have secure door locks and window latches? (Some states have specific laws regarding minimum security devices for apartment units.) Does the building have a security service? If so, is a guard on duty 24 hours or does he or she just drive by periodically?

### 6. Ask about shared facilities.

Does the building have a swimming pool? A recreation or fitness room? Tennis courts? Laundry facilities? Who is allowed to use those facilities and during what hours? Is there an extra fee charged for use of the facilities? Where are the facilities located in relation to your prospective apartment? Do you really want to live poolside or near the laundry room?

### 7. Ask about utility costs.

Is the water bill paid by the owner or separately by the tenants? Are electrical or gas utilities included in the rent? Is there a single thermostat for the entire building? If so, who controls it?

### 8. Take notes.

Before you move in, document the condition of your unit and make note of any nonfunctioning doors or windows, leaking plumbing, missing fixtures, stained carpets and so on. Ask your landlord to initial a copy of your documentation to prevent disputes when you eventually move out. Better yet, take pictures or make a video of the premises before you bring in any of your furniture or belongings.

Since 1989 dan the roommate man has helped 1000's of people find roommates. Need help? Contact him at 800-487-8050 or [www.roommateexpress.com](http://www.roommateexpress.com)

## **Not all apartment leases are created equal**

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Before signing any lease:

\* Take a walk through the unit that you are renting to make sure it is in good repair.

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\* Be sure to read the lease completely. All leases are not the same.

What should be included in your lease:

\* All verbal promises should be reduced to writing within the lease.

\* Are there provisions for a job transfer within the lease?

\* How and when do you give notice to move? Must you give notice even when the lease expires and you wish to move? Can you go month to month at the expiration of your lease?

\* How long does the landlord have to return your security deposit once you have moved.

\* Who is responsible for the repairs to the apartment? If you move into an apartment complex, there are usually maintenance people to take care of all needed repairs. On the other hand if you are renting from a private landlord, you may be responsible for part or all of the repairs.

\* Are late fees addressed in the lease?

\* Who is responsible for the utilities?

\* What happens if you cause damage to the apartment?

If you want to make a change to the lease, cross out the clause in question. Then both you and the landlord must initial the change for it to be binding.

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