

FOUR RULES EVERY RENTER SHOULD KNOW

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By Dan the roommate man

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Whether you're renting for three months or three years; these rules apply to anyone wanting to be a responsible renter.

1. Get everything in writing.

Anything not specifically outlined in your lease should be put into a written document. Without documentation, you have no proof to back yourself up. For example, if you've reported a repair request to your landlord, and three weeks later it still hasn't been taken care of, you won't be able to go to your landlord and complain. How can you prove that you informed your landlord of the problem if you have no physical evidence to back yourself up? Make sure you write down EVERYTHING from repair requests, to amendments in the lease, to lease termination notifications.

Get these documents signed and dated by your landlord, and you and your roommates should do the same. If you would like to see some great examples of form letters, please visit the Colorado Tenant's Organization's web site and click on "CTO Model Letters."

2. Read EVERYTHING before you sign it, and don't sign it if you don't understand.

This rule sounds so simple... but SO MANY PEOPLE don't follow it. The language in a lease is confusing. Don't feel stupid if you don't understand a lease. You should only feel stupid if you sign something without understanding it. Your landlord and the representatives at the place you choose to rent from are not out to hurt you! Don't be afraid to ask them what the lease means.

3. Remember that a contract is a legally binding document.

Depending on the state your renting in, the lease can cover everything from what you pay to who's responsible for the yard work. Regardless of what the lease states, if you sign it, you must abide by it. If you break the lease without your landlord's approval, you could end up losing everything from your security deposit to your credit.

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The only exception to this rule is if you, your roommate(s) and your landlord agree to add an amendment. This amendment can nullify or add to the original agreements made in the original lease. The amendment must be signed and dated by all parties involved in the lease.

4. Don't be afraid to talk to your landlord.

If you're worried about making a payment, or you don't think you're going to be able to fulfill the lease term, talk to your landlord before you do anything. Maybe you'll be able to work out some sort of agreement. While landlords don't have to make any exceptions for you, they'll be much more likely to help you out if you approach them before there's a problem rather than after you've missed a payment, etc.

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dan the roommate man www.roommateexpress.com

BREAKING A LEASE

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I would like to break my lease because I would like to move in with a friend so I can save money to return to school in the fall. I still have about 6 months left on my lease. What can I do?

Thanks, eddie

Dear Eddie,

The first thing to do is read your lease carefully. Some leases have what is called a "lease breaking clause" which will tell you exactly what to do as well as how much it will cost you. There is usually a fee associated with it. But there are also those leases which do not give you an out. You must remember that a lease is a legally binding contract to which you are obligated. Now for the good news – if you should break the lease and move out, your landlord is obligated to mitigate any damages. That means he must attempt to re-rent your apartment. To do so he may also charge you with any marketing expenses associated with the releasing of your apartment along with any other fees. If for some reason market conditions prevent him from finding a qualified renter to move in right away, you will be held responsible for the rent until an appropriate tenant is found to take your place.

There will also be other fees associated with moving in another renter. In the apartment world it is called a "turn-over fee". These fees are connected with preparing the unit for a new renter. Did the landlord have to send in a painter and/or cleaner in order to re-rent your apartment? Charges such as these can also be charged to you as well.

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If you feel that your landlord did not treat you fairly, contact a lawyer who has experience in landlord–tenant law. You may want to explore your options.

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