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MOVING INTO YOUR FIRST APARTMENT–KNOW ALL THE COSTS

By dan the roommate man

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When you move in to a new apartment, the landlord may charge you more than the first month's rent. Before you sign the lease, make sure you understand exactly what you're going to be charged, and get it in writing.

Security Deposit: This is mini–landlord insurance. The deposit is equivalent to about one to two month's rent and can cover anything from a broken window to stained carpet. At the end of your lease, the landlord will conduct an inspection and see whether or not he or she needs to use any of the money on anything damaged beyond the normal "wear and tear" during your stay. State law may only use the security deposit for three purposes: unpaid rent, damages and for cleaning stains or any excessively dirty area. The landlord cannot use it to repaint the apartment to make it look more inviting for the next tenants. (That's illegal).

Cleaning Fee: Since landlords cannot legally use your security deposit for basic cleaning purposes, some of them choose to include a cleaning fee in your lease.

Last Month of Rent: Some landlords ask for the last month's rent in advance. This way, if you break your lease without first consulting your landlord, he or she has 30 days to find a new tenant before he or she needs another rent payment. If you're a good tenant, and don't break your lease, then you'll save yourself the trouble of having to worry about getting together your last month of rent. (This can be really helpful when you have to deal with all the costs of moving out!) Unlike the security deposit, this charge is non–refundable.

Pet Deposit: This, too, is a form of mini–landlord insurance typically running somewhere around \$300.00. The pet deposit is used to cover any wear and tear caused by your pets. Some landlords also ask for a 'pet fee' once a month (\$20–\$50) to cover the cost and inconvenience of the lovely pooper–scooping duties. **Renter's Insurance:** You aren't required to get insurance, but it is HIGHLY recommended. It's incredibly easy for an unusual character to walk through the complex unnoticed.

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New people are in and out of apartments all the time, so you don't have the same security that a homeowner does. With that in mind, you ought to invest in Renter's Insurance as protection against theft, water damage and fire.

Parking: You might not always catch that prime parking space, and depending on where your apartment complex is, this could mean parking on the street. If you're living in the arts district in Downtown Dallas, you might need to feed the parking meter monster or pay for a secured parking lot. Keep this in mind when you yearn for that artsy loft.

Some states put a limit on the deposits a landlord can ask for. For example, in California the deposits cannot add up to more than two-month's rent. Check out the landlord/tenant laws to get the scoop on your state's restrictions.

Regardless of how many of the deposits and fees the landlord asks you for, make sure these are all outlined in the lease. If they are not, make a list of all of the charges, when they were paid, then date it and have the landlord sign it with you. Keep one copy of this list and give one to your landlord to avoid any problems in the future.

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www.roommateexpress.com

Summer Sublease Perfect for College Students

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Summer is fast approaching, and college students throughout the world are rejoicing. Whether you're spending your summer working or playing, the thought of moving out of those smelly dorms and into an apartment has probably crossed your mind more than once. If so, you'll need to learn a little about subleasing.

Typically, landlords will not directly rent out apartments for terms shorter than six months. However, they realize that there are tons of students out there looking for summer solstices. This is where subleasing comes in.

Subleasing consists of you – the restless college student – renting from another tenant who is temporarily moving out. With subleases, the landlord is relieved of many of the hassles that come along with finding new tenants and making them happy. He or she doesn't have to worry about the costs that come along with preparing the apartment for the new tenants or drawing up a new lease. This is now the responsibility of the original tenant.

For example, Jean has lived in the same apartment for two years. Last week she was cast in an acting troupe, which will take a three-month tour through the U.S. Hesitant to leave her dream apartment

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behind, she decides to lease it out to someone (sublet) during those three months. Lucky for Sam – a restless college student – he sees an ad in the paper for Jean's apartment and decides to move in. Before things are officially official, Sam – and anyone else interested in subleasing will need to check out a few things:

- * Make sure the landlord knows the apartment is being subleased and get his/her okay in writing.
- * Find out if you are supposed to pay the landlord directly, or if you pay the old tenant.
- * Find out whom is responsible for maintenance.
- * Ask if there is a security deposit.
- * Get landlord to perform an inspection on the property before moving in so that you don't get blamed for property damages you didn't make
- * Set up your own accounts for power, gas, water, telephone and cable TV services so you don't get stuck with any of the old tenant's bills.

Subleasing is perfect for college students trying to get away for the summer. Typically, the old tenants will leave furniture and appliances behind for you to use. So say goodbye to those bunk beds and community bathrooms, and find an apartment for the summer.

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