

Signing A Lease

Committing to a living arrangement is a major decision - one for which you need to be prepared and there's a lot to consider when [signing a lease](#).

HERE SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING TO LEASE:

- Read and understand the terms of the lease.** Make sure you understand all of the terms, and that you are signing a binding contract. Get help with any terms you don't understand. Like any contract, it is important to have an attorney review it before you sign. Whatever is written in the lease is your commitment for the set period.
- Negotiate your lease.** Most assume they can't negotiate a lease, but some landlords may allow for give-and-take on lease terms, including rent and any deposit required.
- Walk-thru the unit.** Know what you're getting into and what issues your potential living space might have, making sure you and the landlord properly document and take pictures of any problems or needed repairs before taking possession of the premises. It is important that you have evidence of the condition of the premises and any problems before moving in. You will need to be prepared for an inspection when you later move out and can be held liable for any damages to the premises.
- Ensure all repairs are done.** Ask the landlord to fix any problems and make needed repairs before taking possession if possible. It may be difficult to get them to make repairs or fix problems later.
- Consider getting renters insurance.** Renters insurance may be required by your landlord, but even if it is not, having coverage can also protect your personal property against damage or loss.
- Understand the landlord's responsibilities.** Your landlord will likely [be responsible for upkeep and repairs](#) at your property. The premises must be safe and habitable.
- Understand the tenant's responsibilities.** Your lease will have conditions on your responsibility for upkeep and paying rent on time, as well as stipulations on pets, maximum residents, alterations, subleasing, noise, and more.
- Understand your rights.** Landlords are [legally prohibited from discriminating against potential renters](#) based upon such factors as race, age, gender, religion, or disability. If you think you've been discriminated against you have the right to seek legal counsel.
- Clarify how the lease can be terminated.** You may need to [move out before the end of your lease](#). Make sure those terms are set out in the lease – and that you understand any potential penalties. State laws can vary but generally, a landlord will have an obligation to seek to mitigate or minimize the damages. The parties can seek to resolve the matter.

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- Check the lease renewal terms.** While some leases end after the twelve months of the lease are up, other leases have a clause that automatically renews the lease unless you provide proper notice of your intent to leave. Depending on the terms of the lease and laws of the state, it may become month to month.
- Know your rights and how to seek a refund of your security deposit.** Tenants have the right to a security deposit refund within a certain period, but the terms of their lease and laws of the state dictate how a request for return of the deposit must be made, the obligations of a landlord if they don't return all or part of the deposit, the deadlines of the parties, and what deductions can be made to cover repairs or monies owed. Having access to an attorney is important to know your rights and options if you encounter any problems.
- Understand other costs, not just rent.** The right apartment is the one you can afford. You should consider a budget that not only includes the monthly cost of rent, any deposits, moving expenses, and utilities.
- Have a roommate agreement.** If you're moving in with one or more people, have a written agreement that outlines how expenses are split and how responsibilities and rights are shared in the apartment to avoid future conflict. Keep in mind that the landlord will not be bound by such an agreement. It is important to understand your potential liability if you sign a lease and others don't pay their part or move out early. Have an attorney review any contract or lease before you sign. Are you prepared to pay the entire amount if needed? It is also important to understand the impact it can have on your credit if these obligations are not met.
- Have the proper information and documentation.** During the process, you may need:
 - Proof of employment - usually pay stubs and a W2 from a prior year or an employment letter.
 - Photo ID
 - Banking info
- Be prepared with references.** The landlord may want to run a credit check and may seek contacts with employers or former landlords to ensure you're a good candidate.

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