

Rental Guide



Choose the Right Size

While researching potential properties, think of how you will use the space, the length of time you'll be staying and its monthly costs. If you only plan to stay for a one-year lease, it's possible to save money by choosing a smaller place until the need for growth arrives.

Consider these different housing sizes and decide which makes the most sense in your situation.

STUDIO

If space isn't a huge concern, this simplistic approach of a room layout can work in many lifestyles. A studio apartment is essentially a single room broken into different living quarters.

For instance, each corner may represent individual rooms like a kitchen, dining area and a bedroom. Bathrooms are generally the only room separated by a dedicated door and surrounding walls. This footprint is efficient for those who don't require large spaces and are on a budget. When planning to rent a studio to save money for a larger property, consider renting a storage unit to keep your more significant belongings secure.

APARTMENT

For those who require more room and privacy, check out affordable apartments in your area that offer one or two bedrooms. Even if you are the only one who will occupy the space, an extra room is beneficial for storage or to create an office.

When searching for rentals, a key to staying on budget is to rent within your means. The size of a property, along with fees like utility bills and cost of living, should all be considered.



This style of room and board may often cost more but can present more available options in your hunt. Don't forget to look for a layout that fits your life habits like a large living

room for entertaining or spacious kitchen to create meals.

CONDOMINIUM

When a luxurious rental property is more your style,

consider finding a condo packed with amenities. These units typically include numerous residents and public quarters, including swimming pools and fitness centers.

Renters of these buildings are typically treated to on-site property managers to tend to repairs or emergencies, a variety of peers and an active social scene.

Inspect Appliances

While landlords generally cover the cost of failed appliances, ensuring they are in working order can save on utilities and prevent a breakdown during an inconvenient time.

When taking a walk-through, look at manufacturer build dates and test all the appliances to ensure they are without fault.

Unless you are familiar with testing equipment, ask a property manager about the history of repairs and maintenance records. If they are willing, consider hiring a qualified technician to provide peace of mind through inspections.

This small investment may expose flaws that will severely inhibit your convenience while you wait for repair.

HEATING AND AIR

Air conditioning and heating systems not only provide us comfort; without them, our safety is at stake. To increase efficiency, the United States Department of Energy recommends replacing HVAC equipment that is 10-15 years old. If the build date on the appliances exceeds this timeline, prepare for a failure or increased utility bills. When you're analyzing the equipment, look for an Energy Star logo; this shows that the



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appliances are built to operate efficiently.

DISHWASHER

While dishwashers offer incredible convenience, failure can lead to extensive water damage. Look around the base of a dishwasher for signs of leaks or soft spots on

the floor. It's essential to show the landlord, so you avoid penalization for pre-existing conditions. These handy appliances may also increase the risk of fire. The National Fire Protection Association reports that dishwashers were involved in 1,130 home structure fires between 2006-2010.

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM

Throughout the property, flip the light switches in each room and test the performance of ceiling fans. If the apartment is furnished, make sure to check fixtures like lamps to ensure the outlets are working correctly. You should also make sure the cir-

cuit breaker is free of obstructions and clearly labeled. Ask the property manager about when the system was checked last. While it may be challenging to test the entirety of the electrical system before you move in, it's imperative to tell the landlord quickly about anything you see.

Renting with Pets

If you plan to bring your furry friends along during a move, it's good practice to be honest with a property manager during the initial interview. Living with a pet without their knowledge can lead to expensive fees, a broken lease and a soured reputation to local landlords.

When discussing terms with your rental's owner, it's essential to have documents supporting your pet available. You should be prepared to show its medical records, history of vaccines and papers showing its breed, age and gender. Check out these tips from the organization, Pets Are Worth Saving, to have an open and honest discussion with a landlord.

PROPOSE A TRIAL PERIOD

If a property manager is on the fence about bringing a pet to the home, propose a trial period.

This practice will provide a perspective of how the animal acclimates itself with the new surroundings and if its owner is responsible. Of course, in case there is damage or accidents in the home, you should offer to pay for repairs. If the landlord decides that your pet is wel-



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come, it's necessary to get the terms in writing. Make sure to have the new documents notarized, so a change of heart won't leave you and your pet scrambling to find new living arrangements.

SHOW REFERENCES

Another document you

should provide a rental manager with is a list of references who have experiences with your pet.

Consider asking for letters of recommendation from their medical providers, kennel managers and friends who have cared for them. If you are currently renting with pets, ask

your current landlord or neighbors to vouch for your four-legged friend.

ASK BEFORE ADOPTING

If you didn't move to the property with a pet, you might not have discussed animal policies with your landlord. Don't assume you have the right to

bring an animal on the premises without having a conversation first.

You should also avoid being discouraged if they dismiss your inquiry about adopting a large breed of dog. They might be more open to a smaller canine or even a cat companion.

Terms and Policies Explained

First-time renters may find it challenging to understand their responsibilities. While most property managers are efficient in explaining their expectations, there are a few standard policies to become familiar with, so you're prepared.

By knowing what is to come, you can sign a lease without unexpected costs, and plan your budget accordingly.

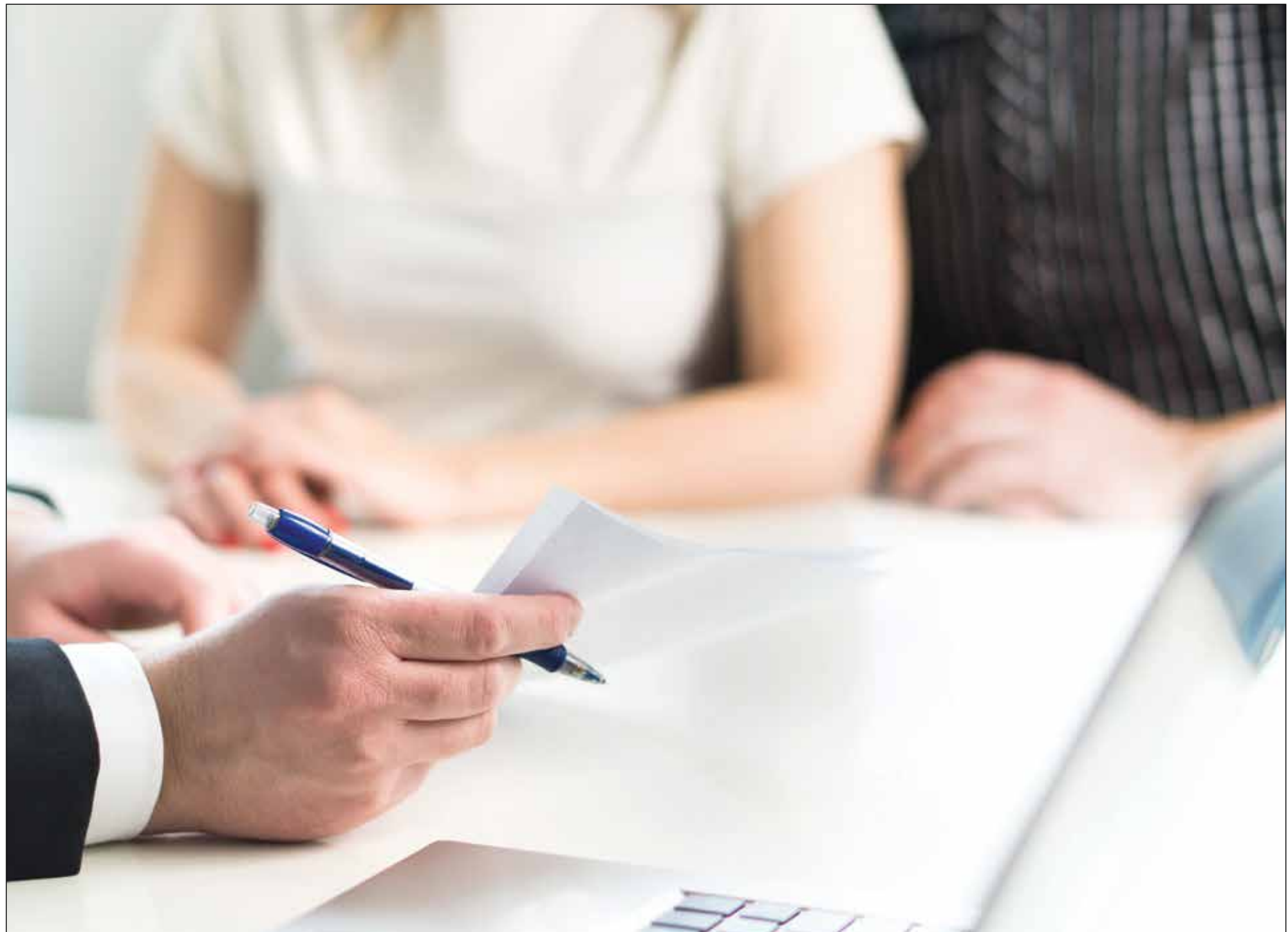
When searching the classified ads for a new place to call home, become accustomed to these universal terms and fee policies in the rental world.

FIRST AND LAST MONTH'S RENT

Once you receive approval to rent a property, a landlord will generally ask for a "down payment" to protect themselves in case of a lease break.

Most situations call for the renter to provide payment to cover the first and last month's rent costs before moving in.

Make sure you incorporate this fee into your budget before you begin the search. Coming up with this expense while moving to a new place can be budget straining.



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SECURITY DEPOSIT

Another typical cost when moving into a rental is paying a security deposit. Landlords ask for this payment to repair damage once you move and clean the property before a new tenant occupies it.

This fee is usually refundable if the apartment is left in good condition. Ask for a written document from the

property manager to understand their policy on how to get your deposit back. The cost of this expense may vary, but it is generally the same amount as the price of rent.

ENDING A LEASE EARLY

The lease agreement is a binding contract written by a landlord and signed by a tenant. Most managers ask

renters to sign for at least a year. This document protects them from someone leaving the property early and losing income.

If you must break a lease early, you will face an early termination fee. This cost should clear in the initial rental agreement and may be based on the number of months left in the contract.

MANAGER INSPECTIONS

There will be times when the landlord or property manager will want to view the interior of your home. Reasons could be inspections of systems, maintenance or pest treatments. Make sure you understand how often management will expect to be in the apartment so you are not caught off guard.

Search for Amenities

Choosing a new apartment complex doesn't have to be a stressful experience. Make a checklist of all the critical needs required before you will call it home.

Do your best to stay true to your list of necessities, and streamline finding the perfect rental.

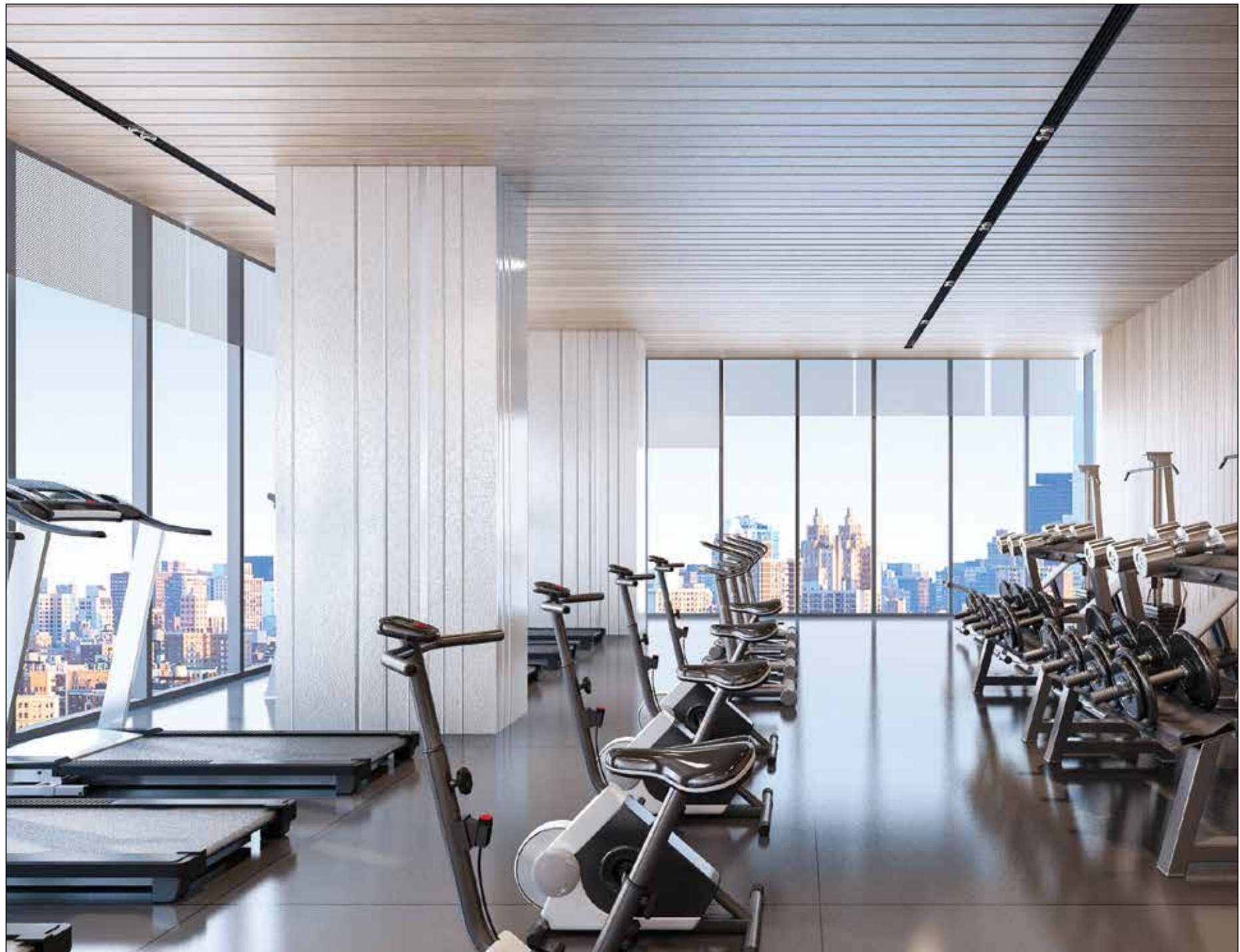
Finding rentals that offer exceptional amenities can add incredible value to your lifestyle. When comparing add-ons and the costs of living, the most efficient property will reveal itself. Make sure to ask potential landlords or property managers about bonuses that are included when signing a lease.

Here are a few additions to look for when apartment hunting.

ON-SITE GYM

It's not uncommon for apartment complexes or condominiums to offer an on-site fitness facility. While access may come with heightened fees, they are typically more affordable than signing up for an independent membership.

If you are contemplating a few different buildings, ask the landlord if you can take a tour of the gym and choose the one that offers the equipment you usually use. You should also have a firm understanding of the hours so you can plan your



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workouts accordingly. Some facilities may offer 24/7 access, while others will have regular operating hours.

PARKING

Another bonus offered by many property managers is accessible parking. Especially in larger cities, leaving your

car on the curb can create risks for security and vandalism. Look for places that offer dedicated areas for parking and understand the lot's etiquette.

If areas aren't clearly labeled with designated parking instructions, it's good practice to speak to other tenants. They

will likely have a system in place regarding who parks where. To keep the peace, find out where the resident you are replacing parked and ask if the spot will remain vacant.

INCLUDED UTILITIES

Renting introduces more costs than only a monthly

housing fee. Some facilities require that tenants pay for their own water, electricity and cable, while others furnish utilities as a perk.

Make sure you understand your responsibilities so you can plan a budget and avoid unexpected fees like heating and cooling the apartment.

Protect Yourself

While landlords are generally respectful and mostly interested in protecting their investment, renters may discover situations where their best interests are compromised. You should know how to take steps to protect yourself during these instances.

It's essential to research your state's tenant laws to understand your rights as a renter. Guidelines are easily discoverable by utilizing state-specific handbooks from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

DOCUMENT EXISTING DAMAGE

Upon the initial walk-through of a potential apartment, it's crucial to document existing damage.

Your security deposit may be withheld at the end of the lease if you are deemed responsible for indiscretions in the property.

Pay special attention to damage on door jambs and locks, carpet stains, compromised trim, and defects to hardwood and tile. Use these tips from the organization Tenants Union to learn how to document damage and receive your refunded deposit.



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Take pictures with a copy of the day's newspaper for proof of the date; some judges do not allow camera timestamps as they are easily altered.

Deposits or denial letters are generally due to be post-marked within 21 days after a rental agreement ends. Allow a few days after the deadline before pursuing legal action.

Did a denial letter claim to make repairs that were already present when you moved in? If so, bring your documentation to a reputable attorney and consider a small claims lawsuit.

Before your agreement ends, it's a good idea to take pictures of the property as you left it.

LEARN SAFETY LAWS

Another way to protect yourself is learning your rights to security as a tenant. Many states and jurisdictions have different laws that require landlords to upgrade defenses with the addition of deadbolts or re-keying locks after a vacancy. Look around the property for the condition of electrical out-

lets, ventilation systems and the presence of smoke detectors. Depending on your location's laws, the property manager may be responsible for purchasing or replacing these items before you move in. Don't forget to invest in renter's insurance to protect your belongings in case of fire, theft or unforeseen damage.



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Get to Know the Neighborhood

Before signing a legal lease, make sure the local community fits into your lifestyle.

Consider spending a few days to check out the demographics of people, entertainment and jobs in the area. Follow these tips to become accustomed to the neighborhood before you agree to rent a property.

TEST FOR WALKABILITY

You can learn a lot about an area by traveling on foot. Take a stroll to determine if walking is a practical avenue to get around or if driving is more accommodating. Take advan-

tage of smart software where residents and travelers will rate the area on how walkability. Their advice may provide you with a perspective you hadn't considered.

PRACTICE REGULAR COMMUTES

You will also want to take a few trial runs to travel to places you will frequently visit. Consider driving or walking to the office, your favorite grocery store and the homes of loved ones.

If you are moving far from home, the everyday commute may be stressful and worth considering an apartment closer to your old neighborhood.

RESEARCH EMERGENCY SERVICES

Learning the operations of emergency responder services is crucial when moving to a new neighborhood. Measure your distance from the closest stations and talk to residents about the typical response time. Technology makes it easier to reach a broad audience with your questions. Don't forget to check crime statistics

and inspect your potential apartment for security measures if an area is questionable.

CHECK OUT LOCAL GROUPS

To combat loneliness and regret of signing a lease, check out local groups organized by people in your age group. Make sure you can make friends by signing up for events or meeting up with peers in social settings. It can be easier to break into a new group by bringing along a friend from home. Their presence may make you feel more comfortable when meeting new people and show them the very best you.