

Understanding Rental Agreements

Lesson 7

Rental Agreement Checklist

Here are some things you should know about the terms of your rental agreement before you commit to renting a new home or apartment. If you have a written rental agreement, look through it until you find the answers to these questions. If you can't find them, ask the landlord to point them out. If you don't have a written rental agreement, ask the landlord for the answers to your questions in writing.

Most written rental agreements use a standard form; however, some landlords add extra conditions to a rental agreement that are handwritten or typed into or attached to the form. This is legal, but occasionally the conditions are not legal. Very carefully read any language that is added to the pre-printed rental agreement. If it doesn't seem fair to you, check with an attorney or one of the resources listed in the Hand-Out 5-4, *Renter Resources*.

- _____ 1. How long does the rental agreement last?
- _____ 2. Who can live in the apartment?
- _____ 3. How long can you have visitors stay with you?
- _____ 4. If guests stay longer than the lease allows, what happens?
- _____ 5. How much is the rent?
- _____ 6. When is the rent due?
- _____ 7. Where do you pay your rent?
To whom do you pay your rent?
- _____ 8. What utilities must you pay?
- _____ 9. Is there a penalty for late payment?
- _____ 10. Are there any payments you must make in addition to the rent, such as security deposit, parking, or utilities?
- _____ 11. When can the rent be increased?
- _____ 12. What happens if you need to move out before your lease period ends?
- _____ 13. Are pets permitted?
- _____ 14. Are you responsible for any maintenance and repairs?
- _____ 15. To whom do you report problems? (You should have a name, telephone number, and address.)
- _____ 16. Who is responsible for being sure the smoke detectors in the apartment work?
- _____ 17. When can the landlord enter the apartment?

Advantages of a Written Rental Agreement

1. Easier to enforce if there are problems.

If you remember that the rental agreement allowed you to move out without penalty after six months, and the landlord said that you had to stay for a year, how do you decide who is right?

2. Avoids surprises when memories differ.

If the landlord deducts a cleaning fee when you move out, but you don't remember agreeing to this, how do you get your money back?

3. Provides a record of the conditions the landlord and tenant agreed to.

What must you do before you take in a new roommate or move? Can you have pets? Without a written agreement, you are subject to what the landlord decides at the time.

4. Protects tenant from changes in rent or rental conditions that occur after move-in.

You believe the rent is supposed to remain the same for a year, but the landlord increases it after six months. If it had been in writing, there would be no question about it.