

Considerations for Living with Roommates

Choosing a Roommate

It is important to talk with potential roommates ahead of time to decrease potential conflicts that may arise. Picking the right roommate can make or break your happiness with your living situation. Use these helpful conversation topics and tips to talk with a future roommate, in order to make sure you can both live together happily.

- Discuss **study habits** and the expected study environment. Will you have some sort of "quiet hours"? Do you like to study in your bedroom or the kitchen table? Does your roommate like to listen to music loudly or require silence when studying?
- Discuss expectations for one another's **friends, visitors, and parties**, if any. Will you be upset if your roommate's friends stay the night? Would your roommate prefer a curfew for visitors? Will either of you allow parties to occur?
- Discuss preferences for **cleanliness** in both your personal spaces and the common areas. Do you prefer to be tidy? Does your roommate mind if things get dusty? Does it bother you if the dishes pile up in the sink?
- Discuss your **sleeping habits**. Do you prefer to be in bed by 10 pm or do you typically stay up until 1 am? What is typical for your roommate?
- Discuss what type of **relationship** you are looking for in a roommate. Are you looking for a best friend, someone to do things with on weekends, or just a roommate to share a living space with?
- Discuss any **common interests** you might have. It can help to share a few interests with your roommate. You might like to go to the gym together occasionally or watch a TV show together once a week!
- Discuss you and your roommate's **schedules**. You may prefer to have similar schedules or you may like to have some alone time when your roommate is at class or work.

Before Moving In

Once you have chosen someone who you think could be a great roommate, it can be helpful to solidify the topics you have discussed to avoid any conflict in the future. We suggest signing a **roommate agreement**, which outlines all the aspects of living together that you have agreed upon. This may seem impersonal, but it can prevent future problems. See our sample roommate agreement **here**. (need to insert link to sample agreement)

Here are some important topics to solidify either in your roommate agreement, or verbally, if you choose not to sign an agreement:

- Agree on a **food policy**. Do you share the cost of food and equally split groceries, or do you shop individually and have a "hands off" policy? Do you label your food or have shelves/spaces in the fridge and kitchen that are specific to you?
- **Open communication** is one of the keys to a successful roommate relationship. Let your roommate know your likes and dislikes up front, and be open to hearing theirs. If your roommate does something that bothers you, don't let things simmer. Small problems can snowball if they aren't addressed. Friendly communication will keep your roommate relationship on an even keel.
- **Be honest, polite, and upfront** when letting your roommate know when something is bothering you. Be direct about your concerns and how they are affecting you.
- **Be fair and balanced** when you come forth and address issues with your roommate. Note if *you* are the one who always becomes irritated and reflect on whether it's due to the actions of your roommate or if you're frustrated with something else and taking it out on your roommate.
- **Respect boundaries**. Roommates who lay down some ground rules have a better chance of respecting each other's boundaries. If you like to turn in by midnight during the week, let your roommate know that being kept up until 3 A.M. will be a problem.
- **Don't be a borrower**
It may be tempting to borrow a roommate's gadgets or clothing, or to help yourself to their snacks when they're not around, but this can be one of the biggest sources of conflict. Keep the peace by keeping your hands off each other's stuff.

- **Practice courtesy.** Common courtesy goes a long way when it comes to roommates. Avoid being too noisy or having too many visitors when your roommate is home.
 - **Keep your space clean.** Roommates who are slobs are only popular with other slobs. Respect the space you share with your roommate by keeping your area organized and neat.
 - **Respect different views and compromise.** You may have different habits and values than your roommate: this is okay! Learn to be courteous of one another's differences. If there is something really upsetting you, be prepared to come up with a plan to compromise, including making sacrifices of your own.
 - **Look for other friends**
If you're lucky enough to get a roommate who becomes a friend, you don't need to spend all your time out of class together. Take some pressure off the relationship by branching out and doing things with other people. Don't feel hurt if your roommate does the same.
 - **Have fun**
 - Keep your sense of humor and try to enjoy the roommate experience.
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- Establish rules around **drinking, smoking, and drugs.**
 - Establish rules around **parties, visitors, and overnight guests.**
 - Create a **cleaning schedule or agreement**, including sweeping, dusting, cleaning up messes, doing dishes, cleaning the bathroom, vacuuming, and taking out the trash.
 - Determine your **personal boundaries.** Is it ok for your roommate to borrow a shirt, jacket, book, computer, etc? Are you allowed to hang out in your roommate's room when he/she is not home?
 - Discuss **utilities.** Will you have cable and internet? If so, what cable/internet package will you choose? Will you split utilities equally?
 - Discuss the **lease term.** Most leases are 12-month contracts, but many students tend to go back home for the summer time. Make sure all roommates are clear on expectations. Will the roommate leaving be responsible and cover the rent while they are gone? Will they try and find a replacement roommate (and if so, is this acceptable to the roommates remaining)?
 - Figure out **finances.** Will you each pay half of the rent, or will you prorate the rent for the person with a bigger room? It can be helpful to have any financial agreements in writing to back to in the future if need be.
 - Consider discussing **unforeseen** circumstances. For example, what will happen if someone loses a job and cannot afford to pay his or her part of rent?
 - Always **communicate concerns** as soon as they happen, or most likely it will get way out of hand.
 - Schedule a time to **revisit the roommate agreement.**

Living Together

Hopefully you and your roommate signed a roommate agreement and things are going great living together! From time to time, you may have small disagreements that might turn into a large conflict if not communicated right away. Here are some tips for roommate conflict resolution and how to be a good roommate.

Adapted from: University of Northern Iowa, USA Today College, Apartments.com, Colorado State University, Ohio State University, Huffington Post

Rental and Legal Considerations

Students who are renting should be aware they have specific rights and responsibilities in the process. The following site from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development provides tips and information for individuals to consider prior to entering into a lease in Colorado.

http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/rental_assistance

Important things to know before signing a lease

(from US News Money and Huffington Post)

- **Narrow your search by price and location.** Be realistic about what you can afford, calculating in extra costs like utilities, internet, phone, and food.
- **Don't rush.** Give yourself enough time so that you won't make a decision out of desperation. If you're desperate, you'll overlook minor things and feel pressured into signing a lease.
- **Find out about extra costs.** Often utilities such as water, trash, and electricity are not covered in your base rent costs. Ask what is included and what is not, including parking and any other hidden fees.
- **Read the fine print.** This is another reason not to rush. Looking over the details takes time, but choosing a place to live is a big decision. Much of the fine print will be boring legalese, but some details are extremely important such as how much it costs to break your lease.
- **Get everything in writing.** Sometimes the lease isn't detailed enough, which could spell trouble if expectations aren't discussed and spelled out beforehand.
- **Ask if your landlord or manager lives nearby.** Ideally, at least someone who works with the landlord or manager lives nearby. It can be helpful to have someone close by to be available if something goes wrong or if repairs are needed.
- **Find out about the lease termination policies.** Some leases automatically renew, while others require residents to notify the property manager of their intent to either renew their lease or move. Some leases also require residents to provide a certain amount of notice if they plan to vacate after their initial lease has expired. Failure to comply could result in a fee.
- **After you've signed the lease, check your apartment for pre-existing damage on move-in day.** Before bringing in your belongings, look for scratched floors, walls or appliances. If you notice any damage, take pictures and ask the property manager to put it in writing. Otherwise, you could be charged for the damage or lose your security deposit when you move out.