

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.