

Ten Tips Every Tenant Needs to Know

by Nolo.com

- 1.** The best way to win over a prospective landlord is to be prepared. Bringing the following information when you meet prospective landlords will give you a competitive edge over other applicants: a completed rental application; written references from landlords and employers; friends and colleagues, and a current copy of your credit report.
- 2.** Carefully review all the important conditions of the tenancy before you sign on the dotted line. Your lease or rental agreement may contain a provision that you find unacceptable--for example, restrictions on guests or pets, design alterations or running a home business.
- 3.** To avoid disputes or misunderstandings with your landlord, get it in writing. Keep copies of any correspondence and follow up an oral agreement with a letter, setting out your understanding. For example, if you ask your landlord to make repairs, put your request in writing and keep a copy for yourself. If he agrees orally, send a letter confirming this fact.
- 4.** Protect your privacy rights. Next to disputes over rent or security deposits, one of the most common and emotion-filled misunderstandings arises over a landlord's right to enter a rental unit and a tenant's right to be left alone. If you understand your privacy rights, for example, the amount of notice your landlord must provide before entering--it will be easier to protect them.
- 5.** Know your rights to live in a habitable rental unit--and don't give them up. Landlords are required to offer their tenants livable premises including adequate weatherproofing; heat, water and electricity; and clean, sanitary and structurally safe premises. If your rental unit is not kept in good repair, you have a number of options ranging from withholding a portion of the rent to pay for repairs to calling the building inspector (who can usually order the landlord to make repairs) to moving out without liability for your future rent.
- 6.** Keep communication open with your landlord. If there's a problem--for example, if the landlord is slow to make repairs--talk with the landlord to see if the issue can be resolved short of a nasty legal battle.
- 7.** Purchase renters' insurance to cover your valuables. Your landlord's insurance policy will not cover your losses.

8. Make sure the security deposit refund procedures are spelled out in your lease or rental agreement. To protect yourself and avoid any misunderstandings, make sure your lease or rental agreement is clear on the use and refund of security deposits, including allowable deductions.

9. Learn whether your building and neighborhood are safe, and what you can expect your landlord to do about it if they aren't. Get copies of any state or local laws that require safety devices such as deadbolts and window locks, check out the property's vulnerability to intrusion by a criminal, and learn whether criminal incidents have already occurred. If a crime is highly likely, your landlord may be obligated to take some steps to protect you.

10. Know when to fight an eviction notice--and when to move. Unless you have the law and provable facts on your side, fighting an eviction notice is usually short-sighted. If you lose an eviction lawsuit, you may end up hundreds (even thousands) of dollars in debt and face a negative credit rating.