

The Renter Move-In Checklist

Everything to check before you sign, on move-in day, and in your first week, so you protect your deposit, get set up fast, and make the place feel like home without losing a cent.

1 · Before you sign

2 · Move-in walkthrough

3 · Utilities & setup

4 · No-damage decor

5 · Condition report

6 · Contacts & dates

1 · Before You Sign the Lease

Read the whole lease, not just the rent line. Ask questions in writing (email or text) so you have a record of the answers.

KEY LEASE CLAUSES TO CHECK

- ☐ **Rent:** amount, due date, how to pay, grace period and late fees
- ☐ **Security deposit:** amount, what it can be used for, and how and when it is returned
- ☐ **Lease term:** start/end dates, renewal terms, any automatic renewal
- ☐ **Notice to move out:** how much notice and in what form
- ☐ **Breaking the lease:** early-termination fees or conditions
- ☐ **Repairs:** who fixes what, and how to submit a request
- ☐ **Landlord entry:** how much notice before they come in
- ☐ **Alterations:** rules on nails, painting, wallpaper and fixtures
- ☐ **Utilities:** which are included and which are in your name
- ☐ **Pets, guests, subletting** and any related fees
- ☐ **Renter's insurance:** required? minimum coverage?
- ☐ **Move-out:** cleaning expectations and any fees

BEFORE MONEY CHANGES HANDS

- ☐ Tour the actual unit you'll rent, not only a model
- ☐ Confirm the landlord or manager is legit (owner name, office, reviews)
- ☐ Never wire a deposit for a place you haven't seen
- ☐ Get every fee itemized: application, move-in, pet, parking, amenity
- ☐ Ask about parking, laundry, trash and package delivery
- ☐ Check cell signal and water pressure during the tour
- ☐ Built before 1978? Federal law requires a lead-based paint disclosure
- ☐ Get any verbal promises (repairs, paint, new appliances) added in writing
- ☐ Get the landlord's name and address for official notices
- ☐ Keep a signed copy of the full lease for yourself

GOOD TO KNOW

Deposit limits, return deadlines and entry-notice rules differ by state and sometimes by city. Look up your local tenant rules before you sign.

2 · The Room-by-Room Walkthrough

Do this **before** you unpack. Photos of existing damage are your best protection when it's time to get your security deposit back.

HOW TO DOCUMENT LIKE A PRO

- ☐ Turn on date/time stamps, or keep original photo files (they store the date)
- ☐ Take a slow video walk-through of every room, narrating what you see
- ☐ Shoot wide, then close up on each scuff, stain, chip or crack
- ☐ Note everything on the condition report (page 5)
- ☐ Email the photos and report to your landlord so there is a dated record
- ☐ Ask for a signed copy of the landlord's move-in inspection, if they have one

CHECK EVERY ROOM

Living areas & bedrooms

- ☐ Walls & ceilings: holes, marks, stains, peeling paint
- ☐ Floors & carpet: scratches, stains, loose boards, tears
- ☐ Windows open, close and lock; screens intact
- ☐ Blinds and curtain hardware work
- ☐ Doors, closet doors and locks work
- ☐ Every light switch and outlet works

Kitchen

- ☐ Fridge & freezer get cold; seals are clean
- ☐ Stove burners, oven and vent hood work
- ☐ Dishwasher and garbage disposal run
- ☐ Cabinets and drawers open, close, aren't damaged
- ☐ Faucet: hot water, pressure, no drips
- ☐ Look under the sink for leaks, water damage or pests

Bathrooms

- ☐ Toilet flushes fully and doesn't keep running
- ☐ Shower/tub: hot water, pressure, drains well
- ☐ Caulk and grout: cracks, mold or mildew
- ☐ Exhaust fan works
- ☐ Mirror, vanity, towel bars are secure

Safety & systems

- ☐ Test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors
- ☐ Heating and A/C turn on and work
- ☐ Locate the breaker panel and water shut-off
- ☐ Ask whether the locks were changed since the last tenant
- ☐ Note any signs of pests, mold or leaks and report in writing
- ☐ Washer/dryer (if included) run a test cycle

Outside & shared spaces

- ☐ Balcony, patio or yard: railings, decking, screens
- ☐ Mailbox key works; parking spot or permit confirmed
- ☐ Storage unit or closet is clean and lockable
- ☐ Water heater area: no leaks, rust or puddles

SEND IT PROMPTLY

Some leases and states set a deadline for returning a move-in condition form. Send your photos and notes in the first days, and keep a copy of everything you send.

3 · Get the Basics Running

Start these 2–3 weeks before move-in where you can, so the lights, heat and Wi-Fi are on the day you arrive.

UTILITIES

- ☐ Ask the landlord which utilities are in your name and which are included
- ☐ **Electric:** set service to start on move-in day
- ☐ **Gas** (if the unit has it): start service; ask if a technician must turn it on
- ☐ **Water, sewer, trash:** confirm who pays and how billing works
- ☐ **Internet:** compare providers at the address; book installation early
- ☐ Ask each provider about deposits or setup fees
- ☐ Stop or transfer utilities at your old place
- ☐ Take meter photos on move-in day (if you can reach them)

RENTER'S INSURANCE

- ☐ Get your own policy: the landlord's usually covers the building, **not your belongings**
- ☐ Compare quotes for personal property and liability coverage
- ☐ Ask whether coverage is replacement cost or actual cash value
- ☐ Check that coverage meets any minimum in your lease
- ☐ Add your landlord as an "interested party" if the lease asks
- ☐ Make a quick video inventory of your belongings

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

- ☐ **USPS:** file a change of address at USPS.com/move or at a Post Office, and choose your start date
- ☐ Bank, credit cards and any loans
- ☐ Employer / payroll
- ☐ Driver's license and car registration (your state may set a deadline)
- ☐ Voter registration
- ☐ Car insurance, health insurance, doctors and pharmacy
- ☐ Subscriptions and online shopping accounts
- ☐ Family and friends

SETTLE IN

- ☐ Save the maintenance request contact and emergency line
- ☐ Set up rent payments and calendar reminders
- ☐ Learn trash and recycling days and rules
- ☐ Collect all keys, fobs, mailbox and garage remotes
- ☐ Find the nearest grocery store, pharmacy and urgent care

FIRST-NIGHT BOX

- ☐ Toilet paper, soap, towels, shower curtain
- ☐ Bedding, phone chargers, medications
- ☐ Basic tools, box cutter, light bulbs, flashlight
- ☐ Important documents and the signed lease

KEEP THE PAPER TRAIL

Save confirmation numbers and start dates for every utility and address change in one note or folder.

4 · Make It Yours, No Damage

Your lease's alterations clause decides what's allowed. When in doubt, ask your landlord in writing first, and always test on a small hidden spot.

Walls & art

- ☐ Removable adhesive hooks and strips for frames and mirrors (stay under the weight limit)
- ☐ Wipe the wall clean before sticking; remove by pulling the tab slowly, straight down
- ☐ Lean large art or mirrors on dressers and shelves
- ☐ Over-the-door hooks for towels, coats and bags
- ☐ Peel-and-stick wallpaper on one accent wall (test first; it can lift paint on some walls)

Windows

- ☐ Tension rods inside the window frame for curtains and café panels
- ☐ Swap flimsy blinds for your own (keep the originals to put back)
- ☐ Removable privacy or frosted window film

Lighting

- ☐ Plug-in wall sconces with cord covers
- ☐ Floor and table lamps to replace harsh overhead light
- ☐ Warm-white bulbs (around 2700K) for a cozy feel
- ☐ Battery puck lights under cabinets and in closets

Ask your landlord first

- ☐ Painting any wall, even a "neutral" color
- ☐ Mounting a TV or heavy shelves
- ☐ Swapping light fixtures or installing smart locks

Floors

- ☐ Area rugs to cover worn floors or add warmth
- ☐ Rug pads under every rug to stop slips and protect floors
- ☐ Felt pads under all furniture legs

Kitchen & bath

- ☐ Removable peel-and-stick backsplash or contact paper
- ☐ Swap cabinet knobs (bag and label the originals)
- ☐ New shower curtain, bath mat and towels for an instant refresh
- ☐ Swap the showerhead only if your lease allows (keep the original)
- ☐ Freestanding shelves and carts for extra storage

Quick wins

- ☐ Plants (real or faux) in every room
- ☐ Throw pillows and a blanket in your accent colors
- ☐ A statement mirror to bounce light

DEPOSIT-SAVER HABIT

Keep a labeled "originals" box with every knob, bulb, blind or showerhead you swap out, so you can put it all back at move-out.

5 · Room Condition Report

Address: _____ Move-in date: _____

Condition key: **G** = Good **F** = Fair **D** = Damaged. Write the photo number(s) so each note matches a picture.

Room / Item	G · F · D	Notes (damage, location, size)	Photo #
Living room / entry			
Walls & ceiling	G · F · D		
Floors / carpet	G · F · D		
Windows & blinds	G · F · D		
Doors, lights, outlets	G · F · D		
Kitchen			
Walls & floors	G · F · D		
Counters & cabinets	G · F · D		
Appliances	G · F · D		
Sink & under-sink	G · F · D		
Bathroom			
Walls, floor, caulk	G · F · D		
Toilet, tub/shower	G · F · D		
Vanity, mirror, fan	G · F · D		
Bedroom 1			
Walls, floors, closet	G · F · D		
Windows, doors, lights	G · F · D		
Bedroom 2 / other room			
Walls, floors, closet	G · F · D		
Windows, doors, lights	G · F · D		
Systems & extras			
Smoke / CO detectors	G · F · D		
Heat / A/C	G · F · D		
Washer / dryer	G · F · D		
Patio / balcony	G · F · D		
Keys received (#)			

Other notes: _____

Tenant signature & date

Landlord / manager signature & date

6 · Important Contacts & Dates

CONTACTS

Who	Name / company	Phone	Email / account #
Landlord / manager			
Maintenance requests			
After-hours emergency			
Electric			
Gas			
Water / trash			
Internet			
Renter's insurance			
Movers			
Neighbor / building			

KEY DATES

Date	Write it here	Date	Write it here
Lease signed		Rent due each month	
Move-in day		Late fee starts after	
Condition report sent		Insurance renewal	
USPS forwarding starts		Lease ends	
Internet install		Notice-to-move deadline	

Deposit paid: \$_____ Paid on: _____ Receipt saved: ☐

Notes: _____

Make your rental feel like home

Free renter tools, printable planners and no-damage decor ideas, made for US renters who want a beautiful home and their full deposit back.

decor-ranch.com

Laws vary by state; check your lease and local rules. This checklist is general information, not legal advice. For questions about your rights, contact your state or local tenant resources or a qualified attorney.