Lease Agreement Guide for Young Adults

Vernon J. DeFlanders Sr. · NextGenAdults · Revised September 27, 2026

Check the rules where you live

This is general educational guidance, not legal advice. Lease terms and state, local and federal protections can differ. Verify entry notice, deposit deadlines, fees, application screening and move-out rules with your local housing authority or a qualified legal-aid provider before acting. A lease does not override applicable law. Keep dated copies of notices, requests, payments and responses.

CFPB renter and tenant debt-collection rights · Find legal aid

When renting your first apartment, understanding the lease agreement is crucial. A lease is a legally binding contract between you and the landlord that outlines your rights, responsibilities, and the terms under which you can live in the property. This guide will walk you through the essential elements of a lease agreement and what to look for before you sign.

What Is a Lease Agreement? A lease agreement is a written contract that defines:

The length of your tenancy (e.g., six months, one year, month-to-month).

The cost of rent and how it’s paid.

Rules and conditions for living in the property.

Your responsibilities as a tenant and the landlord’s responsibilities as a property owner.

Key Sections of a Lease Agreement

1. Basic Information

Parties Involved: Make sure your name and the landlord’s name (or property management company) are correctly listed.

Property Address: Confirm that the address of the rental unit, including the apartment number, is accurate.

Lease Term: Check whether it’s a fixed-term lease (e.g., one year) or a month-to-month agreement. Fixed-term leases often offer stability, while month-to-month leases may provide more flexibility.

2. Rent Details

Monthly Rent Amount: Confirm the exact amount you’ll be paying each month.

Payment Due Date: Know when rent is due (e.g., the 1st of the month).

Payment Method: Check if you can pay by check, online transfer, or direct deposit.

Late Fees and Grace Periods: Understand any penalties for paying late and how many days past the due date qualify for a late fee.

3. Security Deposit and Fees

Security Deposit Amount: Confirm the deposit amount, permitted charges and applicable legal limits in your location.

Refund Conditions: The lease should specify the conditions under which the deposit will be returned, such as a clean apartment, no unpaid rent, and no damages.

Other Fees: Look for additional charges like pet fees, parking fees, or administrative fees.

4. Utilities and Maintenance

Included Utilities: Check which utilities (if any) are covered by the landlord, such as water, trash, or heat.

Tenant Responsibilities: Note if you are responsible for electricity, gas, internet, or other services.

Maintenance and Repairs: The lease should outline who handles routine maintenance and who pays for repairs due to wear and tear or tenant-caused damage.

5. Rules and Restrictions

Pets: If you have a pet, verify that the lease permits it, and note any size or breed restrictions.

Noise Policies: Review quiet hours or noise limits, especially if you have neighbors close by.

Alterations: Understand whether you can make changes to the property (like painting walls or installing shelves) and if you need written permission from the landlord.

Guest Policies: Some leases limit the number or length of time guests can stay.

6. Landlord’s Right to Enter

Notice Requirements: Confirm how much notice the landlord must give before entering your apartment for inspections, repairs, or showing the unit to prospective tenants.

Emergencies: The lease should state the landlord’s right to enter without notice in emergencies, like a fire or serious water leak.

7. Renewal and Termination

Renewal Terms: Check whether the lease automatically renews or if you need to provide notice to continue renting.

Notice to Terminate: Understand how much notice you must give if you plan to move out, and what notice the landlord must give if they want to end the tenancy.

Early Termination Clause: See if there’s a clause allowing you to break the lease early under specific conditions, such as job relocation or personal emergencies.

8. Legal Clauses and Disclosures

Local Laws and Regulations: The lease should comply with local housing laws and ordinances.

Lead Paint Disclosure: Most housing built before 1978 is subject to federal lead-based paint disclosure requirements, with exceptions. Check applicable requirements and the documents provided.

As-Is Condition: Note if the apartment is rented “as is” and if the landlord will fix any known issues before you move in.

9. Renters Insurance

Some landlords require tenants to have renters insurance.

Compare renters insurance coverage, limits, deductibles and exclusions. Not every kind of water damage or loss is covered; ask the insurer about your actual risks.

Steps Before Signing a Lease

Read the Entire Document: Don’t just skim—read every section carefully to understand your obligations.

Ask Questions: If something isn’t clear, ask the landlord or property manager to explain.

Negotiate Terms: If you’re uncomfortable with a clause, see if the landlord is willing to adjust it. For example, you might negotiate a smaller pet fee or a lower late fee.

Document Existing Damage: Before signing, inspect the apartment and take photos of any existing damage. Make sure these issues are noted in the lease or an attached condition report.

Keep a Copy of the Signed Lease: After signing, ask for a copy of the lease for your records. Keep it in a safe place so you can reference it throughout your tenancy.

Conclusion A lease agreement is more than just a piece of paper—it’s your roadmap for living in your new home. By understanding the terms and conditions, asking questions, and reviewing every detail, you’ll enter your first rental experience with confidence and clarity. Remember, the time spent reading and clarifying your lease now can save you stress and money down the road.