



Bottom line, being a good tenant means paying your rent on time; not damaging the property; and not disturbing neighbors. Here are a few tips¹

Know and comply with the conditions of your lease or rental agreement.

If you don't understand any part of your lease, ask your landlord or some else to explain it to you in clear language – BEFORE YOU SIGN IT! Keep asking until you fully understand what you are agreeing to.

Your job is to keep the agreements you make when you sign the lease.

Pay your rent on time – always. Late rent payments not only affect you and the landlord, they also may be reflected in your credit rating. If you need a referral from the landlord in the future, your on-time-payment record is an advantage.

Don't have a pet if it is not allowed in your lease... if you need a service animal, this should be discussed with the landlord as a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). If you have a pet or service animal, you are 100% responsible for the care of the animal, picking up after the animal outside, and to make sure that the animal does not disturb others.

Do not allow extra people to move in or "guests" to stay for long periods of time without discussing in advance with the landlord.

Know your rights. Every state and many localities have landlord-tenant laws. Get a copy.

Become familiar with your rights as a tenant.

If you are a person with a disability, you also enjoy protections under the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). It is to your advantage to know these rights and make sure that others are aware and respect them.

¹ Adapted from: http://www.ehow.com/how_2245277_be-good-tenant.html, http://www.ehow.com/how_8078_be-tenant.html and other sources.

If you have questions about your rights, contact your local Protection & Advocacy organization, a Public Housing Authority, Legal Aid or other attorneys, or other tenant groups in your community.

Submit requests to your landlord in writing to avoid disputes and misunderstandings; keep copies of all correspondence.

Know who to call for what kind of problems. The landlord? Property Management organization? Friend who knows how to unplug a toilet?

Always get advance permission before doing something that affects the unit or other people in the area. This could include everything from painting a room a different color, getting a pet or housemate, or asking for accommodations and modifications under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Keep written records of ALL agreements, including requests and your landlord's responses to your requests. If the landlord does not reply to the request, keep records of the dates and times when you tried to contact the landlord or follow up on the request. Such records come in handy if you have a serious dispute with the landlord.

Make sure you get receipts for your rent payments.

Refrain from damaging the premises or allowing guests to cause damage.

It's a good idea to walk through the unit with the landlord before you move in. Note any pre-existing damage or problems together and sign an agreement that you both acknowledge the presence of these damages. Taking pictures can be of immense value. You don't want to be accused of something you didn't do!

Normal wear and tear is not "damage", but you and the landlord may have different ideas about what is "normal".

You are responsible for your guests. If they damage the apartment, it is your responsibility to fix it, not the guest. You may try to get your guest to pay for some or all of the cost, but the landlord will look to YOU to make and pay for repairs.

Keep your rental unit clean, and properly dispose of garbage.

A dirty place hastens wear and tear on the unit... and invites unwanted insects.

Know where the proper garbage disposal area is and use it!

If you have a problem with something such as a plugged toilet, stuffed drain or broken tile, contact your landlord immediately for assistance.

Notify your landlord in writing of needed repairs to keep components in good working order.

Landlords typically prefer to make repairs when they are small rather than wait for something big. A leaky toilet is easier to fix than a floor that has rotted out because of a leaky toilet!

If you have questions about your responsibility for repairs versus your landlords, check your lease. If you still have questions, talk to the landlord. The landlord may want you to clean the spots on the carpet and change light bulbs, but he/she will fix the broken light socket.

Allow your landlord to enter your rental unit for safety or maintenance reasons, with proper advance notice.

Every state has regulations about how much notice a landlord must give before entering an apartment in non-emergency situations for safety and maintenance. You will find these regulations in the landlord-tenant laws.

If you have a serious health condition, it can be useful to give the landlord or a neighbor permission to enter the apartment under specific conditions to check that you are OK (for example, they haven't seen you in 24 hours).

Keep noise levels to a minimum.

If you like loud music or television, invest in a good set of headphones.

Many apartments have thin walls. You don't want to hear your neighbor's business and they usually don't want to hear yours, either. Keep your voice at a conversational level at all times.

If you have a loud neighbor who is disrupting your ability to enjoy your apartment, notify your landlord. Your neighbors are likely to do the same if your noise disturbs them.

Purchase renter's insurance to cover your personal property in the event of loss.

Landlords are not responsible for replacing the contents of your apartment if it is lost, stolen, or damaged.

Renters insurance is low cost and provides you with protection for your personal possessions including household items, electronics, and personal "stuff."

Move out respectfully.

Give proper advance notice to your landlord about your intentions to vacate the property, according to the terms of your lease or rental agreement.

The landlord's positive referral will be valuable in securing housing in the future. How you leave the place impacts that referral.

When you are ready to leave, walk through the unit with the landlord to check for damages or repairs that may be needed in order to have your security deposit returned. Have a copy of the agreement you and the landlord signed listing pre-existing damages when you toured the apartment before you moved in.

Remember the pictures you took when you moved in? Have them available now.

To ensure return of your security deposit, repair any damages incurred by you repaired to landlord satisfaction.

If you made significant modifications to the unit while you lived there you may be required by the landlord, and by the law, to return the unit to its original state at your expense. If you painted a wall purple, you need to paint it white again. If you installed a serious modification such as a roll-in shower, you may need to replace the original fixtures at your own expense. Under the ADA, your landlord has the right to require this restoration.

Make sure when you leave that the unit is “broom clean” – that is all personal items and trash are removed and the unit is swept out of dirt, appliances, cabinets and fixtures wiped clean of grime.

