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# Rental Guide

May 2025

Renting an apartment in New York might seem daunting, but proper preparation will make it easier. The process is outlined below, with further clarification and information in each section.

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## Overview

**Key Highlights**

- Fast process – most apartments are available for move-in within 30 days.
- Determine the attributes most important to you – location, monthly rent, size of apartment, available light, and type of amenities.
- Usually it is faster and easier to use a real estate broker, but there are websites that have "no fee" listings, such as https://streeteasy.com/rentals.
- When viewing an apartment, be prepared to fill out an application. Have your documentation readily available in both electronic and hard copy form.
- Signing the lease can take as little as a day or two. At lease signing, the first month's rent, security deposit of one month's rent, and broker's fees (if applicable) are paid by certified check or wire transfer.

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**Required Documentation**

- Employment or offer letter
- Last year's tax return
- Verification of other income (if needed)
- Bank statements verifying funds
- Names and contact information of previous landlords
- Personal and business reference letters
- Photo identification (driver's license, passport, etc.)

**Required Funds and Credit Verification**

- A full credit check will be conducted
- An application fee of $20-$100 is required
- First month's rent in a certified check
- Security deposit in a certified check
- Broker's fees (if applicable)

**Important Terminology**

- Condos and Co-op Buildings: Apartments are individually owned. The buildings will have rules about how the apartments can be rented. (See page 8 for more definitions)
- Guarantors: If you do not meet the landlord's requirements, either a company or a personal guarantor can guarantee the lease on your behalf. (See pages 5-6)
- Broker's Fees: A licensed realtor will charge a fee to help find an apartment. (See page 9)

If you are an employee of Columbia University and would like further information or a private consultation, please contact:

**Office of Work/Life**, **Housing Information and Referral Service**
Alice Lesman
al2775@columbia.edu
https://worklife.columbia.edu/
*Please see website for office locations and additional contact information.*

**Disclaimer**

*The content in this document is provided for informational purposes only. It is not intended to provide legal advice and should not substitute for the advice of an experienced real estate attorney. Also, the links and references to web sites and organizations are provided for informational purposes only. Columbia University does not endorse any specific organization, web site, or real estate professional and does not suggest that one source should be utilized to the exclusion of another.*

## 1. Determine your budget, schedule, and need

- It is advisable to begin the process of renting an apartment two to three months prior to your desired move date. This will give you **time to understand the market** and determine your budget, the size of apartment you need and can afford, and which neighborhoods appeal to you. However, apartments do not begin to appear on the market until 30 to 45 days prior to the start of the lease, and there are many apartments on the market that are available for immediate occupancy.

- As a base guideline, usually one's monthly rent should equal 25%-30% of one's gross monthly salary. Landlords usually require **total gross annual household income to be 40 to 50 times the monthly rent**. For example, if the monthly rent is $2,000, then one's gross annual income needs to be $80,000-$100,000.

- Renting an apartment directly from a landlord usually means the **lease has a term of 12 or 24 months**. The apartments are unfurnished, include light fixtures that are attached to the wall or ceiling, kitchen cabinets, and major appliances such as a refrigerator, stove and dishwasher. Some apartments include a washer and dryer, but usually only in new, luxury buildings or apartments that have been recently renovated.

- Apartments in the New York City metropolitan area vary considerably in many ways, such as the **age of the building, size of apartment, available light, and types of amenities**. Buildings with more amenities usually come with more staff, and higher rent.

- Unless you have a large rent budget, you might need to decide **what are the most important aspects** of an apartment to you – location, size, natural light, quiet or little street noise, doorman, gym, roof deck, balcony, parking in the building, laundry room on-site, washer/dryer in unit, pet-friendly, etc. – as you probably can't afford to have it all.

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## 2. Determine Where You Want, or Can Afford, to Live

- Since where you live is dependent on what you can afford, it is a good idea to **understand apartment costs in different neighborhoods**. One of the best websites for understanding the New York market is https://streeteasy.com. Since the website pools listings and information from many sources, it has a wide range of listings in different neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs of New York City.

- As in any big city, **crime and safety** are always a concern. You can gather some interesting information and statistics about crime and safety on the NYC Police Department website.

- Besides affordability and safety, some other considerations in determining where to live include **proximity to your employment, proximity to transportation, convenience to shopping, children's childcare and schooling, and proximity to your social connections.**

**Neighborhood Guides**

There are several good neighborhood guides to help you determine if a certain neighborhood is where you would like to live.

https://www.compass.com/neighborhood-guides/nyc/
https://www.niche.com/places-to-live/search/best-neighborhoods/m/new-york-city-metro-area/
https://www.timeout.com/newyork/new-york-neighborhoods/nyc-neighborhood-guides
https://streeteasy.com/neighborhoods/

Some of the more affordable areas in Manhattan are close to Columbia campuses:
**Upper East Side (East of Third Avenue), Morningside Heights, South Harlem, Central Harlem, East Harlem, Hamilton Heights, Washington Heights, Hudson Heights, and Inwood**.

There are a few neighborhood guides on the Office of Work/Life's website as well.
https://worklife.columbia.edu/content/neighborhood-guides

### 3. Prepare the necessary financial information and documentation

Have **several hard copies and an electronic copy of your documentation** ready (see below) and have your finances in order before you start looking at apartments. Also, bring your checkbook and a credit card with you when you look at apartments, so if you see an apartment you like, you can immediately fill out an application and pay the application fee. It speeds up the process and if you are the first person to fill out an application for the apartment, your chances of getting the apartment are much higher.

Most **landlords request** the following:

- Application fees (i.e. Rental buildings: $20 per person; Condos: $300-$1,000; Co-ops: $600-$1,500)
- Income requirements – gross annual household income needs to be 40 - 50 times the monthly rent (i.e. gross annual household income=$120,000 / monthly rent=$3,000)
- If using a real estate broker, fees are typically 12 - 15% of the annual rent (i.e. monthly rent=$3,000; annual rent=$36,000; 12% of annual rent=$4,320). Sometimes a landlord will pay their broker. If this is the case, then your broker should charge a maximum of one month's rent.
- At lease signing, certified checks or a wire transfer is required for the first month's rent, the security deposit (one month's rent) and the broker's fee (if applicable).
- Credit check, a way of confirming money borrowing and bill payment history, will be conducted on all apartment applicants

**Documents required** when applying:

- Letter from your employer stating position, salary and start date
- Last two pay stubs
- Last one to two years' tax returns (or proof of consistent income)
- Verification of other income
- Last one to two months' bank statements
- Names, addresses and phone numbers of previous landlords
- Two personal and two business reference letters (mostly condos and co-ops ask for this)
- Verification of other assets (real estate, securities, etc.)
- Photo identification (driver's license, passport, etc.)

- If your salary level and total financial picture do not meet the landlord's requirements, you will need a co-signor, or guarantor, to **guarantee the lease**. Landlords prefer a family member who lives in New York, New Jersey or Connecticut. The guarantor must provide the same documentation as the renter and have a gross annual income of 80 to 100 times the monthly rent. Prepare your potential guarantor for this possibility in advance.

- If you cannot meet the landlord's financial requirements and do not have a relative that can guarantee the rent, an alternative might be one of the companies that can **guarantee the lease** on your behalf. More details are on their websites.

  Insurent - https://www.insurent.com/
  Jetty - https://www.jetty.com/
  Rhino - https://www.sayrhino.com/
  Obligo - https://myobligo.com/
  The Guarantors - https://www.theguarantors.com/

- If relocating from outside New York City, additional preparation might be necessary before coming to New York. Landlords will not accept personal or out-of-state checks. They require certified funds or wire transfer. Anyone renting or relocating should try to establish **a New York bank account** before beginning a search. If this is not possible, have easy access to the necessary funds.

- If you are not a U.S. citizen, **do not have credit history in the U.S.**, or if you pay taxes outside of the U.S., you might be asked to pay additional security at the time of lease signing (though landlords are restricted from requesting this as of June 2019). In turn, you should ask the landlord if the lease and payment of rent can be guaranteed by a third-party vendor (see above), or if you can pre-pay the rent in some manner (attorney's escrow account).

- If your income is too low for many market rate apartments, or you do not have a credit history, you might **need to share an apartment or find a sublet**. Many people new to New York start out with a share or sublet. Opportunities are usually abundant, financial requirements are not as stringent, and the cost is usually just the first month's rent and one month's rent as security deposit. Initially having something less permanent will allow you to get your bearings, take the time to look around and also build-up some credit history. Refer to Section 4 for more information about sharing or subletting an apartment.

- If you have concerns about your credit history, you can check your credit report every year on https://www.myfico.com/ or https://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action.
  Both pull credit reports from all three agencies – Trans Union, Equifax and Experian.

## 4. Search for an apartment

- The search for an apartment can take **on**e day or one month. However, if you begin your search too early, you will find it difficult to see many apartments with your move-in date. **Apartments in rental buildings tend to not come on the market more than 30 days prior to the expiration of the current tenant's lease**, and many landlords will not list an apartment until the previous tenant has moved out. The apartment is then available for **immediate occupancy**. The exception to this is rentals in co-op or condo buildings which tend to have a longer application process, as do properties in the suburbs. It is best to **start looking for an apartment 30 to 45 days before you want to move into a rental apartment**, and **at least 60 days before for a co-op or condo apartment or single-family house.**

- The busiest months to search for an apartment are **May through September**, due to increased inventory as more people tend to move during the summer, and more people are looking for an apartment as well.

- As noted in Section 3, **bring several copies of all the required documents**, as well as **your checkbook**. This way when you see an apartment you like you can **immediately fill out an application**, pay the application fee, and have copies of all the required documentation. It speeds up the process and if you are the first person to fill out an application for the apartment, your chances of getting the apartment are much higher. Timing is important and being ready helps to speed everything up.

- When looking at apartments, it is best to have **everyone who is part of the decision-making process** with you – spouse, partner, roommate, parent, etc.

- It is **easiest to use a real estate broker** when looking for an apartment, particularly if you do not already live in the area. Many landlords give the apartment listing to a broker, since the broker will conduct the credit check and confirm all the information on a prospective tenant's application, so paying a broker's fee is sometimes unavoidable. However, it is possible to find an apartment without one, and there are a variety of ways of doing so (see pages 8-9 "No Fee Apartments").

- If possible, **go apartment hunting during the week** when most people are working. If you see an apartment on Friday, it will probably not be available by Monday, since Saturday and Sunday are when most people look for apartments. Also, the best apartments tend to be listed during the first two weeks of the month.

- **Visit t**he apartment and the neighborhood **during the day and at night**, if possible. Some streets may be very busy during the day, but deserted at night, which may or may not feel comfortable. Walk the route you might normally take.

- **If you have a pet**, your choices will be limited to pet-friendly buildings. Many landlords in Manhattan do not allow dogs, while some only allow cats. Some landlords allow only one dog, others allow only dogs of 20 pounds or less, while others set breed restrictions.

**Terminology**

Types of Buildings
Brownstone; Elevator building; Loft; Doorman; Luxury Doorman; Prewar; Postwar; and Walk-up

Types of Apartments
Studio; Alcove studio; Convertible, Flexible or Junior 4; Loft; One-bedroom; Two-bedroom; and Classic

Types of Rental Apartments
In addition to buildings that consist solely of rental apartments, there are opportunities for you to rent an apartment in co-operative and condominium buildings. The conditions attached to these types of leases are totally determined by the building and vary considerably.

- Rental buildings:
  A rental building is owned by a landlord, and all of the apartments are available for rent. Tenants are protected by New York State law, though tenants in buildings consisting of fewer than six units have less protection.

- Condominiums (Condos):
  The apartments are owned by individuals for residential or investment purposes. Within each condominium building's guidelines, the owners are free to establish terms such as rent and length of lease. There will be application and move-in fees.

- Cooperatives (Co-ops):
  A co-op is structured as a corporation. Rather than owning the apartment outright, individuals own shares in a corporation. In many co-op buildings, there are strict restrictions about renting an apartment, the length of the lease (typically two years maximum), and whether the tenant is allowed to have a roommate. Prospective tenants must submit extensive documentation to the co-op board, as well as interview them. The process can take one to two months. Also, the application and move-in fees can be quite steep.

- Rent-regulated apartments and affordable housing:
  On New York City's Housing and Preservation Department website there are descriptions of different types of affordable and rent-regulated housing available in New York City.

  There is more information about affordable housing on our website.

- Rent-stabilized apartments:
  There are not many rent-stabilized apartments that make it to the market these days, but if you think the apartment you want to rent, or have rented, should be rent-regulated or you want to confirm the status, you can:
  - Get the rent history from the state. Contact the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal.
  - Approach your landlord, though it might be helpful to get help from a housing lawyer or tenant advocate. More information is in the Affordable Housing section of our website.

**Ways to Search for an Apartment**

There are many ways to search for an apartment - **word of mouth** (make everyone you know aware that you are looking for an apartment), **social media**, **walking around** the area that you want to live, **signing-up on the wait list** for specific buildings, **contacting landlords and managing agents** directly, and **real estate brokers**.

<u>Real Estate Brokers:</u>

- Though you **do not need to use a real estate broker** to find an apartment, **it is helpful to have one**. New York State licenses real estate brokers and salespersons.

- Brokers charge a commission for their services, which is usually a stated percentage of the first year's rent (15% in Manhattan). The amount of the commission is not set by law and can be negotiated. The broker must assist the client in finding and obtaining an apartment before a commission may be charged. **The fee should not be paid until the tenant has signed a lease for the apartment** shown by that particular broker.

- Though it is possible to find an apartment without a real estate broker, many landlords list the apartment with a broker, so the broker has the "exclusive" and you would need to pay the broker's fee in order to have access to the apartment. Usually, landlords that own less property will give the exclusive to a broker since the broker shows the apartment, verifies the information on the application and conducts the credit check on behalf of the landlord. And since it is the tenant that pays the fee, it doesn't cost the landlord anything to have the broker do most of the work.
  **<u>Please note:</u> The Fairness in Apartment Rental Expenses (FARE) Act is set to be enforced on June 11, 2025. The Act prohibits landlords from charging broker fees to tenants. If the tenant hires a broker separately, then the tenant is responsible for that broker's fees.**

- Here are 10 questions you can **ask your real estate agent** before hiring:
  1. Are you primarily a rental agent or a purchasing agent?
  2. In which neighborhood do you work?
  3. Will I be working only with you or are you part of a team?
  4. Do you work full-time or part-time as a real estate agent?
  5. How many other people are you helping find apartments right now?
  6. Is your license in good standing? (see above)
  7. How many years of experience do you have?
  8. What did you do before you became a real estate agent?
  9. How large is the office you work in, and does the size help you?
  10. Can you provide me with the names and phone numbers of clients who have agreed to be references?

<u>No Fee Apartments:</u>

- **Put the word out** to all your friends and colleagues that you are looking for an apartment, both verbally and through any social media that you normally use (email, Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

- **Walk around the area** in which you want to live – ask the doormen if any apartments are available in the building, respond to apartment signs posted on a building (not all buildings do this, but many do!).

- **Contact managing agents and landlords directly** (see 12 Best Landlords in Manhattan: A Brick Underground Guide and The 14 best Landlords in Brooklyn: A Brick Underground Guide). There are many websites that list "no fee" apartments, which usually means you are contacting the landlord or landlord's representative directly. Since many of these websites are open to the public, there is the potential of scammers listing apartments. See Section 5 about how to avoid a scam.

  https://www.apartmentfinder.com/
  https://gonofee.com/
  https://www.leasebreak.com/
  https://www.listingsproject.com/
  https://www.nybits.com/
  https://padspin.com/
  https://www.renthop.com/
  https://streeteasy.com/
  https://www.trulia.com/
  https://www.zillow.com/
  https://www.zumper.com

**Apartment Checklist**

- **Is the rent reasonable** for the neighborhood and size of apartment? The rent can be negotiated with a landlord, so understand the market before you start looking.
- What are the conditions **of the apartment** and building? Are there any signs of roaches or rodents?
- Is the **apartment large enough** to fit my furniture? Consider the floor plan regarding location of your furniture, TV and cable connection, windows, etc.
- Are all the **appliances in good working order**? Whenever possible, check plumbing, appliances, water pressure, type of heating, air conditioning, and electrical outlets.
- Check the closets, cabinets and storage space.
- Do the **windows and doors open and close** properly? Note locations of windows and exposures. If windows face a busy street, **check the noise level** with the windows open.
- Is all the plumbing in **the bathroom and kitchen in good working order**?
- What is the **security system** in the building – doorman, intercom?
- Does the **superintendent live on site**? If not, ask about the number to call for repairs or in an emergency.
- Is there an **elevator**? If not, are the stairs well-lit and clean?
- Is there a **laundry room** in the building? If so, ask to see it.
- **What utilities are included** in the rent?
- If you are seeing the apartment during the day, **come back to see the building and the area at night**, particularly if it is in an area that you do not know very well.
- Observe **all aspects of the neighborhood** – shopping, playgrounds, bus and subway stops, etc.

**Landlords and Buildings - Research**

When renting an apartment in any large urban environment, it can feel a bit anonymous and disconcerting. There are many questions one can ask, such as: Is the landlord reputable? Are there any violations in the building? Have there been noise complaints filed against other tenants? Many of these questions can be answered by accessing public records, and there are a number of websites that can make this easier.

- Check to see if there are **any violations on the building** and property registration by using the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development's (HPD) Building Registration and Violation Service.

- Check the Public Advocate's NYC's Worst Landlords Watch List.

- Landlords are required to let you know if the building has had **any reported bedbugs in the past year**. This information will be provided as a rider to the lease.

- If you would prefer to access detailed information about **crime statistics**, then the NYPD Crime Statistics' website tabulates different types of crimes (robbery, murder, grand larceny, etc.) by the week and then the percentage change from the previous year. This is searchable by general area.

- A website that provides information about a particular address is Property Shark which lists **ownership information**, management contacts, title documents, property taxes, and other facts obtained from public records.

- On Street Easy, specific building information can be found, along with previous asking rents for apartments in the building.

- If you want to know if the apartment falls under rent stabilization, you can consult the NYC Rent Guidelines Board's website. Further information can be found at New York State-Homes and Community Renewal.

- Some other tips are:
    - Access the building's common areas. Are they well maintained?
    - Get feedback from your broker, if you are using one.
    - Try and speak to other tenants about their experiences with the landlord.
    - Check https://www.openigloo.com/ for tenant reviews about the building.

- Craig's List provides a list of some things to be aware of in order to avoid scams:
    - Deal locally, face-to-face, follow this one rule and avoid 99% of scam attempts.
    - Do not provide payment to anyone you have not met in person.
    - Never wire funds (e.g. Western Union) - anyone who asks you to is a scammer.
    - Don't accept cashier/certified checks or money orders - banks cash fakes, then hold you responsible.
    - Transactions are between users only - no third party provides a "guarantee".
    - Never give out financial info (bank account, social security, PayPal account, etc.).
    - Do not rent or purchase sight-unseen—that amazing "deal" may not exist.
    - Refuse background/credit checks until you have met landlord/employer in person.

- And lastly – Google. You never know what might show up when you google the landlord, managing agent or building address.

**Negotiating Rent**

- The starting position is that you have a **stable job, good credit and an income** that meets their requirements. A landlord wants a stable tenant who pays rent on time.

- When an apartment is not rent-regulated, a landlord is free to charge any rent agreed upon by the parties. If the apartment is subject to rent regulation, the initial rent and subsequent rent increases are set by law.

- Maximum rent increases for rent-regulated apartments are set each year by the New York City Rent Guidelines Board. In addition, landlords of rent-regulated apartments may seek rent increases for certain types of building-wide major capital improvements (MCI) that benefit all tenants, such as the replacement of a boiler or the installation of new equipment.

- If you are looking for an apartment during the winter, many landlords will give **concessions such as a free month's rent or agree to pay the broker's fee** (see page 9 regarding broker's fees). Though inventory is lower in the winter, so is the number of people looking for an apartment to rent. Most landlords would rather have the apartment rented than have it vacant and not have any rent paid at all.

**Subletting**

Sometimes the easiest way to transition to a new city or neighborhood is to sublet an apartment. A short-term sublet can be quite useful if you are in between more permanent arrangements, such as transitioning from a rental to an apartment purchase. Staying in a sublet can also be a good option if there are any large-scale renovations being made in your normal abode.

- Sublets can last anywhere from one month (NYC does not allow sublets for less than 30 days) to several months. There is information in regard to finding a short-term accommodation can be found in the Temporary Housing and Hotels section on our website.

- If you are looking for a sublet close to the Morningside, Manhattanville or CUIMC campuses, Off-Campus Housing Assistance (OCHA) manages an online database of sublets, rooms to rent, and long-term apartment rentals (UNI required to log-in). There are many other websites that list available sublets, but another favorite is Sabbatical Homes as mostly academics list on this site.

- Some things you can do to **ensure this is a legal sublet**:
  - Ask to see a copy of the current lease.
  - Ask to see the identification of the person who is listed as the tenant on the lease, which should be the same person who is trying to sublet the apartment.
  - Request to see the landlord's written permission.
  - Google the tenant's and landlord's names. You never know what might show up!

- Tenants with leases who live in buildings with four or more apartments **have the right to sublet their apartments with the landlord's advance consent.** If the landlord consents to the sublet, the tenant remains liable to the landlord for the obligations of the lease, including all future rent.

- If you plan to sublet to someone that you do not know, it is a good idea to do some vetting. Ask for **employment verification**, as well as for **official identification** (passport, driver's license, etc.). Search their name on the internet and see what comes up.

- If you are looking to find a sublet, there are many ways to find an apartment to sublet in New York, but certainly the best way is to **ask all your friends, post on Facebook, or get the message out** in any way possible that you are looking to sublet an apartment. You never know who might know someone in New York that is leaving town for a few days, a few months, or longer.

- If that fails, then there are plenty of websites to consider.
  https://www.airbnb.com/
  https://hotpads.com/new-york-ny/apartments-for-rent
  https://www.padmapper.com
  https://sabbaticalhomes.com
  https://www.vrbo.com/

- Another option is to find a realtor that specializes in short-term leases.
  https://www.nyhabitat.com/

- See Section 7 for more information about sharing and subletting your apartment.

- For information about subletting laws, check the New York City Rent Guidelines Board's website. https://rentguidelinesboard.cityofnewyork.us/ ,
  and Your Rights to Sublet, Share and Assign Apartments.

**If you are currently affiliated with Columbia University** and would like a referral to a real estate broker, contact the Office of Work/Life, Housing Information and Referral Service, Alice Lesman at al2775@columbia.edu.

### 5. Submit an application

- When you have found an apartment, you would like to rent, you will be asked to fill out a **rental application** and **submit documents verifying your income and financial viability** (see Section 3). Your **references and credit** will be checked at this point. The approval process takes one to seven business days.

- The application is **usually one page** and states there will be a credit check, as well as verification of assets, references, checking account, employer and income information.

- If you have bad credit, then **consider subletting an apartment** until credit can be repaired. Otherwise you might need a g**uarantor** (see page 5-6). Some helpful information about repairing credit can be obtained on http://www.myfico.com/crediteducation/improveyourscore.aspx.

- Ask if the lease can be **sent to you before** you need to sign it. Read it carefully (see Section 6).

- **Check the building and landlord** thoroughly (See Section 4).

### 6. Sign a lease

- **A lease is a contract** between a landlord and a tenant which contains the terms and conditions of the rental. It cannot be changed while it is in effect unless both parties agree. A party must sign the lease in order to be bound by its terms. **Any changes to the lease must be signed by both parties. All agreements** made between the tenant and the landlord **must be contained in the lease**, as verbal agreements are not enforceable. The lease must be written in English. Read it carefully. It is written in favor of the landlord, since it is the landlord that serves the lease. If any clause in the lease is contrary to your rights as a tenant, then the clause is not enforceable by the landlord. If you requested any repairs, replacement of appliances or painting of the apartment before moving in, it needs to be stated in the lease.

- There are **many types of lease agreements,** and the type of lease presented to you will vary depending on the situation with the apartment that you are renting. Although most lease agreements are standard forms, in many instances **clauses or riders may be added** to the lease that supersede or alter the lease agreement in some way. Some examples of types of leases are a "Standard Form of Lease", a "Rent Stabilized Lease Agreement" and a "Co-operative Sublease Agreement". Landlords in New York City are required to have you sign Riders to the Lease regarding window guards and lead-based paint, as well as bedbugs if there has been a report of bedbugs in the building within the last 12 months.

- **All monies** (first month's rent, security deposit and broker's fee, if applicable) **are due at lease signing.** Landlords usually require certified checks, but if the money is electronically transferred, confirm it is to a U.S. account. Also, you will need to bring proof of identity with you (driver's license, passport, etc.).

- **When renting a house or townhouse**, the lease should be explicit about who is responsible for the **maintenance** of the property, and who pays for any **repairs** (i.e. snow removal, lawn mowing, plumber, etc.).

**Check the following:**

- Does the lease state the correct rent, address and landlord?
- Are all the people responsible for paying the rent listed on the lease?
- Does the lease mention all of the amenities agreed upon?
- Check the lease to find out the due date of the rent each month.
- Check to see if utilities are billed separately or are included in your monthly rent.
- Are there any special building rules? Find out if your new building is pet-friendly, has limits on guests, etc.
- What happens at the end of the lease term? Can you renew automatically? What happens if you break the lease? Can you sublet or assign (transfer) the lease?

- If you are signing a lease with a roommate, make sure both of your names are on the lease in order for both parties to have rights to the apartment.
- Check the duration or term of the rental, the conditions of occupancy, and the rights and obligations of both parties.
- If you want the landlord to repaint the apartment, have it stated in the lease.
- If you would like to be able to paint the apartment yourself, or add wallpaper, or any other permanent addition to the apartment, make sure you are allowed to do this. Otherwise the landlord will require you to return the apartment to the original state upon expiration of the lease.

The following lease provisions are void:

- Exempting landlords from liability for injuries to persons or property caused by the landlord's negligence, or that of the landlord's employees or agents.
- Waiving the tenant's right to a jury trial in any lawsuit brought by either of the parties against the other for personal injury or property damage.
- Requiring tenants to pledge their household furniture as security for rent.

Check Section 8 for information about tenants' rights.

**Diplomatic clause**

- An **early termination clause** in a lease is usually referred to as a "**diplomatic clause**". Usually landlords will not agree to add a diplomatic clause during the first 12 months of a lease but may agree to add it for **subsequent lease renewals** or, if it is a 24-month lease, it can be implemented after the first 12 months of the lease. An example of a diplomatic clause is: "The tenant has the option to terminate the lease with sixty (60) days written notice to the landlord."

**Security Deposits**

- Virtually all leases require tenants to give their landlords a security deposit. The security deposit should be one month's rent. A landlord may use the security deposit as a **reimbursement for the reasonable cost of repairs** beyond normal wear and tear if the tenant damages the apartment, or as **reimbursement for any unpaid rent**. The landlord must return the security deposit, less any lawful deduction, to the tenant at the end of the lease or within 14 days after lease termination.

- Landlords, regardless of the number of units in the building, must treat the deposits as trust funds belonging to their tenants and they **may not commingle deposits** with their own money. Landlords of buildings with six or more apartments must put all security deposits in **New York bank accounts earning interest** at the prevailing rate. Each tenant must be informed in writing of the bank's name and address and the amount of the deposit.

- Landlords are entitled to collect **annual administrative expenses of one percent** of the deposit. All other interest earned on the deposits belongs to the tenants. Tenants must be given the option of having this interest paid to them annually, applied to rent, or paid at the end of the lease term. If the building has fewer than six apartments, a landlord who voluntarily places the security deposits in an interest-bearing bank account must also follow these rules.

### 7. Move-in

- The landlord will require **advance notice to schedule a move-in** of your belongings. In most buildings, move-ins are scheduled from Monday through Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm.

- **Tip the building superintendent** when you first move-in as this will likely guarantee better service in the future.

- On move-in day, or before, **take photos of the apartment** before your furniture and boxes have arrived, particularly of any areas that might have existing damage (chips in kitchen counter, water stains on the wood floor, etc.). You can request **a walk-through of the apartment** with the landlord or a landlord's representative prior to move-in in order to assess the condition of the apartment. Take notes.

**Rental Furniture**

If you need to furnish your home quickly, Columbia University students, staff, and faculty will be eligible to receive a $50 VISA gift card for any new Student Package lease of 6 months or longer from Cort Furniture Rental. Follow the link for more information. https://www.cort.com/columbia

**Other furniture options** are listed in the Resources section at the end of this document.

**Renter's insurance**

- The landlord's insurance does not cover the **tenant's personal property**, so a tenant should have renter's insurance. Renter's insurance policies typically cover **damage and loss caused by routine weather events, fire, smoke vandalism and theft**. The amount covered will depend on the amount you elect to take, so consider the replacement cost of your household goods very carefully.

- Renter's insurance also includes **liability protection**. If someone was injured at your home and sued you, your legal expenses and any court award would be covered, generally up to a $50,000 or $100,000 limit, depending on how much coverage you elect to take.

- Coverage **often provides living expenses** should you have to move out of your apartment if the apartment was uninhabitable due to fire, smoke, etc.

- Renter's insurance is not that expensive, as a basic policy costs about $300 to $400 per year with approximately $50,000 worth of property protection. **Read the policy carefully** so you fully understand what is covered.

Following are a few insurance companies that provide renter's insurance. Prices vary from company to company, so it is best to compare policies and prices carefully.

Allstate: https://www.allstate.com/
Allianz: https://www.agcs.allianz.com/global-offices/united-states/ffic-info/
Chubb: https://www.chubb.com/us-en/individuals-families/products/home.html
Hartford: https://www.thehartford.com/
Liberty Mutual Group: https://www.libertymutual.com/
Travelers: https://www.travelers.com/

Home insurance is a voluntary benefit option for Columbia benefit-eligible employees.
https://humanresources.columbia.edu/home-insurance

For more information, check: https://www.iii.org/insurance-topics/homeowners-and-renters-insurance

**Apartment Sharing**

- It is **unlawful for a landlord to restrict occupancy** of an apartment to the tenant named in the lease or to the tenant's immediate family. When the lease names only one tenant, that tenant may share the apartment with immediate family, one additional occupant and the occupant's dependent children, provided that it is the tenant's primary residence.

- A tenant **must inform the landlord of the name of any occupant** within 30 days after the occupant has moved into the apartment or within 30 days of a landlord's request for this information. If the tenant named in the lease moves out, the remaining occupant has no right to continue in occupancy without the landlord's express consent. Landlords may limit the total number of people living in an apartment to comply with legal overcrowding standards.

**Subletting**

<u>Preparing Your Apartment to Sublet</u>
If you plan to sublet to someone you do not know, it is a good idea to do some vetting. Ask for employment verification, as well as for **official identification** (passport, driver's license, etc.). Search their name on the internet and see what comes up.

- Remove any valuables
- Keep your apartment clean
- Make a list of contact information
- Pre-pay anything you are responsible for while you are gone (i.e. electric bill, cable bill, etc.)
- Provide any helpful information about the apartment, building and neighborhood
- Ask for a security deposit

### 8. After Move-in/Move-out

- In most buildings, when any repair or maintenance work needs to be done, it is the superintendent that will either do the repair or arrange to have it done. If you would like to encourage a prompt response to any repairs you need to have done, be sure to t**ip the super when he comes to do work in your apartment**. The next time you need a repair, the superintendent is likely to respond a little faster. The superintendent runs the building, and all other personnel that work in the building usually report to him.

- At the end of the year, it is recommended that everyone who works in the building - the superintendent, doormen, porters, etc. - be tipped.

**Tenant's Rights**

Here are some links to help you know your rights:

- Tenants' Rights: http://www.tenant.net/Rights
- Housing Court Answers: https://housingcourtanswers.org/
- The Rent Guidelines Board: https://www1.nyc.gov/site/rentguidelinesboard/index.page#Sublet
- The New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal: http://www.nyshcr.org/
- NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development: https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/index.page
- Law Help: https://www.lawhelp.org/
- The State of New York's Attorney General's Office provides information on their web site. https://ag.ny.gov/consumer-frauds/housing-issues
- Check Met Council's website for answers to a variety of questions you might have, such as: your right to have a roommate, subletting your apartment, succession rights, breaking your lease, and what to do if you can't afford the rent.

**Lease Renewals**

- Unless you have a rent-regulated apartment, the landlord does not have to renew the lease.

- If you would like to renew your lease, but would like to negotiate the rent increase (or non-increase), then can approach the landlord with the following points:

    - Start the conversation as far in advance as possible.
    - If you have paid your rent on time, then you can point this out to the landlord.
    - Understand what similar apartments are renting for on the market.
    - Smaller landlords might be more willing to negotiate.
    - Vacancies cost landlords money. Thy lose rent while they paint, repair and show the apartment – along with the cost of repairs and potential broker's fees.
    - A new tenant might be noisy or not pay the rent on time.

- Figure out how much it will cost you to move (movers, broker's fees, etc.) and consider this to be the minimum amount you can compromise.
- Ask for a two-year lease in order to lock-in the rent.

- Tenants should be familiar with rent increase laws, so they are not charged more rent by their landlords than is legally allowable. There are three major categories of apartments in NYC: **market-rate or non-regulated apartments, rent-stabilized apartments, rent-controlled apartments, and subsidized apartments**. Each one of these apartment types has its own set of rent increase laws and guidelines.

<u>Market-rate or non-regulated apartments</u>:

There is no limitation on the allowable rent chargeable by landlords and no limit on how much landlords are permitted to increase the rent from lease to lease. The new rent must be agreed upon between the landlord and tenant. If a rent increase is not affordable the tenant's options are to negotiate a smaller increase, if possible, or to move out.

<u>Rent-stabilized and Rent-controlled apartments</u>:

The Rent Guidelines Board (RGB) and State of New York Division of Housing Community Renewal (DHCR) regulate increases for rent-stabilized and rent-controlled apartments. For rent-controlled apartments, landlords must file for rent increases with the DHCR and obtain a rent increase order.

Landlords are not allowed to increase the rent mid-lease, except if landlords of rent-stabilized or rent-controlled apartments apply for and are granted Major Capital Improvement (MCI) increases on their properties. Once obtained, the MCI can become effective at any time. An MCI usually refers to a building wide improvement such as a new roof, or new windows.

**Making changes to the apartment**

- If you would like to paint the walls a different color, or make any other changes to the apartment, **have your landlord approve the change in writing before you do anything**. If you don't get your landlord's approval, you might have trouble getting all or part of your security deposit back after you move-out.

**Getting your security deposit back**

- **Read your lease**. It usually states in the lease specific guidelines by the landlord regarding the return of the security deposit. In New York State, **the landlord has up to 14 days** after lease termination to return the security deposit.

- **Take photos** of the apartment at move-out. Besides normal wear and tear, the apartment should not have any other damage than what was already present when you moved-in.

- Though the apartment needs to be "broom swept" clean, it is best to either **clean the apartment thoroughly** yourself or hire a cleaning service to do so. This helps to prevent the possibility of the landlord attempting to retain some of your security deposit to cover cleaning costs.

- Find out where you need to **return the keys** and do so on the day you move-out. Have the landlord's agent confirm in writing that he/she received the keys.

- If your landlord does not return the security deposit by the prescribed time, then you will need to petition your landlord in **Small Claims Court**.

**Breaking the Lease**

- **A lease is a binding contract**. If either party violates the lease, the offending party is subject to varying penalties under the law. There are certain situations in which a tenant can "break" a lease and still retain the security deposit. This depends on the circumstances regarding the termination of the lease, how quickly the landlord is able to find new a tenant for the apartment, and whether any damage was done beyond reasonable wear and tear to the property during the tenant's occupancy.

- If a tenant has a lease for an apartment that has become uninhabitable, as defined by law, and the tenant can no longer live in the apartment, the tenant is said to be a victim of constructive eviction. **Constructive eviction permits the tenant to break the lease and retain the security deposit**. An example of this would be a flood or a fire.

- Breaking the lease for other reasons, not because the property has become uninhabitable or the landlord has done anything wrong, generally does not entitle the tenant to a return of the security deposit and would in fact **subject the tenant to varying legal penalties** for violating the contract.

- If the landlord is able to immediately find another tenant to rent the apartment after a tenant breaks the lease and moves out, the landlord would have no grounds for keeping the security deposit paid by the original tenant. If the landlord, despite searching, is not able to find another tenant to rent the property, the landlord would be **within rights to sue the tenant for the remaining rent owed** in accordance with the lease.

- If a tenant breaks the lease and moves out but leaves the rented residence damaged beyond what would be considered reasonable wear and tear, the tenant might not be able to retain the security deposit. The landlord would **use the security deposit to repair the damages** caused by the tenant. In order to not be wrongfully accused of damaging the apartment beyond reasonable wear and tear, tenants should carefully survey the property with the landlord and record the condition of the property with photographs prior to move-in.

- If a tenant knows when signing the lease, or the lease renewal, that there might need to vacate the apartment before the lease terminates, the tenant can request a "**diplomatic clause**" be added to the lease (see Section 6).

**Resources**

Credit Report Check
https://www.myfico.com/
https://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action

Furniture and Furnishings
https://www.allmodern.com/
https://www.anthropologie.com/house-home
https://www.cb2.com/
https://www.chairish.com/
https://www.containerstore.com/
https://www.crateandbarrel.com/
https://www.dwr.com/
https://www.dotandbo.com/
https://eternitymodern.com/
https://www.gothiccabinetcraft.com/
https://www2.hm.com/en_us/home.html
https://www.jensen-lewis.com/
https://www.ikea.com/us/en/
https://www.muji.us/store/furniture-interior.html
https://resourcefurniture.com/
https://www.roomandboard.com/
https://www.structube.com/en/
https://www.target.com/c/furniture/-/N-5xtnr?lnk=snav_rd_furniture
https://www.urbanoutfitters.com/
https://www.westelm.com/
https://www.westnyc-home.com/
https://www.worldmarket.com/category/furniture.do

Furniture - Rental
https://www.cort.com/columbia

Furniture – Used
https://www.aptdeco.com/
https://furnishgreen.com/
https://www.housingworks.org/
https://www.fleamarketinsiders.com/nyc-flea-market/

Insurance
https://humanresources.columbia.edu/home-insurance
https://www.iii.org/insurance-topics/homeowners-and-renters-insurance
https://www.allstate.com/

https://www.agcs.allianz.com/global-offices/united-states/ffic-info/
https://www2.chubb.com/us-en/individuals-families/
https://www.thehartford.com/
https://www.libertymutual.com/
https://www.travelers.com/

Lease Guarantor
https://www.insurent.com/
https://www.jetty.com/
https://www.sayrhino.com/
https://myobligo.com/
https://www.theguarantors.com/

Neighborhood Guides
https://www.compass.com/neighborhood-guides/nyc/
https://www.niche.com/places-to-live/search/best-neighborhoods/m/new-york-city-metro-area/
https://www.timeout.com/newyork/new-york-neighborhoods/nyc-neighborhood-guides
https://streeteasy.com/neighborhoods/

NYPD Crime Statistics
https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/stats/crime-statistics/compstat.page

Scams – Avoiding
http://www.craigslist.org/about/scams

Sublets
https://www.airbnb.com/
https://hotpads.com/new-york-ny/apartments-for-rent
https://newyork.craigslist.org/
https://www.padmapper.com
https://sabbaticalhomes.com
https://shorttermrentalsnyc.com/
https://m.sublet.com/
https://www.vrbo.com/

Websites with “no fee” Listings
https://www.apartmentfinder.com/
https://gonofee.com/
https://www.leasebreak.com/
https://www.listingsproject.com/
https://www.nybits.com/
https://padspin.com/
https://www.renthop.com/
https://streeteasy.com/
https://www.trulia.com/
https://www.zillow.com/
https://www.zumper.com

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*Please see website for office locations and additional contact information.*

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