

The First-Time Apartment Renter Checklist

Whether you're still looking or already in the process of moving in, this checklist will make sure you'll have a seamless experience on your first apartment!

PHASE 1: BEFORE SEARCHING

Set your budget

Rent target: income \$ _____ x 0.30 = \$ _____

Upfront savings, 2 to 3 times rent: \$ _____

Fixed monthly costs

Rent: \$ _____

Renters insurance: \$ _____

Parking: \$ _____

Pet rent: \$ _____

Internet: \$ _____

Required service packages: \$ _____

Total fixed costs: \$ _____

Variable monthly costs

Electricity: \$ _____

Gas: \$ _____

Water and sewer: \$ _____

Laundry: \$ _____

Total variable costs: \$ _____

Your dealbreakers

Anything that rules a unit out, no matter the rest.

Your must-haves

Maximum rent: \$ _____

Bedrooms needed: _____

Maximum commute: _____

Parking needs: _____

Pet needs: _____

Laundry needs: _____

Gather your application documents

- ☐ Government photo ID.
- ☐ Social Security number or ITIN
- ☐ Two to three recent pay stubs.
- ☐ Offer letter if starting a new job.
- ☐ Tax returns or 1099s if self-employed.
- ☐ Previous landlord contact, if any.
- ☐ Employer contact.
- ☐ One or two personal references.
- ☐ Co-signer or savings proof, if no history.



PHASE 2: DURING TOURS

Inspect the unit

- ☐ Check walls and ceilings for cracks or stains.
- ☐ Check floors for damage or soft spots.
- ☐ Open every door and window.
- ☐ Run faucets and check water pressure.
- ☐ Check how fast the water gets hot.
- ☐ Flush every toilet.
- ☐ Look under sinks for moisture.
- ☐ Run every appliance.
- ☐ Test heat and air conditioning.
- ☐ Test outlets with a phone charger.
- ☐ Check every lock.
- ☐ Look for pest droppings or traps.
- ☐ Check for musty smells or water stains.
- ☐ Check tubs and vents for mold spotting.

Check livability

- ☐ Listen for street and neighbor noise.
- ☐ Check parking at the hour you would park.
- ☐ Locate laundry, mailboxes, and trash.
- ☐ Ask which internet providers serve the unit.
- ☐ Visit the neighborhood at night.
- ☐ Visit again on a weekend.
- ☐ Time your real commute.

Confirm the true cost

- ☐ Ask which utilities are included.
- ☐ Ask about mandatory monthly fees.
- ☐ Ask about parking and storage costs.
- ☐ Ask about pet fees and pet rent.
- ☐ Get mandatory fees in writing.

PHASE 3: BEFORE APPLYING

Verify the listing before paying

- ☐ Search the address for duplicate listings.
- ☐ Confirm the listing on the company website.
- ☐ Call the number on the website, not the ad.
- ☐ Search the company name plus "scam."
- ☐ Check if the address is listed for sale.
- ☐ See the unit before paying anything.
- ☐ Refuse wire, gift card, or crypto payment.
- ☐ Get every charge itemized in writing.

Ask these six questions

- ☐ What utilities and fees will I pay?
- ☐ Which deposits and fees are refundable?
- ☐ What are the pet and guest rules?
- ☐ How are maintenance requests handled?
- ☐ What are the renewal and increase policies?
- ☐ When is my deposit returned?



PHASE 4: BEFORE SIGNING

Read every clause and confirm every number

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|--|---|
| ☐ Every quoted number appears in the lease. | ☐ Repair responsibilities, yours and theirs. |
| ☐ Lease start and end dates. | ☐ How maintenance requests are submitted. |
| ☐ Month-to-month or auto-renew terms. | ☐ Pet, guest, and subletting rules. |
| ☐ Rent due date and grace period. | ☐ Parking and roommate rules. |
| ☐ Exact late fee structure. | ☐ Renters insurance minimums. |
| ☐ Move-out notice requirement. | ☐ Every unclear clause resolved in writing. |
| ☐ Early termination cost. | |

PHASE 5: BEFORE MOVE-IN

Two weeks out

- ☐ Schedule electricity and gas for day one.
- ☐ Ask which utilities stay in the property's name.
- ☐ Confirm water and trash account transfer.
- ☐ Book internet installation.
- ☐ Buy renters insurance effective day one.
- ☐ Confirm the required liability limit.
- ☐ File USPS change of address.
- ☐ Book movers or a rental truck.

One week out

- ☐ Update banks, employers, and subscriptions.
- ☐ Update license and voter registration.
- ☐ Reserve elevator time or loading access.
- ☐ Ask about move-in hours and truck parking.
- ☐ Ask about large-delivery restrictions.
- ☐ Confirm key pickup time and what to bring.
- ☐ Ask about permits and gate credentials.
- ☐ Ask about mailbox keys and entry codes.
- ☐ Ask how package access works.

Pack a first-night box

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| ☐ Toilet paper and soap. | ☐ Water and simple food. |
| ☐ Towels and toiletries. | ☐ Trash bags and cleaning supplies. |
| ☐ Medications and chargers. | ☐ Lease and key instructions. |
| ☐ Bedding. | ☐ Parking information and a small tool kit. |
| ☐ Change of clothes. | |



PHASE 6: AT MOVE-IN

Document the apartment before unpacking

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| ☐ Timestamped photos of every room. | ☐ Test locks and windows. |
| ☐ Wide views and close-ups of damage. | ☐ Confirm safety alarms are present. |
| ☐ Closets, cabinets, doors, and windows. | ☐ Report problems in writing with photos. |
| ☐ Floors, walls, and ceilings. | ☐ Send the condition report by the deadline. |
| ☐ Assigned outdoor areas. | ☐ Save the originals somewhere secure. |
| ☐ Test appliances, faucets, and drains. | |

PHASE 7: DURING YOUR FIRST WEEK

Set up your systems

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| ☐ Confirm where and how rent is paid. | ☐ Find trash days and dumpster locations. |
| ☐ Add the rent due date to your calendar. | ☐ Find laundry hours and parking rules. |
| ☐ Review autopay terms before enrolling. | ☐ Confirm utilities and appliances work. |
| ☐ Save the routine maintenance contact. | ☐ Confirm locks and building access work. |
| ☐ Save the emergency contact method. | ☐ File all rental documents in one folder. |

FIRST APARTMENT ESSENTIALS CHECKLIST

Walk the apartment first and cross off anything it already includes.

Kitchen

- ☐ Plates, bowls, cups, and utensils.
- ☐ One pot and one pan.
- ☐ Chef's knife and cutting board.
- ☐ Can opener and cooking utensils.
- ☐ Dish soap, sponge, and kitchen towels.
- ☐ Trash bags and food-storage containers.
- ☐ Groceries for your first meals.

Bathroom

- ☐ Toilet paper and hand soap.
- ☐ Bath towels and basic toiletries.
- ☐ Plunger.
- ☐ Shower curtain or liner, if needed.
- ☐ Bath mat, if the floor gets slippery.
- ☐ Small trash can, if none is provided.



FIRST APARTMENT ESSENTIALS CHECKLIST

Walk the apartment first and cross off anything it already includes.

Bedroom

- ☐ Mattress or sleeping setup.
- ☐ Sheets, blanket, and pillows.
- ☐ Hangers.
- ☐ Laundry hamper or basket.
- ☐ Window covering, if allowed and needed.

Tools and supplies

- ☐ Screwdriver set and small hammer.
- ☐ Tape measure.
- ☐ Flashlight and batteries.
- ☐ Approved power strip, where appropriate.
- ☐ Light bulbs, after confirming responsibility.
- ☐ Scissors, tape, and basic hardware.

Buy later, after you have lived in the unit

- ☐ Side tables and coffee tables.
- ☐ Extra seating and dining furniture.
- ☐ Television stand and shelving.
- ☐ Air fryers, mixers, and coffee equipment.
- ☐ Duplicate cookware and serving sets.
- ☐ Storage bins, after measuring.
- ☐ Rugs, artwork, plants, and lamps.

Cleaning and laundry

- ☐ All-purpose cleaner for your surfaces.
- ☐ Broom, vacuum, or mop for your flooring.
- ☐ Cleaning cloths or paper towels.
- ☐ Laundry detergent.
- ☐ Trash bags.
- ☐ Dish and bathroom cleaning supplies.

Safety

- ☐ First-aid kit.
- ☐ Emergency and maintenance contacts.
- ☐ Personal medications you regularly need.
- ☐ Fire extinguisher, if responsibility is yours.

Confirm smoke and carbon monoxide alarms with the property manager before adding or changing any safety equipment.



YOUR KEY INFORMATION

ITEM	FILL IN
Property manager name	
Property manager phone	
Maintenance request contact	
After-hours emergency number	
Lease start and end dates	
Rent amount and due date	
Move-in report deadline	
Electricity provider and account	
Internet provider and install date	
Renters insurance policy number	

