

Top 15 tips for new tenants. In no particular order.

- 1) Understand your rental agreement. Read it and ask questions on any point that is unclear or is worded in incomprehensible legalese. Don't be embarrassed to ask. If there are items that you don't like or are too onerous eg "no noise after 7pm" then ask for the clause to be changed. The agreement will also specify your responsibilities so make sure you can comply with these, and respect your neighbours – advise them in advance of any parties you have organised, and ensure that the garden is kept tidy!
- 2) Understand that landlords need your money. Many of them are NOT well off and simply thought it was a good idea to own another property – they are just like your own mother & father! The costs of renting including mortgages are very high. A delay of 2 weeks in finding a tenant will (obviously) cost them half a month's rental, and that is a substantial amount to lose. There is a lot of competition for business so NEGOTIATE the monthly rent. Do not just agree to what they are asking for. Make them an offer. If they don't accept it, be prepared to walk away.
- 3) The contract should be for a fixed term, which means that they should NOT increase the rent. Ensure there is no clause in the contract allowing this.
- 4) Landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that the accommodation that they offer is fit to live in. I have seen many that haven't been! When viewing the rooms, test everything & make a list of all the unacceptable items & damages & request IN WRITING for these to be removed/repaired prior to you moving in. Once you have moved in, many landlords or letting agents are not motivated to spend money!
- 5) Once you have moved in, if any items need repairing then WRITE to the landlord. Ensure that you have a dated copy as proof of your complaint so the landlord can't wriggle out of his responsibilities.
- 6) If you have a problem with your room or facilities eg a leak, you MUST report it immediately otherwise you may get blamed for damage and lose some of your deposit money. Ensure that you follow this up & put it in writing. The Landlord has an obligation to complete repairs within a reasonable period of time. If the landlord tries to recharge any repairs to yourself then do some research on the internet to find whether the item is the landlord's responsibility! Do not pay until you are sure.
- 7) Ensure that a full inventory is completed. This means a list of every item in the accommodation and noting the condition that it is in. To protect yourself, take photographs of everything on the date that you move in, especially all damages. Landlords should complete their own inventory. Do not sign this until you have verified its accuracy and EVERY bit of existing damage has been included.
- 8) When you leave ensure that you complete a full clean and repair any damages

you have caused, then ensure that a departure inventory is taken. Again ensure that you are happy with the document's contents before signing it, and also I would recommend taking date-stamped photographs of everything. As a landlord I had evidence of a lot of damage to a property and proof the tenant was telling lies, but the arbitrator didn't accept my evidence simply because the photos weren't dated. Outrageous!

- 9) Do not pay a holding deposit. Many letting agents request that these be taken so that they can stop marketing the property. In many cases if you withdraw your offer you lose your deposit. A failed reference check is NO reason to forfeit a deposit either. Also bear in mind that most landlords market their property through more than 1 agent, so there is NO guarantee that the deposit will reserve the accommodation! Do not allow such a clause if the landlord isn't signing to a similar one should they pull out of the agreed contract.
- 10) Ensure that your deposit is being held/registered with an authorised deposit protection scheme. Get proof of this scheme before signing any contract. This will ensure that if the Landlord withholds any of your deposit, you can go to an arbitrator if your deposit is being unfairly withheld. Remember a Landlord cannot withhold your money for items that are damaged but are deemed "fair wear & tear".
- 11) Ensure your property has a Gas Safety Certificate. These need to be carried out at every rented property on an annual basis. It is a legal requirement for all gas-supplied rental properties.
- 12) When signing an agreement, most landlords will try to get you to sign for a 12 month contract. However with students you only need the property for approx 9 months to the end of term. Therefore try to get the contract dates changed so it expires at the end of the summer term (July) rather than September time. This will save you paying several weeks of rent!
- 13) If your Landlord turns up unannounced, you don't have to let them in. Out of courtesy they are supposed to give you a minimum of 24 hours notice. If it's not convenient they have to wait. Just be reasonable.
- 14) If you are renting through a letting agent, it is better that they belong to a professional body, so ask for a copy of their certification.
- 15) If your property has 5 or more unrelated people sharing or is more than 3 stories high then your property should be registered as a HMO – House in Multiple Occupation. Ensure that the property is registered!