

Top Ten Things You Should Know Before Renting

10. LEGAL AND ILLEGAL FEES– The only fees a landlord can charge you include: first month's rent, last month's rent, a security deposit, a lock fee, and a portion of a re-inspection fee. A landlord can't charge you any other fees, such as a holding fee, pet fee, or a broker's/finder's fee, unless they are a licensed realtor.

9. ROOMMATES– If one of your roommates moves out, you may still be responsible for paying their portion of the rent until you find a new roommate. Boston Zoning Code prohibits more than 4 full-time, undergrads from sharing one apartment, regardless of its size.

8. LEASES AND TENANCIES-AT-WILL– If a landlord offers you a lease, read it carefully before signing. Leases, typically for one year, are binding legal contracts. Tenancies-at-will run month to month, but offer you less security against rent increases and evictions.

7. RENTER'S INSURANCE– Your personal property such as computers, TV's, clothing, jewelry, and furniture would be expensive to replace in case of fire or theft. Renter's insurance is a good idea. Don't assume that your landlord's or your parents' insurance will cover your belongings.

6. RE-INSPECTION OF RENTAL UNIT– The City of Boston requires landlords to have apartments inspected for compliance with the State Sanitary Code within 45 days of your move-in. Check the status of your apartment at www.cityofboston.gov/isd/housing/rental.asp

5. CODE VIOLATIONS – You are entitled to an apartment that complies with local and state sanitary and building codes. Violations should be reported to your landlord in writing. If repairs aren't made, call the city's Inspectional Services Department at 617.635.5300.

4. CONDITION OF APARTMENT – Before entering into a rental agreement, check out the condition of the apartment. You do not want to be charged for damages that existed when you moved in!

3. SECURITY DEPOSIT AND LAST MONTH'S RENT – Your landlord can legally require a security deposit and last month's rent in amounts equivalent to one month's rent. Your landlord must give you receipts, pay interest on an annual basis, and the security deposit must be put in a separate account in a Massachusetts bank.

2. NOISE – Be considerate of your neighbors. Having loud parties late at night or cranking up the music can lead to complaints and eventually to eviction, as well as consequences on campus.

1. MEDIATION – If you and your landlord have a dispute, mediation is an informal process to reach a resolution with the help of an impartial mediator. Free mediation services are offered by the City's Rental Housing Resource Center, call 617.635.RENT.

(Source: Rental Housing Resource Center, www.cityofboston.gov/rentalhousing/students.asp)