

TOP TEN THINGS TENANTS SHOULD KNOW

1

TYPES OF TENANCIES

A lease typically runs for one year and is a binding legal contract. Leases offer you security. Be sure to read any agreement before signing it, and keep a copy for your records. If you have a roommate who moves out, you may still be responsible for paying their portion of the rent until you find a new roommate.

A verbal or written tenancy-at-will agreement will run from month-to-month. A tenancy-at-will agreement offers more flexibility, but less security, than a lease. A tenancy-at-will agreement gives you the opportunity to move out after giving the landlord a proper 30-day written notice. It also allows the landlord to ask you to leave or to increase your rent with a proper 30-day written notice.

2

BEFORE SIGNING A LEASE

Always view the apartment and building before you sign a lease. Make sure it's not a scam listing and look to see if the unit and building are in good repair with appropriate safety features, facilities, and appliances.

3

SCREENING TENANTS

Make sure all complaints or requests to your landlord are in writing. If you and your landlord have a dispute that you are not able to resolve, you should consider mediation. Mediation is an informal process in which you try to reach a resolution with the help of an impartial mediator.

If you need mediation, please contact [The Office of Housing Stability](https://www.boston.gov/housingstability) at 617.635.4200 or housingstability@boston.gov. You also have an option to file a [consumer complaint](#) with the [Attorney General's Office](#).

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LANDLORD ENTRY

Your landlord can enter your unit to inspect, make repairs, and show the unit to prospective tenants. Unless there is an emergency, the landlord and the landlord's agents should never enter your apartment without advance notice and your permission. The landlord should provide at least one day's notice and attempt to arrange a convenient time to access the unit.

If you need further assistance, visit [boston.gov/housingstability](https://www.boston.gov/housingstability) or call or email us at: **(617) 635-4200** or housingstability@boston.gov

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HEAT AND UTILITIES

A tenant can only be required to pay for utilities if there are separate meters for each service charged. Your landlord must pay for heat and hot water unless you have signed a written agreement that says you must pay.

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SECURITY DEPOSITS

If your rent is increased, you have to make up the difference in the security deposit and last month's rent. Your landlord should return your security deposit, plus interest, within 30 days after you move out, and must give an itemized receipt if they want to deduct money. They should not deduct for reasonable wear and tear.

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LEGAL AND ILLEGAL FEES

You can legally be charged first and last month's rent, security deposit, lock fee, and a portion of an inspection fee. **IT IS ILLEGAL** For your landlord to charge you a holding fee, pet fee, or a broker's/finder's fee. Only licensed realtors may charge you a broker's/finder's fee. If charged an illegal fee, please report this to the [Attorney General's Office](#).

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RENTAL PAYMENTS

It is best **NOT** to pay your rent in cash, but if you do, get a receipt. There is no "grace period" for payment of rent. You are required to pay rent on the date specified by the terms of the tenancy. You may be charged a late fee, but only if there is a written agreement in effect that allows it. Even then, this fee cannot be charged unless the rent is at least 30 days late. If you have to pay the rent late for personal reasons, don't hide. Approach the landlord and try to work it out. If you are behind on rent, you may qualify for [rental assistance](#) from the City of Boston.

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BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Leave the apartment clean and take pictures of the unit's condition. Return all keys. Forward your mail. Notify utility companies. Schedule bulk item pick-up, if necessary.

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RENTER'S INSURANCE

Buy renter's insurance. It's a small price to pay if there's a big problem.

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