

New tenant checklist

What you must know before you sign a lease

At the start of every tenancy you should be given the following by the landlord or agent:

- a copy of this information statement
- a copy of your lease (tenancy agreement)
- 2 copies of the premises condition report (more on that later)
- a bond lodgement form for you to sign, so that it can be lodged with NSW Fair Trading
- keys to your new home.

The first thing you should do before you sign the lease is read it thoroughly. If there is anything in it which you don't understand, ask questions.

Remember, you are committing to a legally binding contract for which there is no cooling-off period. You will want to be certain you understand and agree to what you are signing.

Only when you can respond with a Yes to the following statements, should you sign the lease.

The lease

- I have read the lease and I asked questions if there were things I didn't understand.
- I know the length of the lease is negotiated before I sign, which means it can be for 6 months, 12 months, or some other period.
- I know that I must be offered at least one way to pay the rent which does not involve paying a fee to a third party.
- I know that any additional terms to the lease are negotiated before I sign.
- I have checked that all additional terms to the lease are legal, for example, the lease does not include a term requiring me to have the carpet professionally cleaned when I leave, unless I have agreed to that as part of a condition to allow me to keep a pet on the premises.

Promised repairs

In relation to any promises by the landlord or agent (for example, replace the oven, paint a room, clean up the backyard etc):

- I have made sure these have already been done, or
- I have an undertaking in writing (before signing the lease) that they will be done.

Upfront costs

I am not being required to pay:

- more than 2 weeks rent in advance, unless I freely offer to pay more
- more than 4 weeks rent as a rental bond.

I am not being charged for:

- the cost of preparing my lease
- the initial supply of keys and security devices to each tenant named on the lease.

After you move in

Make sure you:

- Fill in your part of the condition report and don't forget to return a copy to the landlord or agent within 7 days. This is an important piece of evidence. If you don't take the time to complete it accurately money could be taken out of your bond to pay for damage that was already there when you moved in.
- Get a letter from Fair Trading sometime during the first 2 months saying that your bond has been received and advising you of your Rental Bond Number. If this doesn't arrive call Fair Trading to make sure it has been lodged.

Top tips for problem-free renting

Follow these useful tips to help avoid problems while you are renting:

- Photos are a great way to record the condition of the property when you first move in. Take pictures (that are date stamped) of the property, especially areas that are damaged or unclean. Keep these in case the landlord objects to returning your bond at the end of your tenancy.
- Keep a copy of your lease, condition report, rent receipts, Rental Bond Number and copies of letters/emails you send or receive in a designated 'tenancy' file folder and put it somewhere you can easily find it later.
- Never stop paying your rent, even if the landlord is not complying with their side of the agreement (eg, by failing to do repairs) - you could end up being evicted if you do.
- Keep a diary of your dealings with the landlord or agent - record all the times and dates of conversations, who you spoke to and what they agreed to do. If repairs are needed, put your request in writing to the landlord or agent and keep a copy. This type of evidence is very helpful if a dispute arises which ends up in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal.
- Comply with the terms of your lease. In particular, never make any alterations, keep a pet or let other people move in without asking the landlord or agent for permission first.
- Consider taking out home contents insurance. It will cover your belongings in case of theft, fires and natural disasters. The landlord's building insurance, if they have it, will not cover your things.
- If the property has a pool or garden be clear about what the landlord or agent expects you to do to maintain it.

- Be careful with what you sign relating to your tenancy, and don't let anybody rush you. Never sign a blank form, such as a Claim for refund of bond.
- If you are happy in the place and your lease ends, consider asking for the lease to be renewed for another fixed term. This will remove the worry about being unexpectedly asked to leave, and helps to lock in the rent for the next period of time.

Further information

Go to the Fair Trading website, call 13 32 20 or visit a Fair Trading Centre for more information about your renting rights and responsibilities.

The NSW Government funds a range of community based Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services across NSW to provide advice, information and advocacy to tenants. Go to the Tenants Union website at www.tenants.org.au for details of your nearest service or check your local phone directory.

Landlords and agents must give a copy of this information statement to all new tenants before they sign a residential lease. Fines can be imposed if this is not done.