

FINDING A GOOD APARTMENT SOMETIMES TAKES DETECTIVE WORK

Moving into a new place can be exciting - so exciting, in fact, that it's easy to overlook signs that the unit is in need of repair. Before making your final decision to rent the apartment, look at it again, and this time, more carefully. Detecting potential problems and bringing them to the landlord's attention before signing the lease can help you avoid some hardship after moving in.

Flashlight

Stepladder

Writing Paper

Pen or Pencil

Tape Measure

Light Bulb

Hair Dryer

Electrical Adapter

A friend with an
objective opinion

- As you go around the apartment, make a list of issues that need to be addressed with the landlord.

- Are there adequate locks on the doors that lead outside?

- The tape measure can help you confirm that the apartment meets some of your spacing needs, such as adequate wall space for a large piece of furniture or deep shelving for medical equipment.

- Turn on each light switch. If a light socket is missing a light bulb, use the one you brought to ensure that each light socket is in working condition. The flashlight will help you see sockets in dark areas, such as closets. Use the stepladder to reach the ceiling lights and kitchen and bathroom fixtures, if needed. (Don't forget the sockets on the porch.)

- Check all electrical outlets. (This is where your hairdryer comes in handy.) Plug your hair dryer in each outlet to see if it works.
- Make note of the number of outlets in each room, as well as the locations.

Some older units have 2-pronged outlets (as opposed to grounded 3-pronged plugs). Electrical adapters can solve the problem in some cases, but you want to make sure that the electricity is grounded.

- Look inside all furnished appliances for cleanliness. Keep in mind that a landlord who doesn't clean the appliances for potential renters may not respond quickly to repair needs that tenants report.
- Test out the garbage disposal, if it has one, to make sure it works.
- Turn on the water in the kitchen and each bathroom to check water pressure, drainage and temperature. Also check to see if there is any leakage under or around the sink.
- Flush the toilets to ensure working order and to detect leaks.
- Make sure the apartment has been furnished with an adequate number of smoke detectors.
- Check the condition of the ceilings and walls for cracks and water stains.
- Lightly push on the windows to check that they are tight and secure. Slowly move your hand around the window to see if you feel any drafts.

- Unlock and open the windows to see if the latches work properly and if the window can be opened easily from the inside. Are there screens on the windows?

- Test both the air conditioning and heat, regardless of the current temperature.

After your investigation is complete and you have identified the apartment's deficiencies, determine which ones are "deal breakers" – the necessary repairs that will keep you from being "at home" in the apartment – the problems that must be repaired or you will not take the apartment. Report your findings to the landlord and wait for his/her response.

What if the landlord refuses to make the repairs? Then pat yourself on the back for a job well done! You just cracked the case and can now move on to finding an apartment – and landlord - that will make you happy.