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Back-to-School Apartment Hunting Tips

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FiLife Contributor

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This fall, [19 million students](#) are expected to attend [colleges](#) across the country, and many returning students will be searching for their very first apartments, leaving dorm life far behind. For those students who are new to renting, here are a few tips from Rent.com to help make your apartment search both successful and stress-free.

Know Your “Must-Haves”

It's helpful to create a list that prioritizes apartment amenities of interest. Mark which ones are “must-haves” and which are negotiable for you and your roommate(s). These priorities will become the basic parameters of your apartment search.

Use Online Search Tools for Increased Productivity

Using an online resources like Rent.com will [save](#) time and money by providing free access to detailed property listings that include information such as amenities, pet policies, contact information, pricing, photos, floor plans and even virtual tours! Using your “must-haves” as search parameters, you can quickly narrow your choices and with all of this information at your fingertips, finding the perfect place to live is simple.

Ask Questions

Make sure to ask the landlord questions about maintenance, pet rules and unit customization policies prior to signing the lease. If you are determined to paint your apartment walls or mount a flatscreen on the wall, tell your landlord in advance. It's always better to know what is allowed up front before getting stuck in a lease that doesn't work for you.

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Schedule an Apartment Walkthrough with the Landlord

Before signing a lease, ask your landlord to meet you at the property so you can do a walkthrough of the apartment together. Look closely for damage and make sure it is documented with your landlord as pre-existing so you are not charged for it when you move out. If you are requesting improvements like new carpet, fresh paint or new appliances, make sure your landlord agrees in writing.

Know Your Local Market to Negotiate the Best Lease

In some markets, a large supply of apartments are available for rent. If you find yourself in this type of renters' market, understanding rent ranges in the neighborhood might help you negotiate a better price.

If the landlord is charging a premium for rent and you wish to negotiate, here are a few additional tactics:

1. It's important to have a good relationship with your landlord, so approach negotiation in a friendly and open manner
2. Recognize that any negotiation has to work for both parties, so be sure to present a good business case such as:
 - Present other comparable apartments with lower rents and ask them to match the rent
 - Offer a longer lease term in exchange for lowered rent
 - If getting the rent lowered is not possible, request utilities, free parking or upgraded amenities to truly make the rent worth your while

Have you recently been through the search for the perfect rental? Share your advice in our [For Renters](#) group.

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