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Steps to Renting an Apartment

by Rocco Pendola, Demand Media

- Depending on your situation, you might need to prepare yourself for renting an apartment months ahead of the actual event. Even if you do not have to get ready that far out, you should at least begin preparations a few weeks before you pound the pavement looking for a new pad.
- **Check Your Credit**

By law, you are entitled to a free copy of your credit report from the each of the three major credit bureaus annually. You can secure your reports at the Annual Credit Report website. If there is negative information, think about how to explain it to potential landlords. Erin Burt, an editor at Kiplinger.com, says that in some cases, landlords will make renters with poor credit pay higher security deposits. In California, however, state law prohibits landlords from charging more than double the rent for a security deposit on an unfurnished unit, according to the Department of Consumer Affairs.

- **Pick a City and Neighborhood**

If you are relocating to a new city, the Rent.com website suggests maximizing your time when in town to look for new digs. The site suggests taking notes on everything from local amenities to the dimensions of spaces where you will need to fit furniture. If you are staying in the same city, you have more time to snoop around, but if you are venturing out of your present neighborhood, be certain possible new enclaves fit your lifestyle.

- **Conduct the Search**

Once you pinpoint areas you would like to live in, you have to find new digs. Combine online and offline efforts. In San Francisco and many other medium-to-large size cities, the Craigslist website is the place where people begin and end their apartment search. Walking around target neighborhoods makes great sense.

Not only can you dial up "For Rent" signs, but you can get a feel for what might be your new environs.

- **Impress the Landlord**

Your landlord might be an individual property owner or a large management company. In the former case, be yourself. If the landlord likes you, she might be more willing to rent to you. In the latter, you have to rely more on objective stats, such as your income and credit report. In either case, be honest on all applications and be up front about any negative information. You might want to be proactive about addressing credit missteps, for example. Honesty is a better policy than getting caught in a lie of omission.

- **Sign the Lease**

Ultimately, you will sign an agreement to lease a new apartment. In California, leases generally run for a one-year term. At the end of a year, you operate on a month-to-month basis, according to DCA. Before signing on the line that is dotted, consider negotiating lease terms with your landlord. If you cannot get the landlord to move on the price of rent, Rent.com advises asking for other perks, such as apartment improvements, extra storage or a discounted gym membership.