

The Landlord Checklist

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Being a landlord has never been easy - from bad tenants to legal battles, landlords deal with all sorts of potential problems. One of the easiest ways to avoid these issues is to develop a check list that you go through for each potential tenant. Keeping this check list and following it step-by-step will help you to maintain a great relationship with your tenants, and an easier life for you.

Here are a few tips for what to include in the checklist:

Before the move in

- Check what your state and local area allows for you to charge a tenant. While most areas allow you to charge first month's rent and a security deposit, what you can charge varies by state. This may include last month's rent, a pet fee, or what's known as an application fee. These laws are subject to change, so it's important to stay up to date.
- Carefully screen your possible tenants. This is a rather important step in the process, as this can make or break an entire tenant-landlord relationship. You will want to avoid people who are known for not paying their rent, or for being kicked out of previous rental agreements. There are many ways to go about screening a tenant, but easiest is to order a report from Tenant Background Search.
- Do a walk-through of the area that will be rented out. Make note of any maintenance concerns, or other troubles that the tenant may have.

Leases and deals and papers, oh my!

- Make sure you can outline your specifications and agree on them with the tenant. While most landlords go with a very standard lease for their state and area, you may have further stipulations that need to be agreed upon. These may include specific hours for "quiet time," rules on smoking or drinking near the property, or even removal of snow and garbage from the area. You might want to include a blank area or page to write up additional agreed upon material.
- Always check the lease yourself before allowing a tenant to sign it. If you haven't updated your lease in a while, there may be new agreements or laws in place that you need to keep in mind.

The M word - Maintenance

- You will want to make sure tenants know phone numbers to call for any needed maintenance, including plumbing and electrical repair. This will stop tenants from having to contact you in case of an emergency.
- If you are personally taking on the responsibility for much of the maintenance, you need to follow through in a reasonable amount of time.

Before the move out

- If your tenant has decided to move out, make sure to get an address where they can be contacted in the future. This will solve two problems - you will have a place to

forward their mail to if you receive any, and you will be able to forward the security deposit to them in a timely manner.

- Return the security deposit in a timely manner. State laws vary regarding last month's rent and security deposit. If you charge for a security deposit and last month's rent, consider keeping them in an escrow account. Usually you will have 30 days to return a security deposit.

- If you will be withholding any amount of the security deposit, be very clear about why. List every reason - this will go a long way to reducing friction or possible legal action from the tenant.