



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



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ARCHIVED DOCUMENT: Housing Guidelines



Did you get a visit by an "energy company" or "electric company" person? Did they ask for a copy of your electric bill? Ask if you had gotten your \$25 gift card? Tell you that you are paying too much for electricity or that there is a new program that will save you money?

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ARCHIVED DOCUMENT Guidelines for Choosing Your Housing

ERRORS MADE IN CHOOSING RENTAL HOUSING

It's the time of year when many of you are planning where you are going to live next year. There are numerous common pitfalls experienced by student renters in Champaign-Urbana when selecting rental property. Some of the more notable are:

1. THE EARLY BIRD CATCHES THE WORM.

Many student renters are under the mistaken belief that in order to find a decent apartment they need to sign a lease in January. Rest assured that a wide selection of rental units exist throughout the community through the spring and well into May and June. Unless the property is truly unique there is no need to feel pressured into signing a lease in January. Creative lease bargaining is more likely to be available later in the rental season.

2. THIS IS A "STANDARD LEASE": TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT.

There is no such thing as a standard lease. There are over 500 different landlords in Champaign County, and each landlord uses a different lease. You should have the Tenant Union or Student Legal Service examine the lease before committing your signature and your money. The Tenant Union has a wealth of complaint files on area landlords that can help you avoid signing the lease with the landlord from hell. When presented with a lease on a "take it or leave it" basis, do the wise thing: Leave it!

3. PUTTING UP MONEY TO HOLD THE PLACE.

A few local landlords require you to pay a cash deposit to hold the unit before you actually are guaranteed the rental unit and before you sign the lease. Usually if the landlord rejects you as a tenant you will get the deposit back, but if you reject the landlord for any reason whatsoever you forfeit the \$500 you deposited. Numerous students are victimized by this sleazy practice. The ripoff artists who require "holding" deposits are depriving you of your negotiating power regarding the terms of the lease and the quality of the unit. Their reptilian instinct tells them you would rather sign a bad lease than give up \$500. Don't ever put money down to "hold" a unit!

4. RENTAL PRICE IS THE BOTTOM LINE

Price and location are key factors in selecting rental housing, but beware: "Price" can be a deceptive concept both within the lease and outside of the lease. Always ask yourself what "price" includes. Does it include parking, or is this an additional fee? Will you receive an assigned, guaranteed parking space? Is there an additional charge for common metered utilities? Sanitary tax charge? Garbage hauling? Fixed maintenance fees? These fees should be spelled out in the lease. Price factors outside of the lease include utilities. Talk to current tenants and find out what heating, electricity, etc. cost.

A tip on energy expenses: A unit with units below, above and on each side gives you substantial heating benefits. Avoid corner apartments if you want to save on heating costs.

5. SUMMER SUBLET/FALL OPTION.

This is a fifteen-month lease and is widely available and strongly promoted. It usually is also a poor decision. Under this scenario, you sublet from the current tenants for the summer at full price and sign a lease with the landlord for a one year term. You naturally assume that you will be able to pawn off the next summer on another group of students using the same scheme. In reality, only about one out of four students will be successful in subleasing for the next summer.

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You can afford to pass on the summer sublet/fall option rental scheme.

6. "DON'T WORRY--IT'LL BE FINISHED/FIXED BY AUGUST."

If you are contemplating signing a lease for an apartment that is either under construction or in need of repairs, think again. Even if the landlord promises that it will be in prime condition on August 15th, there's no way to guarantee that, and often, no relief for you if it isn't finished. Instead of putting yourself in the position of having to try to deal with the situation then, simply avoid the problem in the first place. Your fall semester will be much easier that way.

7. CAN I COMMIT TO THIS PERSON/COMPANY FOR A WHOLE YEAR?

A landlord is never likely to treat you better than when trying to entice you to sign a lease. If you are ignored, given the fast shuffle, talked down to or treated poorly in any way during this stage of the relationship, just imagine how things could deteriorate once you've signed the lease. You will be involved with your landlord and any agents in his/her employ for an entire year, so be sure they're the kind of people you think you can work with.

Avoiding these myths and pitfalls can make your housing search more informed and less stressful. Please remember to bring your lease into the Tenant Union or Student Legal Service before you sign on the dotted line.

Student Legal Service

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[Contact Us By E-Mail](#)

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[Office of the Dean of Students](#)

M-F 8:30-12:00 and 1:00-4:30

Closed Noon-1:00pm

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