

Guide to Off-Campus Housing:

Hello Shawnee State University student! Living off-campus is an exciting and important step in developing independence and responsibility. Whether you are planning to live on your own or live with a group of friends, there are several things to consider when making the decision to live off-campus.

Shawnee State University would like to assist you in your off-campus housing experience. The following information has been gathered to assist you in the process of living off-campus. Please understand that the following information is not all inclusive, but to serve as a resource as you embark on your living off-campus journey.

General Considerations:

Before making the decision to live off-campus, here are some general tips to consider:

1. Location – How close do you want to live to campus? Will you be driving or walking to campus? What type of neighborhood do you want to live in? These are important questions to consider when selecting a place to live.
2. Cost – How much will you be able to spend on rent each month? Keep in mind that you will also need to pay for utilities, food, and other living costs. Making a personal budget would assist you in determining what you can afford for rent.
3. Roommates – Do you want to live alone or with roommates? Choose roommates or housemates carefully. If they are evicted or move out early, you may be responsible for the entire rent.
4. Subleasing – If you need to vacate the lease you signed, does your landlord allow for subleasing?
5. Parking – Does the rental property provide on-site or street parking?
6. Leasing agreements – You may need a cosigner or an application fee. Be familiar with the terms of the lease. Credit checks may also be required.

Viewing a Property:

Now that you have made the decision to live off-campus, your next step in the process should be to start looking at apartments. Be sure to take a pad of paper and pen with you so that you can make notes of the apartments. Here are some things to consider when you are going to view properties:

1. Is the apartment location in an area you want to live in?
 - a. Visit the unit during the day and night to see if there is a difference in environment.
 - b. Speak with current tenants to discuss their experience with crime issues, safety issues, etc.
 - c. What floor is the apartment located on?

- i. Living on the first floor may be convenient for moving purposes, but noise can be often heard from the floors above.
 - ii. Upper floor units may present problems when moving, but heating costs could be lower with people living below you.
- 2. Is the size of the apartment large enough to accommodate your needs?
 - a. Is the kitchen large enough for your cooking needs?
 - b. Are the rooms in the apartment large enough for your furniture?
 - c. Are the closets and other storage spaces large enough for your personal belongings?
- 3. Is the lighting in the apartment sufficient enough for you (i.e., one window in living room and all bedrooms)?
- 4. Is everything in the apartment in good working condition?
 - a. Does the heat/air conditioning work properly? Test the thermostat.
 - b. Does the water work properly? Test all sinks, showers, and toilets.
 - c. Do all windows open and close properly?
 - d. Are all locks and dead bolts in working condition?
 - e. Are all light fixtures in good working condition?
 - f. Do all electrical outlets work properly?
 - g. Are all phone/internet jacks in good working condition?
 - h. Are all smoke/carbon monoxide detectors working properly?
- 5. Is the apartment itself in a condition that you would live in?
 - a. Does the condition of the carpet/floors meet your requirements? If it is in bad condition and the landlord promises to remedy the situation, make sure to have this put in writing. It is beneficial to HAVE ALL VERBAL AGREEMENTS PUT IN WRITING!!
 - b. Are the walls and ceilings in a condition you are happy with? If the landlord promises to repaint all the rooms, for example, make sure to have this put in writing. Again, it is beneficial to HAVE ALL VERBAL AGREEMENTS PUT IN WRITING!!

Tips Before You Sign a Lease:

Once you have viewed an apartment a few times and have decided where you would like to live, please keep the following tips in mind prior to signing a lease:

1. When comparing rental prices, remember that utilities are usually not included. Avoid utility systems (water/electric) that are shared among other apartments.
2. Avoid renting from your employer or professor.
3. Read the entire lease carefully! Ask a parent/guardian to also read the lease. Seek clarification on any provisions you do not understand or are uncomfortable with. Be sure the lease contains the name and address of the owner or the owner's agent. If your parents/guardians are co-signing on a joint tenant lease, be sure the lease clearly states that the parent/guardian is liable only for his/her own child and not for other individuals on the lease.
4. Initial each page of the lease and any specific changes made to the document. Make sure that you receive a copy of the lease at the time of signing.

5. If possible, have your parents/guardians do a walk-through of the apartment with you.
6. Contact local utility companies for an estimate of utility costs.
7. Consider purchasing renter's insurance if you want to be sure your personal property is protected. Your landlord is not responsible for covering the cost of your belongings in the event they are destroyed, damaged, or stolen. Take extra precaution by locking your doors and windows at night and when you're gone. Secure your valuables when you are away for long weekends and breaks.

Tips After You Sign the Lease:

1. Create a file to maintain a copy of your lease, correspondence to and from your landlord, copies of renter's insurance policies, receipts of rent payments, and other relevant documents.
2. Keep documentation of your rental payments. It is best to pay rent with personal check or money order. If you decide to pay your rent in cash, be sure to get a dated and signed receipt.
3. Document (i.e., photos, video) the condition of your apartment – both when you move in and when you move out. This will help with the return of your security deposit if you were required to pay one. You could be responsible for damage to the apartment that is caused by your own negligence.
4. Contact your landlord via written communication at the first sign of condition problems in your apartment. Landlords are responsible for keeping rental property in a fit and habitable condition.
5. Meet your obligations as a tenant: pay your rent on time, keep your apartment sanitary, dispose of garbage properly, use appliances in a proper manner, do not disturb your neighbors, and prevent others from damaging your apartment.
6. Once you have moved into the apartment, do not have parties with excessive guests to avoid eviction, tickets, and damages.
7. Do not provide your credit card information to your landlord.