

FREE CHECKLIST

The 11-Point Landlord's Checklist

Eleven things to have documented before a tenant moves in, and kept current the whole time they stay.

Almost every expensive landlord problem starts as a missing document. A deposit dispute becomes expensive because nobody photographed the unit. A screening decision becomes a complaint because the criteria were never written down. A repair argument becomes a legal problem because the request came by text and the response was verbal. This checklist covers the eleven records that turn a disagreement into a short conversation instead of a long one.

THIS IS A PROMPT LIST, NOT THE LAW

Landlord and tenant requirements vary substantially by state, and often by city or county on top of that: registration and licensing, permitted deposit amounts and where deposits must be held, required disclosures, notice periods, entry rules, habitability standards, late fee limits and what a lease may lawfully contain. Nothing in this document tells you what your jurisdiction requires. Use it to build your own list of questions, confirm each item with your state and local authority, and have a licensed attorney in your state review your lease, your notices and your screening criteria before you use them.

How to use this checklist

1 Run it once per unit, before the next tenancy starts

The natural moment is the gap between one tenant leaving and the next signing. If a unit is already occupied, run it anyway and fix what you can mid-tenancy, starting with points 6 through 11.

2 Treat each point as a document, not a feeling

The test for every line is the same: could you put your hands on the record in under five minutes, and would it make sense to someone who was not there? If not, the point is not complete, however confident you are.

3 Do the local verification pass first

Before you fill anything in, spend an hour finding your state's landlord and tenant statute and your city's rental ordinance and housing code. Write the specific requirements for deposits, disclosures, entry notice and habitability into the margin next to points 5, 6, 8 and 11.

4 Store everything in one place, per unit, per tenancy

One folder per unit, one subfolder per tenancy, named by address and move-in date. Digital with a backup. If you own more than two units, this filing convention will save you more time than any other habit on this list.

The 11 points

Complete before move-in, keep current throughout

- ☐ 1. The property is legally rentable, and I can prove it
Rental registration or license if your city requires one, certificate of occupancy or equivalent, any required inspection sign-off, permitted occupancy limit, and confirmation that renting is allowed under applicable zoning, HOA or condo rules. Renewal dates go on your calendar the day you obtain each one.
- ☐ 2. Written screening criteria exist and are applied identically to every applicant
Income standard, credit and payment history standard, rental history standard, and how you evaluate criminal history if you consider it at all, all written down before you take the first application. Every applicant is measured against the same written standard, in the same order, with the reason for each decision recorded. Fair housing obligations apply at every stage including advertising wording and how you answer questions on the phone. Have counsel review the criteria.
- ☐ 3. Applicant information is verified, not just collected
Government identification checked, income verified from a source rather than a stated figure, employment confirmed, and the previous landlord contacted with the same set of questions you ask every previous landlord. Screening reports obtained through a process that complies with the consumer reporting rules that apply to you, with applicant authorization on file. Keep the file for declined applicants too, for whatever retention period your counsel advises.
- ☐ 4. A written lease that matches this property and this state
Full legal names of every adult occupant, the exact premises, term dates, rent amount and due date, accepted payment methods, late fee terms within any local limits, deposit terms, utility responsibility split, maintenance responsibilities, pet terms, guest and occupancy limits, entry provisions, subletting rules, and renewal or holdover terms. Generic forms downloaded without review are the most common source of unenforceable clauses. Have a licensed attorney in your state review the form before its first use, and again if you change it.
- ☐ 5. Every required disclosure and attachment is delivered and signed
Disclosure requirements vary widely and can include lead-based paint for older housing, mold, bed bug history, flood or hazard history, utility billing arrangements, smoking policy, and identification of the owner or agent authorized to receive notices. Confirm the full list that applies to your property with your state and city, deliver each one at the required time, and keep the signed acknowledgment with the lease.
- ☐ 6. The security deposit is handled exactly the way your jurisdiction requires
Confirm and document the maximum amount you may hold, whether it must sit in a separate or interest-bearing account, what receipt or written notice you must give and when, what you may lawfully deduct, the deadline for returning the balance after move-out, and the itemization required with it. Deposit rules are among the most frequently litigated and most locally specific requirements landlords face. Write your jurisdiction's deadline on the file the day the tenant gives notice.
- ☐ 7. A dated, signed move-in condition report exists, with photographs
Room by room, including inside appliances, under sinks, closet interiors, window and door operation, floor and wall condition, and every existing chip, stain and scuff. Photographs and video with visible dates, stored somewhere you will still have access years later. Both parties sign it, both parties get a copy, and it is repeated in the same format at move-out so the two can be compared side by side. Also record meter readings and the number of keys, fobs and remotes issued.

☐ **8. Habitability and life safety items are verified and logged**

Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms present, tested and dated where required, locks rekeyed between tenancies, water heater and heating system operating and serviced, plumbing and electrical functional with no known hazard, egress unobstructed, handrails and stairs sound, and any known environmental hazard disclosed as required. Specific requirements including alarm placement, testing intervals and rekeying obligations vary by state and city, so verify yours and log the date of each check with a photo.

☐ **9. Insurance is in force on both sides, and you hold the paperwork**

Your own landlord or dwelling policy written for a rental use, with coverage limits and liability limits you have actually read, plus loss of rents coverage if you want it. If your lease requires the tenant to carry renter's insurance, collect the certificate before move-in, note the expiration date, and set a reminder to collect the renewal. Also confirm coverage requirements for any vendor who works on the property.

☐ **10. There is one written channel for maintenance requests, and every request is logged**

One method that tenants are told about at move-in and reminded of in writing. Each request records the date and time received, what was reported, what you did, who you sent, when they attended, what it cost, and when it was confirmed resolved. Include an emergency definition and an after-hours instruction. This log is the record that answers a habitability complaint, and it is worthless if it is assembled after the complaint arrives.

☐ **11. Rent collection, notices and record retention follow a written procedure**

How rent is paid and what counts as received, what happens on which day when it is late, the exact notice sequence your jurisdiction requires and the delivery method it permits, who signs notices, and how long you keep leases, ledgers, applications, condition reports, notices and correspondence. Confirm the notice periods and permitted delivery methods with counsel, because getting the form or the timing wrong can restart the process from the beginning.

The four points that cause the most avoidable trouble

Point 2: written screening criteria

Screening is where good intentions create the most exposure, because the whole problem is inconsistency rather than intent. If you accept a slightly lower income for one applicant because they seemed responsible, you have created a standard you cannot explain and a comparison you cannot win. The fix is mechanical: write the criteria before you advertise, apply them in the same order to every application, record the reason for each outcome in the same words, and never adjust a standard mid-process. If a standard turns out to be wrong, change it in writing, date the change, and apply the new version to everyone who applies after that date.

Point 6: the security deposit

Deposit rules combine three things that are easy to get wrong: an amount limit, a handling requirement, and a hard deadline after move-out with a required itemization. The deadline is the part that catches people, because it starts running at a moment defined by statute rather than by when you get around to the walkthrough. Find the exact deadline for your jurisdiction, write it on the tenancy folder, and work backward from it: schedule the move-out inspection, obtain any repair quotes and complete the itemization before the deadline rather than after the work is finished.

Point 7: the condition report

A condition report only works if move-in and move-out use the same format, the same room order and the same level of detail. A thorough move-in report compared against a two-line move-out note proves very little. Photograph the same angles both times. Keep the images somewhere durable, not only on a phone you will replace. And write descriptions in plain, specific language: not damaged, but a four inch scuff on the north wall, two feet above the baseboard.

Point 10: the maintenance log

The log does two jobs. It answers the question of whether you responded reasonably and promptly, and it tells you what the property actually costs to run. Both jobs require the same discipline: log the request the day it arrives, log the response the day it happens, and log the resolution when the tenant confirms it rather than when the vendor leaves. A gap of several weeks in the log reads as a gap in your attention, whether or not that is what happened.

What to keep, and where

RECORDS TO RETAIN PER TENANCY

Record	Created when	Notes
Registration, license, inspection certificates	Before advertising	Track renewal dates; a lapse can affect your ability to enforce
Advertising copy and screening criteria	Before advertising	Keep the version that was live for each vacancy, dated
Applications, authorizations, screening results, decision notes	During screening	Includes declined applicants; ask counsel about retention periods
Signed lease, addenda and disclosures	At signing	Every page, signed and dated by all parties
Deposit receipt and account details	At or near signing	Plus the itemization and any correspondence at move-out
Move-in condition report and photographs	Before keys are handed over	Matched by a move-out report in identical format
Safety checks: alarms, locks, systems	Before move-in and at set intervals	Date-stamped, with photographs where practical
Insurance certificates, yours and the tenant's	Before move-in	Diary the renewal dates
Rent ledger	Ongoing	Every payment, date received, method, balance
Maintenance log with invoices	Ongoing	Split routine from capital work as you go, not at tax time
Notices served and proof of delivery	As they occur	Method of delivery matters and is jurisdiction specific
All written correspondence	Ongoing	Move anything important out of text messages into a dated file

Your property record

Fill this in once per unit and keep it at the front of the folder. When something goes wrong, this page is what you or anyone helping you will reach for first.

Property address and unit

~~Exactly as it appears on the lease~~

Registration or license number and renewal date

~~If required in your city or county~~

Governing statute and local ordinance

~~Note where you found them and the date you last checked~~

Attorney and last lease review date

~~Review again whenever you change the form or the law changes~~

Deposit amount, where it is held, and the return deadline

~~Write the deadline in days and the event that starts the clock~~

Tenant names and lease term dates

~~Every adult occupant, full legal names~~

Rent amount, due date and accepted payment methods

~~Plus the grace period and late fee terms, within local limits~~

Insurance: carrier, policy number, renewal date

~~Both your policy and the tenant's certificate~~

Maintenance request channel

~~The one method tenants are told to use~~

Emergency contacts and preferred vendors

~~Plumber, electrician, HVAC, locksmith, with after-hours numbers~~

Utility responsibility split

~~Which accounts are in whose name, and account numbers you control~~

Key, fob and remote count issued

~~And the date of the last rekey~~

Date this checklist was last completed

~~Re-run it at every turnover~~

YOUR NEXT STEP

Get the documents this checklist keeps asking for

The Landlord Toolkit turns these eleven points into the actual paperwork: move-in and move-out condition report forms, a screening criteria worksheet, a maintenance request and response log, a rent ledger, a tenancy file index, and a local requirements research sheet that tells you exactly what to look up for your state and city.

Get the Landlord Toolkit at propertymanagementresourcehub.com

Important. This checklist is general educational information for rental property owners. It is not legal advice, and it is not a substitute for advice from a licensed attorney in your jurisdiction. It is not tax, insurance or brokerage advice either. Landlord and tenant law, registration and licensing requirements, required disclosures, security deposit handling, entry and notice rules, habitability standards and permitted lease terms vary by state and often by city or county, and they change. Nothing here is a statement of the requirements that apply to your property. Confirm current requirements with your state and local authorities and have a licensed attorney review your lease, notices, screening criteria and any other binding document before you use them. Results vary.