

OFF-CAMPUS LIVING TIPS

that are better to know before you start searching.

From someone who's "been there."



1. Start early, as early as possible. You will be surprised to find that many students in the area **start searching at least 6 months before** the move-in date.
2. **Avoid paying for a locator** (I learned the hard way) – all you are paying for is a listing they provide if and when you fax a request to receive the listing. From my experience, locators provide no further assistance than that list and you already have free access to newspaper listings, web site listings, and realtors' listings. It can be really expensive.
3. **Check the newspaper classified listings constantly.** Find out when certain papers come out and get the listings first thing because many of the apartments get picked up as soon as they are printed. Also, find out when the realtors get their new listings, they basically get them at the same time each week.
4. **Follow up on all phone calls.** You will end up leaving a lot of messages that will not always get answered – keep calling!
5. Searching by means of word of mouth can be successful as well. Ask around and **tell everyone you know that you are looking to rent.** You can also post "apartment wanted" or "roommate wanted" signs around campus, or you can place a wanted ad in the newspapers' classified sections.
6. Do not limit your search to the amount of bedrooms you need – **limit it to your budget.** Sometimes you can find more bedrooms for the same price.
7. Make sure to **get as much information on the apartment as possible** before making an appointment to see it. Specifically be sure to **ask about utilities.** They often forget to inform you whether utilities are included, and utilities (e.g.: electric, heat, gas, water, trash, sewage) can really add up.
8. If you are unhappy with the price listed, **consider asking the realtor or landlord if the price to rent is negotiable** – sometimes they are willing to negotiate and it does not hurt to ask. Some landlords will reduce the rent if you are willing to complete duties for them (e.g. snow removal/salting, let in service people, etc.)

9. **Have an idea of the area** of the apartment you want to see. When you start making appointments, ask for the exact address. You can waste a lot of time when you find out -after the fact- that the apartment is nice but it is in an area in which you do not want to live.
10. If you are interested in the apartment, **ask for the application for the lease** and make sure you understand whether or not a co-signer is needed and if a fee is charged. Also, make sure you ask if anyone else has applied for the lease. Sometimes realtors/landlords are hesitant to tell you someone has applied for the lease because if it falls through, they still want to rent it. It is to your benefit to know that you would be competing against someone else for the lease and so you know how quickly you need to complete your application.
11. **Maintenance issues seem to be one of the biggest complaints among student renters.** Make sure to ask how to submit a maintenance request and how the landlord or maintenance service responds to problems in the apartment (e.g. heat or air conditioning not working, fire alarm problems, etc...).
12. Make sure to take notice of the **fire escape situation**. If you live above the first floor, it is required, by Pennsylvania state law, that you have outside access beyond the use of the hallway and stairs. (You should have access to some type of external fire escape or have a fire ladder inside that can be used from a window.)
13. Be concerned with **safety bars on windows** – especially on the first floor. Know if they are there and how they unlock in case of an emergency.
14. **Make sure you can live harmoniously with your roommate** (e.g. mutual understanding about cleaning of shared spaces, respect of privacy, noise and belongings, etc.) and make sure the **financial agreements have been made** before moving in.

