

So You Want to Vacate Your Apartment, Office or Suite?

1. Give notice to your landlord
2. Clean and repair your apartment or space
3. Document, document, document
4. Get your security deposit back

It's time to finally say sayonara to your apartment or space. Remember that security deposit you gave to the landlord when you signed your lease? It would be nice to get that back. It would also be nice to avoid getting charged for unnecessary repairs that the landlord performs after you're gone. So save your money and allow us to guide you through the process of properly vacating your apartment or space.

Oh, one last thing: Remember that none of this informative article is meant as a substitute for individual legal advice.

1. Give notice to your landlord

If you think you can just pick up and move out of your apartment or space anytime you feel like it, realize that this is almost never the case; rather, you must give a certain predetermined amount of notice to your landlord. So here's the proper procedure for giving your landlord notice:

1. Go and find your lease. If you can't locate it, then go to the landlord and get a copy of it as soon as possible. Just make sure that your landlord gives you a copy of the one that you actually signed and not another version.
2. Look through the lease and find out how much notice you agreed to give to your landlord before vacating.

That isn't all quite as straightforward as you would think, because sometimes they also require that your last day coincide with the end of a rental period. As a result, you might not be able to move out. Here's an example:

- You decide on March 20 that you want to vacate your apartment or space.
- Thirty days are required as notice by your lease.
- The first day of every month is the end of your rental period.
- Therefore, if you decide to give notice that day (March 20), you would not be able to vacate until the end of the following rental period (May 1) and not April 21, even though this would be more than thirty days later.

So our advice is to give your landlord plenty of notice (more than your minimum requirement) and arrange it so that the last day of your lease coincides with your rent period.

2. Clean and repair your apartment

Reasonable wear and tear is generally expected. You can find out exactly what condition your apartment or space should be left in by looking at the lease.

Chances are, though, that you'll be responsible for doing some light cleaning and easy repairs (anything that the landlord feels wasn't up to snuff will be deducted from your security deposit). Here's how to go about it:

1. Look around your apartment or space and assess its status. Would you move in there if it was left in that condition? Did any major catastrophes occur (e.g., holes in the walls, doors falling off hinges, etc.)? Basically you want to leave the apartment relatively close to the same condition it was in when you moved in.
2. Check to see if there are any areas that could use a little paint, and ask the landlord for the paint for those areas.
3. If you have small holes (from hanging pictures, attaching coat hooks, etc.) then you don't have to worry about painting. Just use a spackling compound to fill in the holes. If you don't want to worry about spackling (and you're willing to risk getting caught), consider filling the holes in with toothpaste or soap (if your walls are white) -- they fill in holes very quickly and very easily.

4. For larger holes (from, say, your friend's fist during his weekly drunken rage), you might need to install wallboard.
5. Directions for painting, spackling, and wall boarding on your own, visit [RENTNET®](#). The [Decorating and Home Improvement](#) tabs will provide you with lots of useful tips, how-to articles and expert advice. Of course, you could also just hire someone.
6. Many leases require you to clean your floors (shampoo the carpets). These can be quite tough tasks to handle on your own, so we suggest that you hire a professional. Just realize that it's something that you may get charged for if you don't do it.
7. Clean your bathroom as well as you can. This especially means getting rid of the fungus and mold on the walls.
8. Defrost, clean, and turn down the refrigerator.
9. Leave the apartment or space as empty as it was when you got there; the landlord will charge you for the removal of anything you leave behind. If you have something that you don't want (a table, a sofa, whatever), you can either call the future tenant and offer to sell it to them, or you can find a [Goodwill](#) and give it to charity (we recommend the second option).

3. Document how you left the apartment or space

Now that your apartment or space is spotless, it's time to compare it to the sheet you filled out when you arrived at the apartment or space that assesses what was damaged when you moved in. You did fill one of those out, right? It protects you from having to repair the previous tenant's damage. If everything matches up, then you can expect to get your full security deposit back.

One way to prevent any problems is to arrange a time to meet with your landlord after you have removed all of your goodies from the apartment or space and made any repairs. Walk through the apartment or space, and see what he/she expects you to pay for. Discuss everything right out in the open, write down the results, and have him/her sign the agreement. You're now free and clear of having any extra repairs taken out of your security deposit.

Taking pictures of your cleared out apartment or space right before you are ready to turn in the keys is also a good idea. Make sure you immediately turn all of the keys in to the landlord personally or send them certified mail. And make sure that you include a forwarding address for the return of your security deposit.

4. Get your security deposit back

Within a certain amount of time after you have left the apartment or space (as mandated by local law), your landlord must either send you your security deposit back or an itemized list of the deductions claimed plus the remainder of your deposit.