

Searching for
off-campus housing



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Welcome, graduate students!



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Union Bank & Trust

Union Bank & Trust (UBT), headquartered in Lincoln, is the official banking partner of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln.

UBT's UNL branch is located inside the City Campus Student Union. ATMs are located on City Campus, East Campus, and Innovation Campus.

UBT partners with UNL to provide free financial education to students:

- Support with navigating the U.S. banking system
- Managing money and personal finances
- Connecting students to financial products, community resources, and education

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Presentation agenda

- ✓ Explore off-campus housing options
- ✓ Determine the housing rental price you can afford
- ✓ Determine your housing needs
- ✓ Discover websites to research available properties
- ✓ Questions to ask as you tour potential properties
- ✓ Learn about the rental application process
- ✓ Understand the conditions of a lease agreement & security deposit
- ✓ Learn damages to look for as you complete the move-in inspection
- ✓ Understand your rights and responsibilities as a tenant
- ✓ Learn about renter's insurance coverage

Lincoln, Nebraska

- Located midway between Chicago and Denver, Lincoln is the state capital and second largest city in Nebraska with approx. 300,000 people
- Center of the state's governmental and educational activities, including UNL
- Housing is about 17% lower in Lincoln than the U.S. national average
- "Four-season" climate
- Proud resettlement community for immigrants and refugees
- Median age is 33 years old and 40% of adults hold a bachelor's degree

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Off-campus student housing options

Common off-campus housing options for students in Lincoln include:

Apartments

- Traditional
- Student-living apartments not affiliated with the University but close to campus

Houses

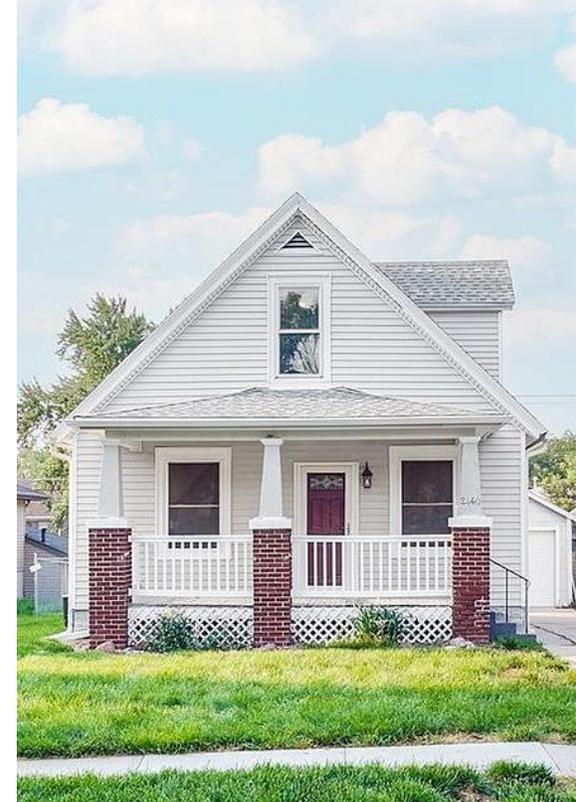
- Detached or “single-family”

Multi-family

- Often single-family homes converted into two or more housing units such as a duplex

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A typical 1900s Craftsman bungalow single-family home near campus (Zillow)



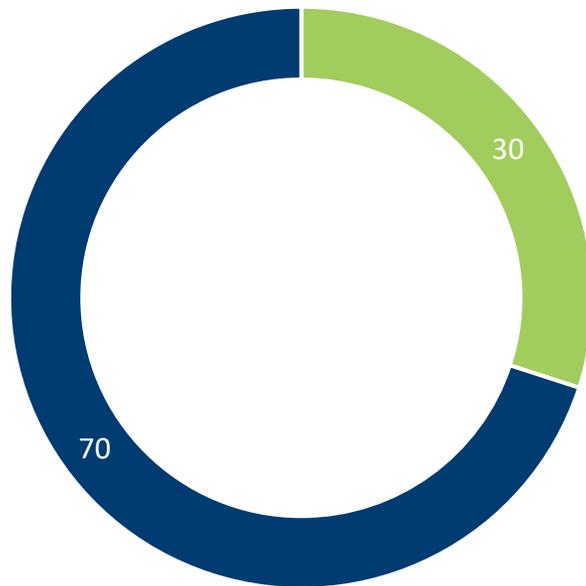
Off-campus housing search process

1. Determine the monthly housing price you can afford
2. Consider proximity to campus and assess your housing needs
3. Search for available housing
4. Submit a rental application and fee
5. Provide a security deposit
6. Sign your lease agreement and purchase a monthly renter's insurance policy

How much rent can you afford?

How much rent can you afford?

Monthly Expenses



■ Rent ■ Other Expenses

- Each student's financial situation is unique, but one popular guideline is that rent should not exceed 30% of gross monthly income (before taxes and deductions). This will ensure you have enough money for food, transportation, utilities, and other necessities each month.
- For example, if you have a graduate stipend of \$1,500 per month, your monthly rent should be no more than \$450.

How much rent can you afford?

Let's stick with our \$1,500 monthly income example. If you have a lot of needs, your budget for rent could be tight.

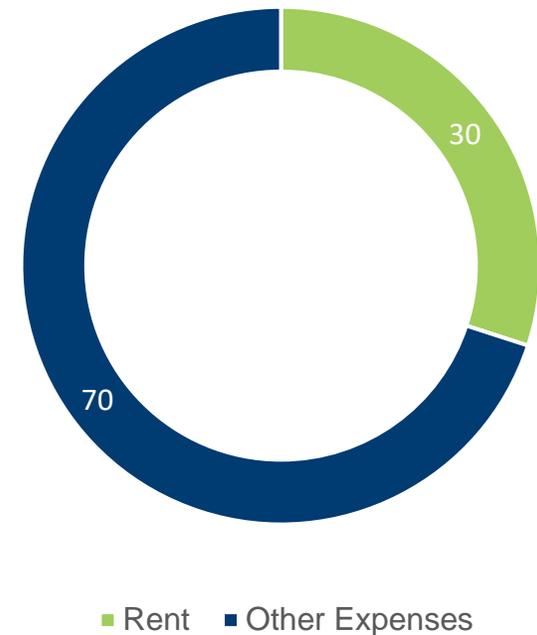
Consider this monthly example:

- \$360 car payment
- \$135 car insurance
- \$45 UNL commuter student parking permit
- \$50 gasoline
- \$160 utilities (gas, electricity, internet)
- \$175 grocery expenses
- \$15 renter's insurance
- \$100 cell phone plan

These expenses total \$1,040 per month, leaving just \$460 for rent.

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Monthly Expenses



Roommates can help with cost sharing

- Average monthly rent in Lincoln:
 - Studio: \$1,200
 - 1 Bedroom: \$1,002
 - 2 Bedroom: \$1,232
 - 3 Bedroom: \$1,478

([Apartments.com](https://www.apartments.com))
- Utilities (electricity, natural gas, internet) are usually not included in the rental price and are an additional expense per month. Cost varies based on usage but “budget billing” programs may be available.
- Many university students choose to live with roommates off-campus to help share the cost of living.

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Additional expense: Utility services

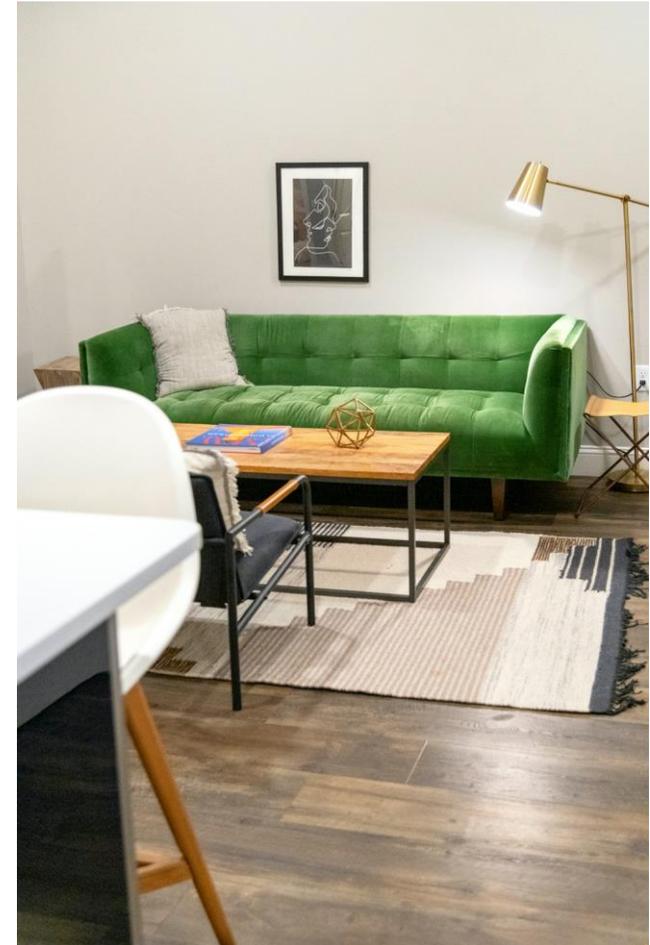
- Most renters are required to pay for natural gas, electricity, and internet utility services separately from their monthly rent.
- It is important to ask which, if any, utilities may be included. The property owner or landlord usually pays for garbage/waste removal, water service, snow removal, and landscaping maintenance.
- The property owner will provide instructions for how to set up utilities.
 - Electricity: [Lincoln Electric System](#)
 - Natural gas (heat): [Black Hills Energy](#)
 - Internet, there are several providers to choose from such as: [ALLO](#), [Kinetic](#)
 - Wi-Fi is free for students on campus and at most local libraries and coffee shops

Additional expense: furnishings

Aside from student apartments, most housing does *not* come furnished. Furnishings can be a significant expense and challenging to transport if you do not have a vehicle.

The following appliances are typically included in the rent:

- Refrigerator
- Microwave oven
- Full stove/oven (either gas or electric)
- Dishwasher
- Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), usually central or radiant
- Laundry (sometimes in unit or on site)



Additional expense: security deposit

- The first month you move into a new apartment is often the most expensive as you will likely need to pay a security deposit on top of your first month's rent.
- A security deposit is a sum of money given by you to your landlord at or near the beginning of the lease. The purpose of the deposit is to protect the landlord against damages above normal wear and tear during tenancy.
- Your security deposit is held by the landlord during your lease and can be returned to you, in part or in full, upon moving out assuming the apartment is returned in the condition outlined in your lease agreement.

Amount: Nebraska law limits the security deposit to an amount equal to one-month's rent.

Note: Pets and parking, such as a garage space, may require an additional fee.

Location, location, location

Where should you live?

The University of Nebraska has 3 Lincoln campuses:

- City (main) Campus
- East Campus
- Innovation Campus



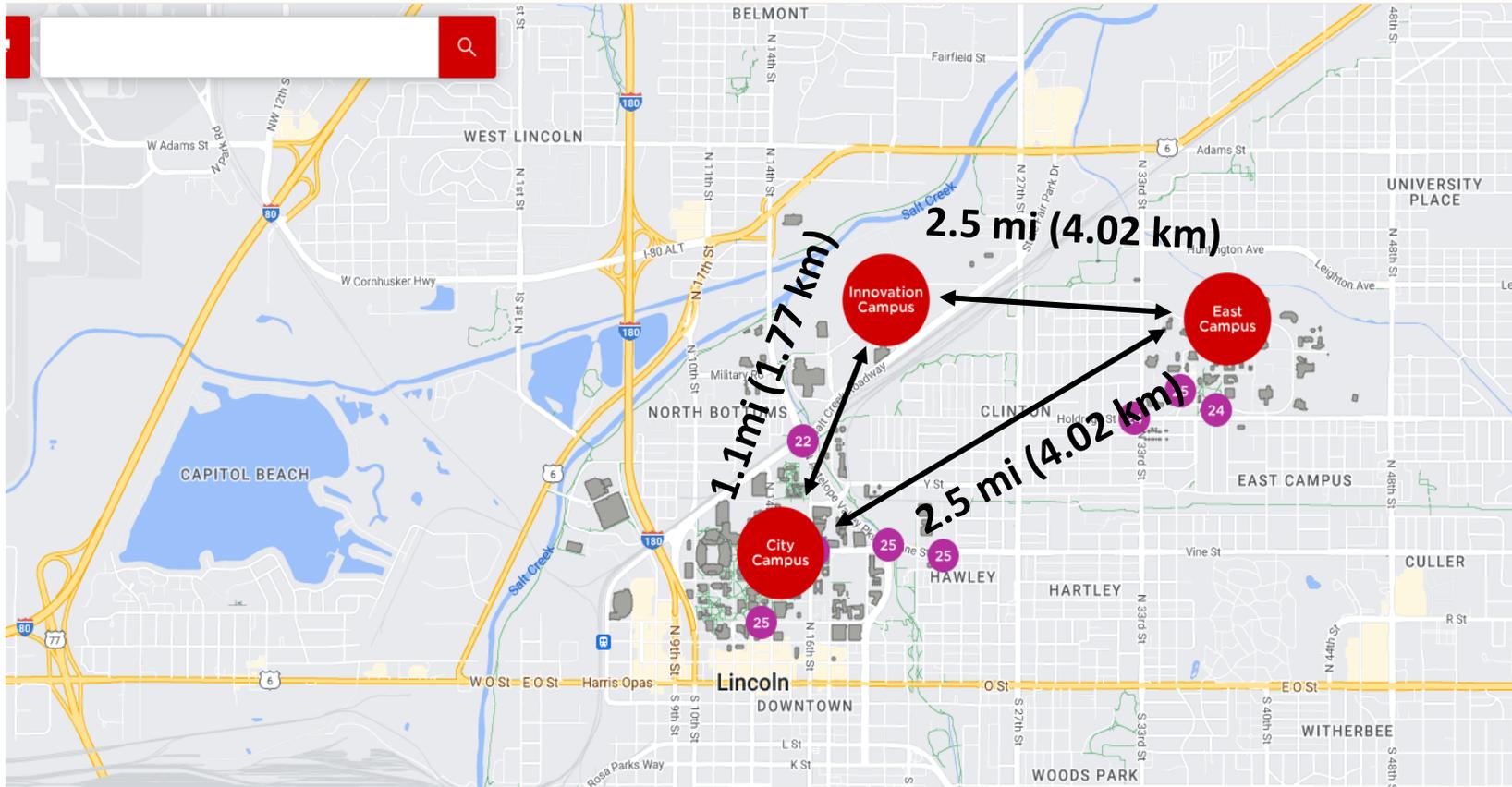
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It is important to know on which campus you will be spending most of your time. Housing closest to campus is convenient and often walkable but will be more expensive and is generally further away from grocery stores and shopping centers. Be aware of distances. You may need a car, bike, or bus pass depending on where you choose to live. Buses run daily among the campuses every 10-20 minutes.

N CAMPUS MAPS



Public bus transportation: StarTran

- StarTran (bus service) is the only mass transit carrier in the City of Lincoln
- Operates eight buses on two routes, #24 and #25, connecting City, East, and Innovation Campuses
 - StarTran: <https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/City/Departments/LTU/StarTran>
 - UNL <https://parking.unl.edu/city-east-campus-routes>



Image: StarTran

Determine your housing needs

Determine your housing needs

A helpful place to start your search is by making a list of your “must-haves”:

- ✓ Do you need a roommate, or can you live on your own?
- ✓ What length of rental period do you need? (12 months is most common)
- ✓ How many bedrooms do you need?
- ✓ Are appliances/furnishings included?
- ✓ Is there laundry in your unit or on-site?
- ✓ How close do you need to be to campus or a StarTran route?
- ✓ What is the proximity to schools? (for students bringing children)
- ✓ What other amenities/services are included?

Off-campus housing considerations

Distance from campus: Housing closer to the University may be more convenient but also more expensive.

Public transportation: StarTran is the only mass transit carrier for the City of Lincoln. If you choose to live further from the University and do not have a car, you will want to live close to the StarTran route or by a trail if you plan to ride a bike.

Bicycle trails: Lincoln has many bicycle trails as well as bicycles that can be rented.

Weather: Nebraska has warm summers and cold winters with snow, which make walking less preferred than taking the bus or driving.

Searching for housing

When to start your search

Tenants typically need to provide advance notice of 30-60 days to their landlords when they plan to vacate their apartment. This means that many properties may not know what they have available to rent many months in advance. Waiting lists are common.

Lincoln is also home to several other colleges (Nebraska Wesleyan, Southeast Community College, Union Adventist University, Bryan College of Health Science). Start your housing search as early as possible. Some students sign a lease in the summer before they move to secure their housing before undergraduate students return in August.

Search available housing

There are many places to search for available housing. Helpful property search websites include:

- [Apartments.com](https://www.apartments.com)
- [RentCafe.com](https://www.rentcafe.com)
- [Apartment Guide](https://www.apartmentguide.com)
- [Apartment Finder](https://www.apartmentfinder.com)
- [Zillow](https://www.zillow.com)

Each has options to filter your search (by price, number of bedrooms, etc.) so you can get a feel for layout and pricing. Be careful of rental scams!

How to spot a rental scam

Rental scams try to steal money from prospective renters. Unfortunately, these scams are on the rise. Don't fall for fake!

- They don't want to meet you or show you the property
- They want you to move in immediately without seeing the property
- They ask for a rent or security deposit before signing a lease
 - You should never mail or wire money to anyone if you have not signed a lease.
 - In some cases, the landlord will tell you they do not live in the area and want you to wire your deposit. Anyone who doesn't live near the rental itself should have a property manager or realtor who does and can handle these logistics.
- The price is *too good*: Rents far below market value (see slide 13) are a red flag
- The listing has typos, poor grammar, or excessive punctuation (👉 **CHECK US OUTTTTT!!!** 👉)
- There is no tenant screening process
- They want you to sign an incomplete lease

Tour available properties

It's challenging to rent an apartment sight unseen. Online photos are meant to make a property look its best, and images can be deceiving. Read online reviews from residents. Do they respond to residents' feedback? Do they have an active social media presence?

If you find a property you like, contact the leasing office or property management company to see if you can schedule a virtual tour:

- Try to schedule visits for same day or weekend to help with comparison
- Plan for one hour for each visit
- Prepare a list of questions to ask and keep your “must-haves” list handy. Does it meet your needs?
- Ask if you can take pictures (this will help you remember later)
- Take notes after each visit of things you like and what may be lacking

Off-campus student living

There are several apartments which are unaffiliated but near the University that accommodate student living.

Pros

- Most within walking distance to campus
- Many provide individual leasing by bedroom
- Fully furnished
- Roommate matching service
- Amenities (study rooms, pool, fitness centers, game/movie rooms)

Cons

- Most do not accommodate families with children
- Mostly undergraduate students (noise)
- Expensive (many start at \$1,000+ per person)

Examples:

- [Atmosphere](#)
- [Canopy Park](#)
- [Latitude](#)
- [LivRed](#)
- [8N Lofts](#)
- [The 50/50](#)

Off-campus student living



Images: Latitude Apartments

ubt.com

Questions to ask

- May I view the unit I would actually live in? (this might be an option if there are no current tenants)
- What is the rent amount?
- When is rent due?
- How do I pay rent (online, credit card, cash, check)?
- Safety and security?
- On-site management?
- How are maintenance requests handled?
- Is there laundry in unit or on-site?
- Can I have pets? What is the cost?
- Where can I park?
- What is the policy for guests? How long can they stay?
- Snow removal, garden/lawn maintenance?
- Modifications (can you paint the walls, etc.)?
- Which utilities are my responsibility? Which utilities are included?
- What are the lease termination/renewal processes?

Things to look for during your tour

- ✓ Free from mold, mildew, insects
- ✓ Clean common areas like the fitness center and clubhouse
- ✓ Locks on doors
- ✓ Storage and cabinet space
- ✓ Functional appliances (turn on the stove, run the faucets)
- ✓ Laundry in unit or on-site
- ✓ Upkeep and maintenance

Have your “must-haves” list handy. Does the property meet your needs?



Rental application and fee

Rental application and fee

- If you find an apartment or house you like, you can submit a rental application.
- Application fees have no limit and are nonrefundable (\$25-\$100 is typical).
 - Verify credit history
 - Criminal background check
 - Screen for ability to pay
 - Identifies any previous evictions
- Be prepared to provide:
 - Identification (passport, ID card)
 - Previous addresses
 - References
 - Social Security number
 - Proof of monthly income such as graduate assistantship letter or financial aid statement
 - This is used as a screening tool to assess your ability to pay rent
- A property is not required to rent to you if you complete a rental application
- Applying does not legally bind you to anything (but your lease agreement will)

Rental application timeline

- A rental application typically takes up to 5 business days to be approved.
- If your application to rent the apartment is approved, you have the option to sign a binding contract called a lease agreement to live there.
- Lease agreement contract is usually valid for 12 months. After 12 months, most properties will allow you to renew the contract for another 12 months or pay a higher month-to-month rent if you want a shorter lease.



Lease agreement contract

Lease agreement terms

- Term of lease (usually 12 months)
- Rent amount
- Amount and conditions of security deposit
- Conditions to end a lease agreement
- Consequences for moving out early
- Roommate negligence
- Where, how, and when to pay rent and late fees
- Paying utilities
- Expectations and conditions for guests
- Subleasing
- Making alterations to property
- Reporting damaged or broken items
- Pets and fees
- Smoking inside and outside
- **Any verbal conditions discussed during your tour — get these in writing in the lease!**

A lease agreement is a legal contract!

A lease is a legal contract. Understanding rental terms is important when looking for an apartment so you can sign a lease with confidence and fully enjoy your new place. You are ultimately responsible for everything you agree to in your lease!

Lease agreement

- A legal and binding contract between a renter and a property owner/manager that gives the renter the right to live at a property for a fixed, agreed-upon period of time in exchange for a monthly rental payment.
- If you do not like the property or wish to stay there any longer, you are legally responsible for paying the monthly rent until the lease expires unless you wish to pay extensive fees to end the agreement. It's common to pay the equivalent of two months of rent to “break” a lease.

Lease agreement

- Don't be afraid to ask questions, negotiate, and/or ask for changes (requests need to be written in the lease to be enforceable)
- Review the lease carefully before you sign it (but once you sign, you're committed to the agreement)
 - **Read your lease thoroughly — you are responsible for everything in it!**
 - If there is something you do not understand, ask questions before you sign



Renter's insurance

Renter's insurance

- Most landlords require that renters obtain a renter's insurance policy prior to moving in (most policies are approx. \$5-\$15 per month).
- Even if it's not required, a renter's insurance policy is one of the most effective ways to protect your personal belongings from loss or destruction due to:
 - Fire
 - Lightning
 - Windstorm
 - Hail
 - Theft
 - Vandalism
- Renter's insurance can generally be purchased online through any company that sells insurance products. You can visit the National Association of Insurance Commissioners [website](#) to search for licensed consumer insurance companies.
- Tip: If you have auto insurance, see if you can bundle for savings.

Complete property unit “walk-through”

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Completing a walk-through

A “**walk-through**” is an inspection you make of your unit/property to establish the condition of the property at the beginning and end of the lease. It provides an opportunity for you to report any damages prior to moving in.

- Take photos of each room and note any damages **before** you move in
- Request updates or repairs be made if needed
- Get a checklist for the end of the lease to make sure everything is in the condition they expect it at the end of your lease
- Request in writing any conditions in which your security deposit would not be refunded

Your rights and responsibilities

Know your rights

The U.S. has many laws that protect tenants. Basic tenant rights include the right to:

- Freedom from discrimination
- Privacy
- A healthy and safe living environment
- Advance notice of eviction

Know your rights

The property owner (“landlord”) has legal responsibility to:

- Keep the premises in a fit and habitable condition
- Keep all common areas in a safe and clean condition
- Maintain in good working order all electrical, plumbing, sanitary, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning
- Provide running water, reasonable hot water, and reasonable heat
- Provide receptacles for removing trash and arrange for its removal
- The property owner must deliver possession of the rental unit to you at the beginning of the lease term
- Freedom from landlord retaliation (eviction, refusing to provide maintenance) for complaining to a housing agency for code violations
- Freedom from unlawful entry (only with notice or an emergency is allowed)

Source: Tenant’s Rights: UNL College of Law

Your responsibilities

Follow the terms you agree to in your lease agreement

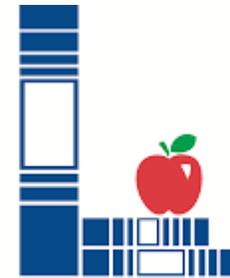
- Take reasonable steps to keep the property clean and sanitary
- No smoking or pets if not allowed
- **No extra people living in the unit if they are not on the lease**
 - **Follow property owner's rules for guests**
- Inform property owner if you plan to be away for an extended time
- Maintain renters' insurance policy if required
- Pay the required rent until the end of the lease
- Promptly notify the landlord of any problems with the property
- Notify the landlord when you plan to terminate your lease (usually require at least one month's notice before you plan to move out)

Schools and childcare

Public K-12 education

Lincoln Public Schools: If you have children, you can find your neighborhood school by using the district's Home School Lookup and enroll your child online at: <https://home.lps.org/student-services/enroll-your-student/>

- 41 elementary schools (Kindergarten–5th grade)
- 13 middle schools (6th–8th grade)
- 8 high schools (9th–12th grade)



Lincoln Public Schools

Getting Help

Lincoln community resources: MyLink app

MyLink is a free app that includes a directory of community organizations and social services in Lincoln:

- Employment
- Childcare
- Disability services
- Food
- Housing
- Legal services
- Rent and utilities
- Transportation
- Education
- Libraries
- Refugee and immigrant services
- Language assistance



Free to download, and you don't need to be connected to Wi-Fi to use.

Cultural and community centers of Lincoln

- [Lincoln Recreation Centers](#)
- [Asian Community and Cultural Center](#)
- [El Centro de las Americas](#)
- [Lincoln Indian Center, Inc.](#)
- [Malone Community Center](#)
- [Willard Community Center](#)
- [Good Neighbor Community Center](#)
- [Belmont Community Center](#)
- [The Salvation Army Community Center](#)
- [Lincoln Northeast Family Center](#)
- [Lincoln Community Learning Centers](#)
- [Center for People in Need](#)
- [Yazda-Yazidi Cultural Center](#)



Rental glossary

Rental glossary

Application

- A document a potential tenant fills out so a landlord can decide if they're qualified to rent the apartment. In addition to basic information, you may need to provide proof of income, references, and agree to a criminal background check.

Clubhouses and common areas

- A shared-space building at an apartment complex. Clubhouses usually have office space, tables, couches, TVs, games, a pool, fitness center, and other options for residents. Common areas may include laundry rooms and outdoor spaces.

Co-signer/guarantor

- A secondary signer of your lease who won't be residing in the apartment. A co-signer is usually needed when the tenant has a short or poor rental or credit history and requires someone (usually a parent or employer) to vouch for them. This person is equally responsible for upholding the terms of the lease if you cannot.

Rental glossary

Co-tenant

- Two or more people who sign the lease with the intent that both or all will occupy the apartment and be equally responsible for the rent and other lease provisions. Co-tenants have equal and shared accountability under the agreement.

Eviction

- The formal process where your landlord terminates your lease and asks you to vacate your apartment in a period of time decided by local laws. You can be removed from your apartment for failure to pay rent or breaking the other terms of your lease.

Guest

- A temporary visitor to your apartment who does not reside there, including significant others, friends, and family. While someone visits you/your roommate, they're required to abide by the terms of your lease such as quiet hours and parking restrictions. It may be a violation of your lease agreement to have guests staying beyond the terms outlined in the lease.

Rental glossary

HVAC

- Acronym for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.

Landlord

- The owner of your property or an agent of the owner who leases out the apartment. They are responsible for maintenance and any other items outlined in the lease agreement.

Lease agreement

- A legal and binding contract between a renter and a property owner/manager that gives the renter the right to live at a property for a fixed, agreed-upon period of time in exchange for a monthly rental payment.

Lease commencement date

- The date that the lease officially starts and the renter has access to move into the unit or house. This does not mean the renter has to move in on this date, but it does mean rental payments will also begin this date.

Rental glossary

Lessee/lessor

- The lessee is the tenant, and the lessor is the landlord or owner.

Lien

- The right of a landlord to keep possession of a renter's property until a debt has been paid.

Month-to-month

- A rental agreement that's automatically renewed at the end of each month (as opposed to signing a rental contract for another year or some other length). This is often an available option for renters who have living at a residence for at least a year.

Notice to quit

- A formal notice given by a landlord to a tenant stating they intend to end the lease and begin eviction. It will often state some cause that can be corrected, such as paying back owed rent, removing an unauthorized tenant, animals, etc. by a certain date to resolve the violation.

Rental glossary

Notice to vacate

- A formal notice given to the landlord by a tenant saying they tend to end occupancy of the premises and not renew the lease. Your lease will usually state a window during which you can do this without penalty.

Prorated rent

- The amount of rent charged to a tenant when the first or last month of a lease is less than a full month. If you move in during the middle of the month, the landlord will often only charge you for the days/percentage of the month you actually occupied the unit.

Quiet enjoyment

- A term often included in leases which protects your basic rights to quiet, and peaceful use of your apartment within accepted standards (ex: not having your lawn mowed at 4 a.m.).

Rental glossary

Renewal

- The option the tenant has to continue living in the apartment after the initial term of the lease is over. There's often a choice of renewing for the original term or converting to month-to-month.

Roommate

- Someone who shares a room or apartment with you.

Security deposit

- The extra sum of money you provide to your landlord upon signing the lease or moving in that proactively covers any damage you might do to your apartment or rent you don't pay during the term of your lease. Your landlord holds this money until you vacate the apartment.

Sublease

- When a renter rents out part or all of an apartment to another person (either for a profit, to take a previous roommate's space, or because you'll be away for an extended period). Subletting your apartment without your landlord's permission is usually a violation of your lease agreement.

Rental glossary

Tenant

- The person who enters into a lease and pays rent to occupy a space in an apartment or rental unit owned by another entity or person. A sub-tenant or person not listed on the lease agreement is not a legal tenant.

Term

- The amount of time specified on your lease during which you'll occupy the apartment and pay rent. This is usually 12 months but can be any time frame.

Termination

- Any situation in which either party — you or the landlord — decides to end the agreement for whatever reason. Eviction, non-renewal, and vacating for cause are all types of rental agreement terminations.

Utilities

- Expenses in your apartment for which you are billed on a consistent, recurring basis often depending on usage. Utilities can include heat, electricity, water, internet, garbage removal, storage, parking, natural gas, sewer, and cable.



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