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Eight Items To Look For During a Rental Walk-through

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When a Realtor is hired to show prospective tenants around homes, guests may be more likely to look at the size and number of bedroom(s), closet space, lawn maintenance, cleanliness of the bathroom(s), and check out the distance for schools and work.

However, here are eight frequently overlooked housing details that tenants should look for more often when they reach that residence.

1. Check the Outlets and Switches.

Some switches flip up. Others flip down. Some turn on certain sections of a room. Others may not work at all. Bring something that can instantly plug in (ex. smartphone or motion detector light) to confirm that all outlets are in working order. If certain light switches need to be repaired, request that these electrical requests be repaired ahead of time and/or make sure faulty outlets are in writing before putting down a security deposit. For larger items that need a considerable amount of power to work, working outlets can also decrease the odds of a power outage.

2. Measure the Banisters and Doorways.

That three-seater couch with the large ottoman may have been a breeze for movers to bring into a first-floor rental. But for new tenants moving into upper-level, multi-unit buildings, a narrow banister can lead to an abandoned couch—unless the landlord is willing to allow movers or tenants to temporarily dismantle it.

In Texas, handrails are required on at least one side of a flight of stairs with two or more

risers, according to residential building code requirements. **Promenaid**, a handrail company, confirms that handrails cannot be more than 4.5 feet on either side of the stairway with a width range of 27 for one side and 31.5 feet for both sides. If the tenant is willing to give up large pieces of furniture, this may not be a deal breaker. If that furniture must come with the tenant, check all doorways and banisters before getting one's hopes up.

3. Confirm the Location and Condition of a Circuit Breaker.

While fuse boxes and circuit breakers may not be top priority when moving in, they can quickly be an issue if electrical problems become a pattern. Generally speaking, circuit breakers are more human-friendly and could potentially cost less to repair. While some property owners may not see a reason to replace fuse boxes with circuit breakers, make sure that there is language in the lease regarding who polices electrical problems.

Fuse boxes and circuit breakers: Although the terms are often used interchangeably, a fuse box and a circuit breaker are not one and the same. They serve the same purpose—to avoid electrical use overloads and protect the electrical circuits—but their response differs. Largely found in homes built before the 1960s, when there's an electric overload in a home with a fuse box, "the excessive heat will cause the filament to melt, cutting off the electrical current and stopping the flow of electricity." **Penna Electric** confirms that once that fuse is blown, it cannot be reused; it must be discarded and replaced with a new fuse. (Think of it as a candle wick that has been burned down.)

Circuit breakers, which operate by electromagnets, protect against electric shock and overheating. If there is too much power being used in the home, a circuit breaker switch will flip its ON switch to OFF. By default, whatever is overpowering that electrical outlet will immediately be turned off too. Unplugging the problematic electric item and then turning the switch back to ON largely resolves the issue. No electrician or landlord needed.

4. Run Feet Over the Floorboards.

Property owners will often pull up old carpet and put down new carpet, as opposed to trying to clean stains out of the prior renter's spills. However, when it comes to wooden floors or tile floors, this may be a more involved job in the event of damage. Make sure there are no nails or gaps in floor boards. Laminate floors may be fixable with strips of wood, wood shims or pieces of rope. If the landlord opts out of making floor repairs, take photographs and notes of any areas that appear to be worn to avoid being blamed for them later. Also, make sure the gaps aren't big enough to become a safety hazard, especially for the smaller feet of babies and paws of pets.

5. Test the Wall Padding for Noise Sensitivity.

Some Realtors prefer to do morning walk-throughs while others are all about afternoons and evenings. Ask the Realtor to come to the home when most people are generally off work to see how the neighborhood comes alive. While single-family homes have more privacy than multi-units, for light sleepers in both groups, **loud neighbors** can be a killjoy. In addition to seeing the rental with a Realtor, drive past the home during hours that the tenant feels should be quiet, as well as times when it's OK to be noisy.

For tenants who are aware that they'll be the "noisy" person on the block, ask Realtors ahead of time if there are any strict noise ordinances. The "noise" can be anything from an overly hyper dog who loves to bark, an aspiring music band member who loves a good drum battle or the family member whom all other family members love to visit for backyard BBQs. Identifying the level of tolerable noise and what's "normal" on this block can save prospective tenants from neighbor fights later.

6. Check Tuckpointing Flaws For Rodent Risks.

Small holes in the walls or near pipes are the go-to areas to blame for mouse infestation.

However, worn bricks on the outside of the building can be just as problematic for humans and an entrance door for rodents. Tuckpointing also helps preserve the walls and chimneys. While the average tenant probably won't be a brick restoration expert, bricks falling apart and noticeable holes in the lower regions of the home are a clear giveaway of **pest problems**.

7. Make Sure Electrical Amenities Are In Working Condition.

The remote control for the electric garage door opener is convenient—as long as it works. The high-tech outdoor cameras near the doors may make a house feel like home—unless it has blurry night vision.

Most importantly in a tech-dominant world, the Wi-Fi connection may be useful to jot down walk-through notes—unless the connection is horrible in multiple rooms. Excluding bathrooms (primarily because the goal of that room is to be stain- and mold-resistant instead of comfortably chitchatting), that doesn't mean tenants shouldn't be able to talk in the kitchen, bathroom, living room and other rooms. If there is no smartphone connection at all, or it's constantly disconnecting, consider this a red flag. For work-from-home employees and entrepreneurs with home offices, poor signal strength will become a problem sooner rather than later.



8. Open All Windows And Doors, Including Closets.

It's fairly common for Realtors to keep closet doors open so tenants can peek inside at shelving and space. Prospective tenants should still close those same closet doors. Make sure that the doors are all lined up properly and not a poor do-it-yourself job. The same goes for windows, the front and back door, and doors to other rooms.

Even doors that may look fine at first glance can become a source of frustration later. One example is if the bedroom door has a key lock. One accidental slam from the outside, and now the tenant is locked out of the bedroom. If there are tricky locks that are not easily accessible from both sides of the door, make sure to get spare keys. (Tenants should also confirm who is responsible for late-night lockouts or **locksmith needs**.) **Smart technology locks** and cameras should also be tested to confirm they are in working condition and to clarify who has 24/7 access to both.

While there are plenty of other things to browse around for before agreeing to a

background check or signing a lease, these eight features usually get overlooked. Sometimes it's from an overwhelming feeling of trying to check everything at once. Other times it's to avoid being too picky and risk losing a rental. Don't worry about the latter. If the home is meant for that tenant and the landlord is a responsible property owner, asking a few extra questions and testing a few household items won't be a bother. After all, inquiring about these eight items will help busy Realtors remember what they also need to



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