



California Tenant Rental Guide

Know Your Rights, Responsibilities, and Resources

Last updated: May 2025

1. BEFORE YOU RENT



What to Look for

- **Condition of Unit:** Check for mold, pests, water damage, locks, smoke alarms, and working utilities.
- **Written Lease:** Always get a lease in writing. Month-to-month or fixed-term—know the type.
- **Security Deposit Limits:**
 - **Unfurnished unit:** Max 2 months' rent
 - **Furnished unit:** Max 3 months' rent
 - Must be returned within **21 days** of move-out with an itemized list of deductions.



Application Fees & Screening

- Landlords can charge an application fee (max **\$63.79** as of 2025).
 - They can legally run credit/background checks—but must notify you.
-

2. WHILE YOU RENT



Your Rights

- **Habitability:** Unit must be safe, clean, and livable (per CA Civil Code §1941.1).
- **Rent Control:** Cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland have local rent control. Statewide rent cap (AB 1482) applies if:
 - Property is **15+ years old**
 - It's **not** a single-family home (unless owned by a corporation)
 - **Annual rent increases** capped at 5% + CPI (max 10%)

Repairs

- Notify landlord in writing.
- If no response in **30 days** (or sooner for urgent issues), you may:
 - **"Repair and deduct"** (limit: 1 month's rent, max twice per year)
 - **Call code enforcement** if needed

Privacy

- Landlord must give **24 hours' notice** before entering (except emergencies)

Rent

- Late fees must be **reasonable** and disclosed in the lease.
- Landlords **cannot** charge rent via cash-only unless tenant has bounced a check.

3. EVICTIONS & TERMINATION

When Can You Be Evicted?

- **With Just Cause** (AB 1482):

- Non-payment of rent
- Lease violation
- Owner/family plans to move in
- Substantial renovations
- **Without Just Cause:**
 - Only allowed if tenant has been there **less than 12 months** or the property is exempt



Notice Periods

- **30 days:** If you've been there <1 year
 - **60 days:** If you've been there >1 year
 - **3-Day Notice:** For failure to pay rent or lease violation
-

4. MOVING OUT



Security Deposit Return

- Within **21 days**, you must receive:
 - Full refund, OR
 - Written notice with receipts for any deductions



Forwarding Address

- Provide one in writing. If you don't, landlord can send the deposit info to your last known address.
-

5. RESOURCES

Help & Legal Support

- California Department of Consumer Affairs: <https://www.dca.ca.gov>
 - Tenant Legal Hotlines:
 - LA Tenants Union: <https://latenantsunion.org>
 - Tenants Together (Statewide): <https://tenantstogether.org>
 - Local Rent Boards: Vary by city (e.g., San Francisco, Berkeley, Santa Monica)
 - Legal Aid: <https://www.lawhelpca.org>
-

Pro Tips

- Always **communicate in writing** with your landlord.
- **Keep copies** of all rent payments, letters, and notices.
- Learn your **city-specific laws**, especially in rent-controlled areas.