

The First Apartment Starter Kit

Five printable sheets that turn your move into a checklist you can actually finish — from the first tour to the day your deposit comes back.

1 Room-by-Room Essentials

Everything a functioning apartment needs — and nothing it doesn't.

2 The 8-Week Moving Timeline

What to do at 8, 6, 4 and 2 weeks out, move week, and move-in day.

3 The Budget Planner

One-time costs, monthly costs, and your save-before-you-move target.

4 The Apartment Tour Sheet

40 checks and red flags — bring it to every viewing.

5 The Move-In Inspection Form

Document everything on day one. This is how deposits come back.

How to use the Kit: print the sheets you need (they're designed for cheap black-and-white printing too), stick them on the fridge or a clipboard, and check things off with an actual pen. Momentum feels good.

Room-by-Room Essentials

The stuff a functioning apartment actually needs. Buy the starred basics first; everything else can wait until you've lived there two weeks and know what you're missing.

KITCHEN

- ☐ Pots: one large, one small ★
- ☐ Frying pan (nonstick) ★
- ☐ Baking sheet
- ☐ Chef's knife + cutting board ★
- ☐ Mixing bowl (doubles as serving bowl)
- ☐ Spatula, wooden spoon, tongs ★
- ☐ Can opener + bottle opener ★
- ☐ Colander
- ☐ Plates, bowls, glasses, mugs ×4 ★
- ☐ Cutlery set ★
- ☐ Food storage containers
- ☐ Dish soap, sponges, dish towels ★
- ☐ Trash can + bags ★
- ☐ Paper towels
- ☐ Foil / parchment / plastic wrap
- ☐ Oven mitt

BATHROOM

- ☐ Shower curtain + rings + liner ★
- ☐ Bath towels ×2 + hand towel ★
- ☐ Bath mat
- ☐ Toilet paper (day one!) ★
- ☐ Toilet brush + plunger ★
- ☐ Hand soap
- ☐ Small trash can
- ☐ Shower caddy or shelf
- ☐ First-aid basics + pain reliever ★

BEDROOM

- ☐ Mattress + frame or platform ★
- ☐ Sheets ×2 sets, pillows, duvet ★
- ☐ Blackout curtains (streetlights are real)
- ☐ Hangers
- ☐ Laundry hamper ★
- ☐ Bedside lamp
- ☐ Full-length mirror
- ☐ Underbed storage bins

LIVING SPACE

- ☐ Somewhere to sit (sofa, loveseat, or two good chairs) ★
- ☐ Small table (eating + working) ★
- ☐ Floor or table lamp ★
- ☐ Curtains or blinds if not provided
- ☐ Wi-Fi router (if not renting one)
- ☐ Power strips + extension cords
- ☐ Throw blanket (instant cozy)

CLEANING & UPKEEP

- ☐ All-purpose cleaner ★
- ☐ Bathroom cleaner
- ☐ Broom + dustpan or stick vacuum ★
- ☐ Mop or floor wipes
- ☐ Microfiber cloths
- ☐ Laundry detergent ★
- ☐ Basic toolkit: screwdriver, hammer, tape measure, level ★
- ☐ Command strips / renter-safe hooks
- ☐ Flashlight + batteries
- ☐ Fire extinguisher (small kitchen one)

THE FIRST-NIGHT BOX

- ☐ Sheets + pillow + blanket
- ☐ Towel + toiletries
- ☐ Phone charger
- ☐ Toilet paper + hand soap
- ☐ Snacks + water
- ☐ Change of clothes
- ☐ Meds, documents, valuables
- ☐ Scissors or box cutter

★ = **buy before or on move-in day.** Everything unstarred: wait two weeks. Your apartment will tell you what it's missing — and your budget will thank you.

The 8-Week Moving Timeline

Work backward from move-in day. If you have less than 8 weeks, start at the top and compress — the order matters more than the exact dates.

8 WEEKS OUT

- ☐ Set your total budget (Sheet 3)
- ☐ Confirm your move date; give notice on a current lease
- ☐ Start the hunt: shortlist areas, set alerts, book tours
- ☐ Check your credit report — landlords will

6 WEEKS OUT

- ☐ Tour with the checklist (Sheet 4)
- ☐ Get renters insurance quotes — many leases require day-one coverage
- ☐ Line up proof of income, references, co-signer if needed
- ☐ Declutter — less stuff means a cheaper, easier move

4 WEEKS OUT

- ☐ Sign the lease — read it first (deposit terms, guest policy, break clause)
- ☐ Book internet install for move-in day or earlier
- ☐ Schedule utility transfers into your name
- ☐ Reserve truck / movers / officially bribe the friends
- ☐ Start collecting free boxes

2 WEEKS OUT

- ☐ File USPS change of address
- ☐ Update address: bank, work, subscriptions, deliveries
- ☐ Pack rooms you don't use daily; label by room
- ☐ Order day-one essentials to arrive at the new place
- ☐ Confirm elevator booking / truck parking

MOVE WEEK

- ☐ Pack the first-night box (Sheet 1) — it rides with you
- ☐ Defrost the fridge; eat down the pantry
- ☐ Photograph your OLD place once it's empty (deposit evidence)
- ☐ Charge everything; get cash for helpers

MOVE-IN DAY

- ☐ Photo-document the NEW place before boxes come in (Sheet 5)
- ☐ Check: hot water, toilet flush, stove, every lock, smoke alarms
- ☐ Submit the inspection form to your landlord
- ☐ Build and make the bed before you're too tired to care
- ☐ Confirm utilities are live and in your name

The two that bite people: internet installs book out 1–2 weeks (order at week 4), and renters insurance often has to be active before you get keys (quote at week 6, activate at signing).

The Budget Planner

Fill in the right column with your real numbers. Typical ranges are there so you know what's normal — yours will vary by city.

ONE-TIME MOVE-IN COSTS

Item	Typical range	Your number
Security deposit (often 1× rent)	\$500 – 2,000	\$ _____
First month's rent (sometimes + last)	1–2× rent	\$ _____
Application + admin fees	\$50 – 350	\$ _____
Truck / movers / gas + pizza for friends	\$50 – 600	\$ _____
Starter furniture (bed first!)	\$300 – 1,500	\$ _____
Kitchen + bathroom + cleaning basics	\$150 – 400	\$ _____
First grocery haul (pantry from zero)	\$150 – 300	\$ _____
Utility deposits / setup fees	\$0 – 300	\$ _____
Move-in total		\$ _____

MONTHLY COSTS

Item	Typical range	Your number
Rent (aim ≤ 30–35% of take-home pay)	—	\$ _____
Electric / gas / water (if not included)	\$100 – 200	\$ _____
Internet	\$40 – 80	\$ _____
Renters insurance	\$5 – 20	\$ _____
Groceries (one person)	\$250 – 450	\$ _____
Phone	\$25 – 80	\$ _____
Transport (car / transit)	\$60 – 400	\$ _____
Subscriptions (be honest)	\$20 – 80	\$ _____
Laundry (if coin-op)	\$15 – 40	\$ _____
Monthly total		\$ _____

YOUR SAVE-BEFORE-YOU-MOVE TARGET

Move-in total (from above)	\$ _____
+ One extra month of full costs (the buffer that saves you)	\$ _____
= Target savings before you sign anything	\$ _____

Rule of thumb: if the move-in total plus one month's buffer isn't in your account yet, push the date — a month of waiting beats a year of being one bill away from trouble.

The Apartment Tour Sheet

Bring one per apartment. Run the checks — actually turn the taps — and count the flags. Two-minute tours rent bad apartments.

WATER & PLUMBING

- ☐ Water pressure: run the shower
- ☐ Hot water arrives within ~30 seconds
- ☐ Flush every toilet
- ☐ Look under sinks: leaks, water stains
- ☐ Drains empty quickly (sink + tub)

POWER & APPLIANCES

- ☐ Test outlets in every room (bring a charger)
- ☐ All stove burners + oven turn on
- ☐ Fridge and freezer are cold and clean
- ☐ Enough outlets where you'd actually live
- ☐ Breaker box: labeled, accessible, not scorched
- ☐ Heating / AC actually runs

DOORS, WINDOWS & SAFETY

- ☐ Every window opens, closes, locks
- ☐ Front door: deadbolt that works
- ☐ Smoke + CO detectors present
- ☐ Building entry secure (if shared)
- ☐ Cell signal in every room

PESTS, DAMP & SMELLS

- ☐ Corners + ceilings: mold, water stains
- ☐ Under sink + behind fridge: droppings, traps
- ☐ Musty smell = damp somewhere
- ☐ Fresh paint on ONE patch (what's under it?)
- ☐ Window sills: condensation damage

BUILDING & NEIGHBORHOOD

- ☐ Hallways + trash area maintained?
- ☐ Laundry: in unit, in building, or blocks away?
- ☐ Noise: visit at night if you can
- ☐ Parking / transit reality check
- ☐ Phone flashlight down the basement/storage

LANDLORD & LEASE RED FLAGS

- ☐ Pressure to sign today / "3 people want it"
- ☐ Cash only, no receipts
- ☐ Won't show the actual unit (only a model)
- ☐ Vague about deposit return terms
- ☐ Dodges the "who handles repairs?" question
- ☐ Lease bans normal things (guests, working from home)

ASK BEFORE YOU LEAVE

- ☐ What's included in rent? (heat? water? parking?)
- ☐ Average monthly utility cost for this unit?
- ☐ How are repair requests handled — and how fast?
- ☐ Why did the last tenant leave?
- ☐ When was the unit last treated for pests?

Scoring: nothing's perfect — one or two small issues are normal (and negotiating leverage). But any TWO red flags from the landlord section? Walk away. There are other apartments.

The Move-In Inspection Form

Complete this BEFORE your boxes come in. Photograph every issue, note it below, then email a copy to your landlord and yourself — that timestamp is your deposit's best friend.

ADDRESS / UNIT

MOVE-IN DATE

Area	Existing damage / condition notes	Photo
Entry — door, locks, walls		☐
Living room — walls, floor, windows		☐
Living room — outlets, fixtures, blinds		☐
Kitchen — counters, cabinets, sink		☐
Kitchen — stove, oven, fridge, dishwasher		☐
Kitchen — floor, walls, under-sink		☐
Bathroom — tub/shower, caulk, tiles		☐
Bathroom — toilet, sink, vanity, fan		☐
Bedroom — walls, floor, closet, windows		☐
Doors & windows — all lock and open		☐
Smoke / CO detectors — present, working		☐
Heating / AC — runs, filters clean		☐
Water — pressure, hot water, leaks		☐
Meters — electric/gas/water readings		☐
Other		☐

TENANT SIGNATURE

LANDLORD SIGNATURE (OR "EMAILED ON" DATE)

Do this even if your landlord doesn't ask. Wide shots of every room + close-ups of every flaw, same day you get keys. When you move out, repeat the exact shots. Deposits come back to tenants with receipts.