



Off Campus Housing Referrals

University of Massachusetts Amherst | 235 Whitmore Administration Building | 413-577-2187 | www.housing.umass.edu

Housemate Checklist

Consider these points throughout the process of choosing a housemate, finding a place together, and getting yourselves settled.

1. Choosing a Housemate - know what's important to you:

- Male or female
- Smoker, nonsmoker, or no preference
- Someone with pets
- Someone younger, older, or the same age
- Someone in a serious relationship or unattached
- Someone who shares the same expectations in terms of cleaning, paying for things, food, using each other's belongings, etc.
- Someone who shares a similar budget
- Someone who shares similar sleep and study habits

2. Finding a place- Use the Housing Search Checklist for detailed suggestions about looking for a place to live. Also discuss:

- Who will look for a place? Will one person or both be responsible?
- How will you make a final decision as to where you will be living?
- How will the security deposit be handled (by one person or jointly)?

3. Setting expectations:

- Communicate openly and honestly; be flexible, but do not feel you have to compromise on things you feel strongly about.
- How will you handle rent and utility payments?
- What will be your policy for using each other's possessions, including those in the common areas, such as the couch or television?
- What will be your guest policy and party policy?
- How will you handle cleaning responsibilities?
- Will you grocery shop for one another or just for yourself?
- How will you handle messages and mail?
- Complete a "roommate" contract or agreement about how you are going to handle certain situations. There's a sample on this website. Select the "Other Resources" link.

4. Who will bring what?

- Make sure you sit down and make a list of what each of you is going to bring, from furniture to appliances.
- Who will purchase any new/necessary items that neither of you currently own?
- Remember houses and apartments don't furnish themselves — unless, of course, you have rented a furnished apartment!

5. Once you move in:

- Who will be responsible for calling the landlord if you have problems with the unit?
- How will you make each other aware of the conversations you have with your landlord?
- Finally, remember that you and your housemate must continue to communicate with each other if you want your relationship to remain a positive one.

6. When expectations are not met:

- Stay calm. Schedule a house meeting.
- List what you want to talk about prior to the meeting. Stay in the present; don't list things that happened a month ago.
- Talk to one another and come to an agreement.
- Look at what you can all do differently next time. Don't yell and don't accuse.
- Try not to leave notes. Communicate face-to-face or over the phone.

- It's no one's fault but your own if you don't confront issues that are bothering you.

Getting to Know Your Housemates

To be comfortable living with someone, it's important to get to know each other and have open communication. Spend some time together, especially within the first few days of living together. Invite your housemate to a movie or out to dinner and introduce each other to your friends. It's also important to discuss house rules up front and include them in your housing or housemate agreement to avoid future confusion. And don't forget, for every question you ask your housemate, be sure to share things about yourself as well!

Good questions to help you get to know each other.

- What name do you like to go by?
- Where are you from?
- Where else have you lived? (When was that? Did you enjoy the experience?)
- How old are you?
- When is your birthday?
- Why did you come to the University of Massachusetts Amherst?
- What are you studying?
- What are your favorite things to do?
- What kind of activities were you involved in during high school/college?
- What TV shows or movies do you like to watch?
- What genre of books do you enjoy reading?
- What is your family like? Do you have any siblings? (How many and how old are they?)
- What types of hobbies or activities do you enjoy?
- What type of music do you like listening to?
- What sports do you play?
- What sports do you like to watch?
- What type of exercise or training regiment do you follow?
- How do you feel about living away from home?
- What kinds of activities do you want to become involved in on campus?
- What kind of neighborhood did you grow up in?
- What are your friends like?
- What, if anything, do you find interesting about religion or spiritual beliefs?
- Is your lifestyle affected by your religion or spiritual beliefs?
- What jobs have you held and where have you worked?
- Have you ever been in the military or traveled?

Learning to Live Together

- What time do you like to go to bed?
- When do you prefer to be awake? (Are you a morning person or prefer to sleep in?)
- How important is it for things to be neat and clean?
- What are your feelings on sharing things (food, toiletries, etc.)?
- What are your study habits?
- What pet peeves do you have?
- Do you smoke? How often? Inside only, outside only, or both?
- How do you feel about having guests over?
- How do you prefer to handle conflict?

Establishing House Rules

This part of the checklist is designed to help you and your housemate(s) establish guidelines to follow while you are living together. Listed below are several issues that typically cause conflict between housemates. Discussing your preferences now will potentially help you to avoid conflicts in the future. Try to resolve any differences now, before conflicts arise, in a manner that is satisfactory to all housemates.

1. Guests/Visitors

- How many visitors should be allowed at a time and how often?
- At what times are visitors acceptable for studying and/or social purposes? Is it different on weeknights and weekends?
- Will you have to give notice if you will be having visitors?
- Can guests stay overnight?
- Can guests be male and/or female?

2. Food/Shopping/Household Supplies

- Will you buy your own food or will all food costs be shared?
- Will you be expected to cook individually or will you create a rotating schedule of who will cook for everyone?
- Is borrowing food acceptable? What foods? How will you handle replacing borrowed food?
- How will the cost of household supplies (such as cleaning supplies, toilet paper, dish detergent, etc.) be divided?

3. Cleanliness/Cleaning Responsibilities

- Will you clean up after yourself or will you rotate cleaning the entire space?
- Who will clean common areas and how often?
- Will you create a schedule defining who cleans what or spend one day each week cleaning together?
- Be sure to take into account tasks such as sweeping/vacuuming, emptying the trash, dusting, tidying up the room(s), cleaning the kitchen, bathroom, etc.

4. Community/Personal Property

- Can you borrow or use items such as the stereo, television, a hairdryer or curling iron, clothing, and computer? Do you prefer to be asked before borrowing?
- May housemates use personal items when the owner is not there?
- How will the use of community items (refrigerator, shared furniture or appliances, etc.) be divided between housemates?

5. Study Hours/Sleeping

- What hours and days will be set aside for study time?
- Can you play low background music?
- What time do you expect to be able to go to sleep on weeknights and weekends?
- What time is it reasonable for the living space to be quiet during the week? On the weekend?
- Do you expect to be able to nap?

6. Entertaining

- Do you want to be notified in advance if your housemate is entertaining?
- Is there a maximum number of people allowed?
- Who will clean up afterwards?
- Are there specific times or days when friends, guests, or parties are not allowed?

7. Smoking

- Inside or outside only?
- Do you want smoking to be allowed in the bedrooms and/or in the common areas?
- Is it banned at all times?

8. Pets

- Do you have allergies that would require banning certain types of pets?
- Will pets be allowed in common areas?
- Will all of you be responsible for the care of the pet?

9. Messages/Phone Use

- How will you take messages?
- Where will you keep the phone?

Communicating with your Housemate(s)

The most important aspect of any relationship is communication. It is important to begin your experience as housemates with a strong foundation of open communication. This will minimize initial problems, while serving as a useful method for handling any issues that may arise. Knowledge of these aspects of communication may help contribute to a successful household.

Communication includes both **verbal and nonverbal messages**. The different parts of the message you convey have different levels of effectiveness in terms of influencing the listener.

- The words you use - 11%
- Your tone of voice - 32%
- Your body language, facial expression, other non-verbal cues - 57%

Although you always want to choose your words carefully, how you say them and how you appear when you say them is even more important.

- Understand your own communication style so that you can adapt to the styles of your housemate.
- Actively listen. Non-verbal communication is just as important when you are an active listener as when you are speaking. Your housemate will notice nonverbal cues to whether or not you are interested in the conversation and are paying attention.
- Negative cues may discourage your housemate and block further attempts at communication.
- Give feedback to show that you have been listening actively, but wait until your housemate has finished conveying his/her message.
- If your housemate asks you to just listen and is not looking for a response, you should respect those wishes.

These steps will give you an idea of your listening style as well as showing what improvements could be made.

1. Listen closely to the story without interrupting.
2. Once your housemate is finished, repeat the story back to him/her. This doesn't have to be word for word but should include the main points of the story.
3. Have your housemate confirm whether your understanding is accurate.
4. Ask questions to learn more details. Be direct, courteous and calm. Spare others your unsolicited advice and acknowledge that what works for you may not work for others. Be sure to state your main points first and then offer details, if necessary. Also listen for hidden clues about feelings and take notice of any nonverbal cues from the other person.

Conflict Resolution Guidelines

Having a conflict with a housemate? Don't worry. Disagreements are inevitable, especially when people live together and interact everyday. Try not to be afraid of confronting your housemate(s) about what is bothering you.

Here are 10 Effective Ways to Handle Conflict:

- 1.** Make sure you have enough time to effectively discuss the situation with your housemate(s). Instead of bringing up a problem as your housemate is walking out the door, find a time when you can both sit down and talk about the conflict.
- 2.** Remember that you and your housemate(s) are entitled to the same right to be heard in the discussion. It may help to pick a neutral location to meet to discuss the conflict.
- 3.** Enter into the discussion without the desire to "win." Resolving a conflict with your housemate requires that you find a workable solution, not one where one person "wins."
- 4.** Try to take a step back and view the situation from the perspective of your housemate(s), and ask them to do the same. Understanding the problem from each other's perspectives will help find an agreeable solution.
- 5.** Talk about actions that a person can change rather than aspects of your housemate's personality. Personal attacks make it harder to effectively communicate with your housemate(s) about the issues at hand.
- 6.** If you have more than one housemate, it's important that you avoid teaming up with one housemate against the other. It's going to be important for all of you to work together to resolve the situation. Teaming up against one housemate will only make it harder to find a workable solution.
- 7.** Take into account any cultural differences that could be adding to the situation. If your housemate comes from a different background, it may be that your differing customs and values are affecting the situation and the way you each handle conflict. Try and keep the lines of communication open and find ways that you and your housemate(s) can feel comfortable discussing these differences.
- 8.** Make the decision to remain calm and patient while working out a solution. If the discussion escalates into an argument, it may be best to stop and cool off. It may be to take a break and come back to the discussion later on.
- 9.** If your housemate(s) begin fighting unfairly, it is up to you to get the conversation back on the right track. It is best to set a positive tone from the start and maintain it throughout the conversation.
- 10.** It may be helpful to give your housemate(s) time to think about the situation (at least overnight). Your housemate(s) may then be able to better discuss his/her perception of the conflict, which will lead to a more satisfactory solution.