Accommodation options and tips

If you can, live at home – it’s a sensible way to keep your costs down. If you need to live away from your family home, accommodation will be a major expense, so it’s important to consider all your requirements and look at all options before deciding what type of accommodation you will choose. Things to consider:

**Suburb:** do you need to be near a bus route or train line to get to uni? Do you need to be near a shopping centre? The amount of rent you’ll have to pay will vary considerably from suburb to suburb in Sydney.

**Type of accommodation:** do you want to share with a family, one person, other students? Do you want food included or to self-cater? Do you require furniture? Will you need to sign a lease? If so, do you understand your obligations?

**Boarding**

The costs of boarding with a family will vary depending on which meals are provided, whether you have one room with an ensuite or a couple of rooms, etc. Sometimes if you do work around the home (mowing, cleaning) you will receive a rent reduction.

Things to check: whether you need to supply linen and towels or any furniture; washing and ironing arrangements; telephone arrangements; is there a facility to connect a computer modem; are there restrictions on visitors; do you feel safe/happy/comfortable in the place? Look for boarding advertisements in local papers, on noticeboards at uni, and at the Student Association.

**Share accommodation**

Many students living off-campus choose to share a flat or house with others. The person who owns or has taken out a lease on the property will usually interview potential flat/housemates, and costs of rent, electricity, gas, telephone and often food will be shared. Look in local newspapers or at the Student Associations and on noticeboards on each UWS campus.

**Renting**

Real Estate Agents have listings of houses and flats to rent, either at their offices or online. Before you leave home, collect two or three character references (from school, work, or someone in the business community). These can assist when applying for rental accommodation, as Real Estate Agents need to assure landlords that their property will be looked after.

If you are taking out a lease, start-up costs will include a Tenancy Agreement, bond of four weeks rent (six weeks if the property is furnished), plus two weeks rent in advance. A two bedroom unit with a rental of $200 per week would cost $1415. If you have trouble finding these initial costs, the Department of Housing’s RentStart program may be able to assist. Phone (02) 9821 6111, see the Dept of Housing website for addresses of local offices at [www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au) or look at the RentStart policy.

Make sure you understand all the paperwork when you are signing a lease, as these are legal documents.

Other initial costs will include connection fees for electricity, gas and telephone. Some utilities
providers will allow you to pay the connection fee with your first account, or may waive the fee if you set up a direct debit on your account.

If the property is unfurnished, you will need a basic amount of furniture, furnishings and kitchen equipment. Often this can be brought from home or purchased second-hand at opportunity shops or garage sales.

**Advice from the NSW Office of Fair Trading**

If you are thinking of moving into a unit or sharing with friends then you need to know your rights and responsibilities. When moving in:

- You must be given a copy of the Residential Tenancy Agreement – a legally binding contract
- You must be given a Condition Report which is part of the Tenancy Agreement and describes the condition of the place. Take your time to fill it in properly.
- You must give the landlord a copy of the Condition Report filled in with any added comments within 7 days of receiving a copy of the agreement
- You might have to pay a bond to your landlord (which must be written in the tenancy agreement) and the landlord must lodge it with the Renting Services Branch of the Office of Fair Trading
- The premises must be in a clean and reasonable condition.

**When you have moved in make sure you**

- Pay the rent on time
- Take care of the place
- Contact the landlord if there are any repairs needed – put it in writing
- Do not alter or make additions without the landlord’s written permission
- Do not change locks without the landlord’s written permission
- Do not interfere with the peace, comfort or privacy of your neighbours
- Ask the landlord’s written permission before you let someone else move in
- Start your own renting file to put all your letters and receipts together in one place.

**During your tenancy you have rights to**

- Full use and quiet enjoyment of the rented property
- Reasonable security
- Have repairs carried out in a reasonable time
- Get proper notice when the landlord or agent wants to visit, 2 days notice for repairs unless repairs are urgent and 7 days notice before an inspection
- Be given 60 days written notice of a rent increase.

**Do you know your rights?**

Sandy and Nakita were best friends who shared a house together and had just recently had an electrical fault in their house. They had tried for hours to contact the landlord about the problem, but there was no answer. They started getting worried about what to do because most of their food in their freezer had started to defrost, no lights could be used in the house and they couldn’t cook food. Hours of trying to contact their landlord turned into two days of relying on take away food and candles, not being able to keep anything cold in the fridge, as well as having no heating during the night.

Nakita and Sandy were not aware of their rights as tenants and this would have made the difference from living out of an esky in darkness for two days, to living their life as normal.
Had Nakita and Sandy read the Renting Guide, they would have known that:

- The repair problem was actually an “urgent repair”
- They could have contacted any properly qualified tradesperson chosen by the landlord, which is written in the tenancy agreement
- They could have paid up to $500 for the repairs and claimed it back from the landlord within 14 days
- They could have contacted their nearest Fair Trading Centre for information on what to do
- They could have applied for an urgent hearing with the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal.

For more information about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant contact your nearest Fair Trading Centre on 13 32 20, or visit their website at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/realestaterenting.html

Accommodation tips

- If you’re eligible for the Youth Allowance ‘away from home’ allowance, you may receive extra benefits such as rent assistance. Check with Centrelink.
- Before you leave home, find out what you will need to bring with you. If living on campus, you may need sheets, towels, and pillows or cooking utensils, plus stationery and personal effects. Bringing these from home will reduce your costs.
- Negotiate meals, parking, sharing of expenses, visitors rights before you agree to rent, share or board.
- Don’t buy a heater that is cheap to buy but expensive to run, such as fan heaters. Air conditioning is also an expensive form of heating. Keep doors and windows closed when the heater is on. Or put on an extra jumper or use a blanket to warm up rather than using a heater. Don’t leave heaters on overnight – if the bedroom is very cold, buy an electric blanket.
- Seal drafts around doors and windows to keep the heat in. A cheap, stick-on foam sealant can be bought at any hardware store, but should be fixed in place by the real estate agent or landlord.
- Close window coverings in the summer to block out heat conducted through the windows.
- Ask your telephone company to bill you monthly rather than quarterly. It’s easier to pay a smaller amount each month than a large sum every three months. If you find it easier, use your electricity and gas account nos. to pay an amount each month as well, so that you’re not surprised by a big bill at the end of winter. It can be expensive to have utilities reconnected.
- Keep a writing pad and pen near the phone, so that when anyone makes a call, they can record it next to their name. This makes it easier to divide up the bill. Be aware of off-peak times to make STD calls. If you like to speak to your family regularly, ask your parents to call you a couple of times a week. Try to save up your news for these calls.
- International phone cards are the cheapest way to make overseas calls – check which brand will give you the best deal for the country you’re calling.
- Write emails to friends or family overseas or interstate, rather than phoning them.
- If you use the computers at uni to check and send email, this will cost you nothing.
- You can rent a phone with an incoming call line only, except for 000 emergency calls, if you have a concession card. Telstra call this service ‘InContact’.
- Wait until you have a full load before running washing machines or dishwashers. Use cold water in your washing machine, with cold water detergents. Always try to dry clothes outdoors rather than in a clothes dryer.
- If you know you will be tight on funds, contact your landlord and tell them in advance. If you’re a good tenant, they may be willing to offer solutions. If you are having difficulty paying electricity, gas or phone bills, contact the supplier as soon as possible to negotiate a payment plan.
Be aware of your tenancy rights and obligations. Contact the Department of Fair Trading for advice by phoning 13 32 20 or visit their website at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/realestate_renting.html