The Landlord Leasing Guide

PROTECTING AN INCOME PROPERTY, FROM LISTING TO RENEWAL

Most landlord losses come from two places: a tenant who should not have been approved and a lease that did not say what the owner assumed. This guide covers getting a unit rent ready, pricing it, screening lawfully and consistently, documenting condition, and handling maintenance, renewals, and turnover.

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A Note From Patricia



I am a landlord myself, so this guide is not theory. I have learned that written criteria, dated photographs, and quick maintenance responses prevent nearly every dispute worth worrying about. I will also tell you when a rent number is optimistic, because a month of vacancy costs more than the increase you were hoping for.

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Step One: Make It Rent Ready Before You Market

Showing a unit that is not finished lowers your rent and attracts weaker applicants. Complete the work first, then market.

- Handle function and safety: locks and rekeying, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, GFCI outlets, water heater condition, and HVAC service.
- Clean thoroughly, including carpet or flooring, appliances, vents, and windows.
- Fresh neutral paint and working light in every room does more for rent than any upgrade.
- Address drainage, gutters, and exterior grading before they turn into interior damage.
- Photograph and date every room, including closets, appliances, and existing wear, before anyone moves in.

Step Two: Price It From Evidence

- Use closed and currently leased comparables in the immediate area from the last few months, not last year.
- Compare like condition. A renovated unit and a dated unit are not the same product.
- Calculate the true cost of chasing a higher rent: each vacant month reduces your annual return more than most increases add.
- Decide your position on pets in advance, in writing, since pet policy affects both the applicant pool and your risk.
- Set the lease end date intentionally so turnover lands in a stronger leasing season.

Step Three: Screen Consistently and Lawfully

Fair housing law applies to every step, including your advertising, your showing conversations, and your criteria. The protection for you is a written standard applied identically to every applicant.

- Publish written qualification criteria before you accept applications, and apply them to everyone the same way.
- Verify income with documentation, not screenshots, and verify employment directly.
- Verify rental history with prior landlords, and confirm identity.

- Run credit and background screening through a compliant service, and apply your stated standard consistently.
- Document your decision and the reason it met or failed your written criteria.
- Never make decisions based on protected characteristics, and be careful with familial status, disability, and assistance animal questions. When unsure, ask counsel rather than improvising.

Step Four: The Lease Should Say What You Assume

- Rent amount, due date, grace period, late fee, and accepted payment method.
- Security deposit handling and the itemization and return timeline required by Texas law.
- Maintenance responsibility split, including filters, yard, pest, and how emergencies are reported.
- Occupancy limits, guests, subletting, and named occupants.
- Pets, weight and breed terms, and any pet deposit or fee, plus how assistance animals are handled separately from pets.
- Alterations, mounting, painting, and smoking terms.
- Utility responsibility, HOA rules, parking, and trash.
- Entry notice, inspection rights, and lease end obligations, including cleaning and carpet condition.
- Renters insurance requirement, which protects both of you.

Step Five: During the Tenancy

- Respond to maintenance requests quickly and keep written records with dates, vendors, and invoices.
- Use licensed vendors for electrical, plumbing, and HVAC. Deferred repairs become habitability problems.
- Handle rent issues immediately and in writing, following the notice requirements exactly.
- Do periodic documented inspections as permitted by the lease, with proper notice.

- Keep a reserve for capital items: roof, HVAC, water heater, and flooring all have finite lives.
- Review the tax assessment annually and protest when it is not supported.

Step Six: Renewals and Turnover

- Start renewal conversations well before the lease ends. A modest increase with a good tenant usually beats a vacancy and a turn.
- If you raise rent, support it with comparables and give proper notice.
- At move out, walk the unit with your dated move in photographs in hand.
- Itemize deductions properly and return the balance within the required timeline. Deposit disputes are avoidable with documentation.
- Rekey between tenants, every time.

How I Work: Transparency, Integrity, and Privacy

I will give you a realistic rent, not a flattering one, and I will tell you when an applicant does not meet your own written criteria. Ownership details and applicant information are handled confidentially. For legal notices, evictions, and fair housing questions, I will tell you plainly that it is time for an attorney.

Questions Worth Asking

Bring these to me, to your lender, or to your attorney. If I do not know an answer, I will tell you and get it from the right professional. Use the space to write down what you learn.

☐ What does this unit realistically lease for in its current condition?

☐ What repairs should be done before marketing rather than after?

☐ Are my written screening criteria consistent and lawful?

☐ Does my lease actually address maintenance, pets, and entry?

- ☐ How do I document condition to protect the deposit?
- ☐ What reserve should I hold for capital items?
- ☐ When should I start the renewal conversation?

Speak With Patricia

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