

# SMART RENTER GUIDE

WHERE

***Education, Energy,  
and Rental Efficiency***

MEET



OHIO  
UNIVERSITY

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***Your Off-Campus living  
experience*** begins here.

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**Community Collaboration** **2**

Campus Involvement Center, UpGrade Ohio,  
and the Smart Renter Campaign 3

**Finding Off-Campus Housing** **4**

Getting Started 5

Visiting a Potential Home 5

Signing a Lease 6

Landlords 7

**Becoming a Smart Renter** **8**

Moving In/Out 9

Roommates 10

Personal Safety 11

Trash and Recycling 12

Personal Budgeting 13

**Green Guide: Tips for a Greener Home Life** **14**

Energy Efficiency 15

Transportation 16

Food 16

Waste 17

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COMMUNITY

***Collaboration***

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## Campus Involvement Center

The Community Engagement program within the Campus Involvement Center assists students who live off campus by serving as a resource for navigating a variety of issues. These issues range from making a smooth transition from on-campus living to off campus life, to understanding city policies regarding trash, noise, and house parties (just to name a few).

**Questions?** Stop by the office.

**Campus Involvement Center, Baker Center 361**

**Hours:** 8am – 5pm weekdays

**E-mail:** harrisob@ohio.edu

**Phone:** 740-593-4098

## UpGrade Ohio

UpGrade Ohio connects people with local resources to reduce energy use and to access renewable energy solutions, paving the way for a sustainable energy transition in the state of Ohio. With collaboration, we hope to support a strong mandate to implement clean energy reform.

**[www.UpGradeAthens.org](http://www.UpGradeAthens.org)**

## Smart Renter Guide

### **When Education, Energy, and Rental Efficiency Meet...**

The creation of this rental guide was made possible through collaboration between **UpGrade Athens County, Kleinpenny Education Fund**, and the **Ohio University Campus Involvement Center**.

#### **LOOK FOR TIPS FROM THE SMART RENTER CAMPAIGN.**

When you see the professor, remember that he has ***your*** back.

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FINDING

*Off-campus*  
HOUSING

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## Getting Started

### Want to live off-campus?

**Wonder where to start?** There are some obvious decisions you may have already thought of, such as rent price, rental location, or house vs. apartment. However, before you begin looking at rentals, you may want to have a list of “necessities” and questions to consider before signing a lease.

### Things to consider during your housing search:

#### Affordability

- Your budget for rent
- Your budget for utilities
- Utilities included in the rent (gas, water, trash)
- Parking fees
- Cable and Internet

#### Academic Needs

- Proximity to the library, other study space and your classes
- Computer and internet accessibility

#### Physical Needs

- Proximity to Ohio University
- Proximity to recreational, facilities, restaurants, grocery stores, etc
- Pet policies
- Laundry on or off site



### Questions to Ask During a Property Visit:

- When is rent due?
- Which, if any, utilities are included?
- Are pets allowed? If so, is there a fee or additional deposit required?
- Is there on-site parking? Where is it?
- Do residents have assigned spots?
- If there is no on-site parking, is there a place that you recommend I park?
- Who is responsible for lawn care and snow removal?
- What is the procedure for maintenance issues?
- What is the average response time for average maintenance requests?

**Talk to the current tenants if they are present and ask if the house is comfortable and well maintained.**

## Visiting a Potential Home

When you are on the search for a place to live off-campus, visit a few rentals. Before visiting, research the properties online. Make sure they are within your budget and contact a landlord to view what interests you. Bring a notepad and camera to record what you like and dislike about the property. It's easy to forget details after seeing a few places. Make sure to meet with the property manager and feel free to ask lots of questions.



**\* BONUS TIP - While viewing prospective rental properties ask current tenants about monthly utility costs.**

## Signing a Lease

After carefully choosing your future rental property, you will need to secure it by signing a lease. A lease is a legally binding document and breaking one can be problematic and expensive. Do not sign a lease simply to secure a place to live. Read the lease before signing it to protect your rights as a tenant.

### What type of lease are you signing?

There are several types of lease agreements in general use. Each has various benefits for tenants and property managers. The most prevalent lease type in Athens is the "Joint and Severally Liable Lease". This type of lease states that the tenants are jointly liable for the property. This means that if one tenant were to not pay their rent then all the tenants could be held legally liable for that payment. The advantage to this is that if you lose a roommate, you get to choose who moves in with you. The other lease agreement that is in use in this area is an "Individual Lease." Individuals sign a specific lease and they are held individually liable for such an agreement. Depending on your specific situation you may want to ask your perspective landlord what types of leases they have available that might fit your preferences.



### Questions to Consider Before Signing a Lease:

- Is the contact information correct on the lease?
- What are the move-in and move-out dates?
- Is there a lease renewal clause?
- How much is the rent and when is it due?
- Can the rent amount be increased?
- What is the penalty for late payments?
- Is a deposit required? If so, how much is the deposit?
- If pets are allowed, is there an additional deposit, rent amount or fee?
- Can the tenants sublease the apartment or house?
- Are there restrictions against decorating/painting the apartment or house?
- Are there guest restrictions?
- Are there conduct rules for the property (i.e. no parties, no outside furniture, etc.)?
- When is trash pick up?



\* BONUS TIP - Don't waive the \$12 dollar fee for Student Legal Services. They can help you navigate your renter's rights.



## Landlords

While living off-campus you may find yourself in a situation you may not know how to handle. Here are some typical situations and resources to help address them. For additional information regarding these issues or assistance with any other issue, contact the Office of Off-Campus Living at 740.593.4098, or harrisob@ohio.edu.

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*“...you may find yourself in a situation you may not know how to handle.”*

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### **Your Property Manager Has Not Responded To Requests For Repairs**

If your property manager is not making repairs in a timely manner or not responding to your requests at all, click on the following link to the Center for Student Legal Services for steps you can take to remedy the situation.

### **Your Property Manager or Staff Enters Your Home Without Notice**

The law generally requires that the property manager give you at least 24 hours notice before entering your home. If you're having legal issues with your landlord and need support here's a link to a page of downloadable documents from student legal services that may be of assistance.

Here's the link:

[www.studentlegalrights.org/housing-publications/](http://www.studentlegalrights.org/housing-publications/)



\* BONUS TIP - Don't forget to shovel and salt your sidewalk in the winter. It is your job to keep the section outside of your house clear.

### **Your Property Manager Has Withheld Part Or All Of Your Security Deposit**

Give your landlord, IN WRITING, your forwarding address when you move out. Once you have left, the landlord has 30 days to return your security deposit. If you don't get all of it back, the landlord must send an itemized statement regarding the deductions. For information on what you can do during move in and out that may help you get a fair amount of your security deposit returned or if you believe your security deposit is being unfairly withheld, click on the following link to the Center for Student Legal Services.

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BECOMING A

***Smart*** RENTER

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## Moving In and Out

**BEFORE YOU MOVE INTO YOUR APARTMENT,** inspect your rental and record anything that is in need of repair, damaged or hazardous. You can use the sample inspection form by clicking the link on the following page. If you find something wrong with the rental and it is not on the inspection form, make a note of it in the additional comments section. Ideally, your property manager should be present when you inspect the property. Call ahead to make an appointment and push if necessary to have someone meet you for move in.

**AFTER INSPECTION IS COMPLETED,** ask your property manager to sign the inspection form to ensure that you both agree to the outcome of the inspection. If they are not able to be present or refuse to sign the inspection form, send them a certified copy of your findings. Furthermore, be sure you and your property manager are in agreement as to how the problems will be fixed. How these problems should be fixed should be listed in your lease. The same form should be completed upon moving out.



### **It is best to videotape or photograph your inspection of your apartment or house.**

The key is to take pictures of everything. It is also important that you can prove that the pictures or video that you took are dated accurately. Holding up the daily newspaper in your picture is one way to do this. It is not absolute proof, but it is better than nothing. Also, do not pause the tape if you are videotaping because it may look like it has been edited. Be sure to take the same precautions when you move out of your apartment or house to help prove your case regarding the condition you left your place if your property manager challenges it.



**\* BONUS TIP -** Keep a Rent Folder. Include a copy of your lease, proof of rent payments, and copies of correspondences sent to your landlord. Document in case there is a dispute.

# Roommates

Several issues should be considered when deciding who would make a good roommate.

- Cleanliness
- Privacy
- Lifestyle similarities
- Guest policies
- Parties
- Sharing belongings
- Paying bills



\* **BONUS TIP** - Before moving in, coordinate with your roommates so you don't buy unnecessary furniture appliances or lights.

**A roommate agreement** is a great tool to use while and/or after deciding whom you would like to live with in your apartment or house. The roommate contract will assist you and your new roommates with determining house rules, who will pay for what and several other items that will be helpful in creating a successful living environment.

**Here is a link to a roommate contract/ agreement to fill out:**

[www.ohio.edu/involvement/offcampus/upload/roommate-agreement.pdf](http://www.ohio.edu/involvement/offcampus/upload/roommate-agreement.pdf)

When you all move in together, share contact information with each other, including your roommate's parents or emergency contact numbers.



\* **BONUS TIP** - Ask for your security deposit back by sending out a written request with an address to mail it to.

## Personal Safety

Off-campus safety is based on common sense and personal responsibility. If you are sharing a rental with other people, it is important that everyone is equally responsible for making sure the rental is secure. Here are some tips for staying safe off-campus:

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***“...it is important that everyone is equally responsible for making sure the rental is secure handle.”***

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### Inside the Rental

- Leave just one LED light on when gone for long periods of time. Purchase a timer that can turn the light on and off automatically.
- Keep emergency numbers in an accessible location for all tenants.
- Test smoke detectors every month.
- Purchase Renter’s Insurance.
- Know your roommate’s security habits. Your home will only be as safe as all the tenants allow it to be.



### Entrances

- Always keep doors and windows locked.
- When utility or service people come to your door, ask to see ID.
- If you lose your keys, work with the property manager to replace the locks to your rental immediately.

### Outside the Rental

- Get to know the area around your rental.
- Never leave a key outside under a mat or in a place accessible to a stranger.
- Never walk alone at night.



**\* BONUS TIP - If you see a crime in progress, report it! Look out for your neighbors. If something seems suspicious, call it in.**



# Trash and Recycling

Trash cans can be placed at the curb the night before your pickup day beginning at dusk. Cans must be returned to your home and out of sight from your street of address, by sunset of your pickup day.

**Follow this link for the Athens trash collection schedule:** [www.ci.athens.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=250](http://www.ci.athens.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=250)



The following materials are accepted by Athens-Hocking Recycling Centers. Materials must be clean and sorted by type. The Athens-Hocking Recycling Centers reserve the right to refuse any materials that cannot be recycled or which are improperly prepared for processing.



**\* BONUS TIP -** Don't leave beer cans or trash on your property after or a party. City code enforcement issues fines every day.

**Newspaper** – Mixed Paper – Magazines & Catalogs

**Paperboard** – Cereal boxes, cracker boxes, pop & beer cartons, etc. Remove plastic inserts. Flatten.

**Corrugated Cardboard** – Must be flattened.

**Beverage Cans** – Aluminum beverage cans. Rinse.

**Aluminum food cans** – Scrap Aluminum – Aluminum foil, pie pans and other scrap. Material must be free of food.

**Tin/Steel Food Cans** – Rinse. Labels need not be removed.

**Glass** – Rinse, remove caps. Labels need not be removed.

**Plastic** – #1-#7 plastics. Plastic bottles such as milk jugs, pop bottles, shampoo & detergent bottles. Clamshells & containers such as those used for salad, cottage cheese, yogurt & berries. NO Styrofoam accepted.

**Follow the link for a the Athens City recycling flyer:** [www.ci.athens.oh.us/DocumentCenter/View/1858](http://www.ci.athens.oh.us/DocumentCenter/View/1858)

# Personal Budgeting

Paying rent is not your only expense when living off-campus. Creating a personal budget can help you keep track of your money and make better spending decisions.

The following 6 tips adopted from U.S. NEWS Money can help you budget your during your college years.

**1. CREATE AN ACTUAL BUDGET.** This is incredibly important. List monthly income sources, including savings, wages and parental allowances, and then write down estimated expenses for the month. It isn't easy to identify college living expenses in advance, but you should try. Take costs such as school supplies, food outside your meal plan, personal care items and laundry into account. Then, try managing your budget and tracking expenses using an online personal finance management tool like Mint.com, which helps you easily create and stick to a budget.

**2. SEPARATE WANTS FROM NEEDS.** Is \$30 per week for gas a "need" or a "want?" How much should you budget for non-meal plan food? How much will laundry cost? After a few months on campus and tracking expenses, it becomes easier to distinguish wants from needs and put a plan into action. Some students give themselves a weekly cash allowance rather than carry a debit card, and when that week's allowance is gone, they wait until next week for more "wants."

**3. SET UP A CHECKING ACCOUNT.** Banks usually cater to college students by offering free checking and saving accounts, which allows students to avoid fees on withdrawals or fund transfers. Shop around to find a bank with convenient ATMs near campus to eliminate out-of-network charges. And keep in mind that when an out-of-state check arrives (say, from grandma), it may take a few days to clear, so keep an eye on the account balance before spending against it.

**4. USE, DON'T ABUSE, CREDIT CARDS.** In 2012, 70 percent of undergraduate students had at least one credit card, according to the International Journal of Business and Social Science. College is a great time to start building credit (which is crucial for leasing an apartment, purchasing a vehicle and even landing a job post-graduation), but it's easy for many to amass a large amount of debt while in school. It's important to understand the difference between credit building and overextending. If you don't know, visit a business professor during office hours and ask!

**5. DO YOUR HOMEWORK ON LOANS AND FINANCIAL AID.** College graduates tend to have a difficult time balancing ever-growing student loan payments against declining wages. Understand what the exact size of your student loan debt will be upon graduation, and come up with a plan for how you will pay it back. Even if it involves moving back home for a bit (to preserve your sanity, give yourself a specific timeline for when you plan on moving out), it will be worth it in the end.

**6. SHOP SMART FOR TEXTBOOKS.** Textbooks are one of the biggest college expenses—a brand new edition of a biology book can cost upward of \$300. Bypassing the campus bookstore at the start of each semester is an easy way for college students to save an abundant amount of money. Invest in a Kindle or iPad and download your books—they are less expensive that way. Or look for books in used bookstores or online. Even with shipping costs, the price can turn out to be significantly cheaper.

Need help splitting the bills between roommates? Try Simple Bills.

Simple Bills is a free service specifically for roommates that splits utility bills by each roommate, receives payment from each roommate, and pays the utilities. **Follow the link for more information:** [www.simplebills.com/for-roommates](http://www.simplebills.com/for-roommates)

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# ***GREEN*** GUIDE:

TIPS FOR A GREENER HOME LIFE

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## Energy Efficiency

Even in a rental property, your behavior can make a difference. Here are some tips to help you lower your energy bills and help the environment.

Install LED bulbs in all light fixtures. This alone can save you 75% more than incandescent bulbs. Some area landlords have already updated their properties lighting for you. Put LED's in all your personal lamps.

Use power strips and turn them off when you are away.

If you need to purchase appliances, make sure to purchase Energy Star.

Consider using timers to turn lights on when you need them and keep them off when you are gone during the day, or when there is enough natural light from the sun.

Use microwaves and toaster ovens to cook food or warm leftovers. They use less energy than conventional ovens.

Keep your freezer full, it uses less energy than an empty one. You can even fill the freezer with gallon jugs of water.

When doing laundry, wash full loads of clothes and choose warm or cold depending on the contents.

If you have the space, install a clothesline to dry your clothes using the energy from the sun!

**Phantom Energy: Electronics use energy when plugged in, even if not in use. Click the power strip to save \$.**



**\* BONUS TIP - Make sure the furnace filter is changed every 1 - 3 months to ensure clean air and improve efficiency. Ask your landlord for assistance.**

Avoid phantom energy. Even when they are turned off, electronics with stand-by modes use energy to power features such as clock displays. Printers, cable boxes, and DVR's are the biggest culprits.

Unplug phone and laptop chargers when they are not in use.

Looking to buy a new or used TV? Consider an Energy Star model, which uses 30% less energy than a conventional brand. Or use your laptop as your TV, which uses even less energy.

Use tight fitting lids and covers on pots and pans when cooking. This reduces the cooking time and the energy used to cook the food.

## Transportation

**Walk instead of drive.** Athens was listed as one of the United State's most walkable cities in 2015.

**Choose public transportation.** Did you know that Athens Transit bus rides are now free to all Ohio University students, faculty and staff? All you have to do is show your university ID. **For more information on schedules and routes, follow the link:** [www.athenstransit.org/](http://www.athenstransit.org/)



\* **BONUS TIP** - Athens Public Transit rides are free to all students with a valid university ID. Ride the bus to campus or to get your groceries.

**Two-words: GO BUS.** If you are traveling to another city in Ohio, the Go Bus will most likely be able to get you there for ten dollars. **For more information, follow the link:** <http://ridegobus.com/>

**Ride your bike.** Athens is a biker-friendly city chock full of bike lanes. It is also home to the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway. **Follow the link for a map of the bike path:** <http://bloximages.chicago2.vip.townnews.com/athensmessenger.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/d/82/d8212744-ff80-11e1-a798-001a4bcf887a/5054faddcc37.pdf.pdf>

**Need to drive? Why not carpool?** If you are going somewhere outside of Athens, consider posting your route on the Ohio University Bobcat Board, student senate's rideshare program.

## Food

### THE ATHENS FARMER'S MARKET AND OHIO UNIVERSITY MINI MARKET

The **Athens Farmers Market** is a great way to support the local food economy! They are located in the parking lot of the Market on State (1000 E. State St.) every Saturday from 9-12, April-December on Wednesdays 9-12 from April through December, and Thursday evenings May-September 4-7 pm.

For those who can't make it to the Athens Farmer's Market, some of the vendors set up a mini market on campus. This market is located at Lindley Park next to Bentley Hall, and runs every Friday from 11 am to 3 pm.

**Follow the Ohio University Mini Market's Facebook page for more information:**

[www.facebook.com/OuMiniFarmersMarket/](http://www.facebook.com/OuMiniFarmersMarket/)

### 30-MILE MEAL PARTICIPANTS

Athens is an amazing place to eat locally! We are now home to one of the nation's first "super-local" food economies, which we call the 30 Mile Meal. Any restaurant that holds its logo purchases a portion of its food and drink from farmers within a 30-mile range of town.

**Current 30-Mile Meal Participants:** <http://athensohio.com/category/dining/30-mile-meal-dining/>

To learn more about which businesses are involved and the farmer's you're supporting, you can head to the 30 Mile Meal's blog, their Facebook page, or the Athens Visitor's Bureau.

## IN YOUR HOME

### 1. Prioritize plants

### 2. Minimize meat

Meat production is a substantial contributor to greenhouse gas emissions—beef production especially—and the environmental burden deepens, as raising and transporting livestock also requires more food, water, land, and energy than plants. To eat for our own health as well as that of the planet, we should consider picking non-meat proteins such as nuts and legumes.

Having trouble cutting your meat consumption?

**Consider participating in Meatless Monday:**

[www.meatlessmonday.com](http://www.meatlessmonday.com)

### 3. Shop local

Exploring the farmers market helps you find fresh produce grown locally, but equally important, you can meet the people who produce your food. Such relationships are opportunities for education: you can learn how your food was grown, when it was harvested, and how to prepare it.

### 4. Eat mindfully

One of the simplest things you can do to eat more sustainably is to practice mindful eating. Focusing on what you're eating allows you to reflect on where your food came from and how it is nourishing your body. Additionally, by tuning in to your hunger signals you may learn that you don't need as much food as you thought, and resize your meals accordingly.



\* BONUS TIP - Pack your own lunch. Use up your leftovers and save money!

## Waste

**Arm yourself with reusable water bottles, grocery totes, cloth bags, and glass jars.**

**Pay attention to the FIVE Rs:** Refuse what you do not need, Reduce what you do need, Reuse what you consume, Recycle what you cannot Refuse, Reduce or Reuse, and Rot (Compost) the rest.

**Instead of disposable menstrual products, invest in a menstrual cup or reusable liners.**

**Only shop a few times a year to avoid compulsive purchasing.**

**Shop second hand for your wardrobe and household items.**

**Donate the items you don't need.**

**Welcome alternative house cleaning tools:** a metal scourer for stainless, a wooden brush for light scrubbing, an old toothbrush for hard to reach places and rags for everything else (counters, floor, fridge, mirrors etc.)

**Opt for glassware and ceramic dishes over paper or Styrofoam.**

**Sign up for electronic billing and opt out of paper.**

**Use your recycling and compost bins more than your trash bin.**

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**For more tips on reducing personal waste, visit [www.zerowastehome.com/](http://www.zerowastehome.com/)**

**For tips on composting, visit [www.planetnatural.com/composting-101/tips/](http://www.planetnatural.com/composting-101/tips/)**



\* BONUS TIP - You can save money and air quality by foregoing ammonia-based cleaners for natural products. A mixture of lemon juice, vinegar, baking soda and essential oils cleans almost any surface.

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*Where Education, Energy, and  
Rental Efficiency Meet*

UpGrade Ohio  
Campus Involvement Center

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