



Sharing Spaces

*A quick and easy guide to starting the year off on the right foot.
Get to know your apartment mates today; avoid conflict tomorrow.*

Housing and Residence Life

Live on, to live in the experience!

Sharing Spaces

A valuable and memorable experience of college life is living with roommate/apartment mates. Whether they're from across the state or across the world, each person is unique in their background, personality and habits.

Knowing your roommate/apartment mates and building a relationship are not easy tasks. Getting along with your roommate/apartment mates and preventing unnecessary conflict requires:

- Open lines of **communication**
- Mutual **understanding and respect**
- Mutual **agreement**

This five step process will help you begin to discuss roommate/apartment mate issues that, if not addressed, might lead to conflict.

If you and your roommate/apartment mates already know each other, it is still important to complete this guide. Friends might discuss important topics less often than those who have just met, leading to misunderstanding and conflict. Being friends with people is different from living with them.

Take turns responding to each item before going on to the next one. If you are not exactly sure what your roommate/apartment mate is saying, ask for clarification, or try to state your perception of what is being said in order to check for understanding. As you go through the questions, be honest and open-minded. If you don't understand some of the answers your roommate/apartment mates give, ask questions! Dialog is more productive than assumption.

If you find you are skipping questions and responding in only a joking manner, think about why you are reacting that way, talk about it, and then try to get back to the question. If an item truly stumps you, or you feel reluctant to discuss the issue, take a rain check and try to go back to it sometime later.

People don't need much in common to get along with each other! All they need is respect and communication.

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Break the Ice

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Personal 2 Characteristics

It helps to understand one another's habits, personal traits, and emotional style. By discussing characteristics, you will gain a better idea of the things you have in common with your roommate/ apartment mates. You will also notice differences which may require compromises. Take time to discuss and give your reactions to each question below.

- How would you describe your **personality** and **sense of humor**?
- How much time do you need **alone**? How and when do you get that?
- How do you let people know if you are **angry**? **Happy**? **Upset**? **Excited**? **Frustrated**?
- How do you usually deal with **stress**?
- Do you **exercise** or **workout**?
- How much **sleep** do you need, and when do you sleep?
- Describe your **study** habits. When and where do you study?
- What type of **environment** do you need to study well?
- Do music, telephone conversations, having people over the apartment, and TV **affect** ability to study?

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Living Area

Now that you have a better sense of your roommate/ apartment mates, spend time identifying individual needs and preferences. The questions below will help get you started. If something important to you is not on this list, bring it up to your roommate/apartment mates. It is essential that your roommate/apartment mates take part in creating an environment that supports individual freedom and mutual consideration.

- What time do you usually wake up? What time do you usually go to **bed**?
- What does "**clean**" mean to you?
- (*Roommates*) How clean would you like our **bedroom**? Do you tend to be tidy, messy, or in between?
- What personal belongings are you willing to **share** (e.g., computer, clothing, videogames, microwave, DVD's, etc.)?
- How will we coordinate the **purchase** of toilet paper, paper towels, hand soap, cleaning supplies, etc.?
- What staple food items are you willing to **share** (e.g., milk, butter, eggs, seasonings, etc.)? How will we coordinate purchasing these items?
- How often will the kitchen, living room, and bathroom(s) be **cleaned**? How will we divide responsibilities? Would it help to have a cleaning schedule?
- When should we **lock** the apartment door (e.g. at night, when we're down the hall, if we step out for just a second)?
- Do some **odors** (cooking, garbage, personal hygiene) bother you?
- How will we share **refrigerator** space? How will we organize the cabinets?
- How will we take **messages** (e.g. friends and family stopping by)? (*West residents*) Where would you like your mail?

4 Guests

Depending on the time of day, guests can be a friendly addition to the apartment or an unwelcoming nuisance. While you certainly may invite friends into your living area, socializing too much or at inappropriate times can have an adverse effect in your roommate/apartment mates. Discuss the following questions to prevent visitor conflict.

- At what **times** is it ok to have guests over?
- How many guests is **too many**?
- What are your feelings about having guest(s) stay **overnight**?
- What is your romantic **relationship** status? How do you feel about romantic partners staying overnight?
- If overnight guests are ok, how far in **advance** would you like to **know**?
- Does the **gender** of the guest make a difference?
- Can friends be over while you're **studying**?
- Is it ok for my friends to be in the apartment while I am **away**?
- (Roommates) If you are gone, may my guest use your **bed**?

Getting Personal

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- How comfortable are you when making new **friends** and interacting with people you don't know?
- How often do you attend **parties** and other social events? DO these events include alcohol and/or controlled substances? How do you **feel** about alcohol and controlled substance use and abuse?
- What are your **pet peeves**? What makes you tense or uptight?
- What are your **goals** for this semester/year? In the next five years? What do you want out of life?
- What **beliefs** and **values** are important to you?
- Are there **religious** or **spiritual** events that are important to you? How do you observe them? Are there other events that are important to you? As you observe these special events, how might they **affect** the common areas of the apartment?
- In an emergency, time and information are critical. Do you have any **allergies** or **medical conditions** we should be aware of?
- If things are working out with us, how should we **handle** it?

Few people enjoy conflict and confrontation. Whether you and your roommate/apartment mates are best friends or new acquaintances, personal conflicts might arise at some point. While conflict was once viewed negatively, it is now seen as a natural part of life. In fact, conflict can be an extremely positive tool if managed correctly.

As Conflict Arises...

What Triggers Conflict?

Conflict is the result of *real* or *perceived* differences concerning *personally* important topics. Possible sources of conflict include **decisions, behavior, values, goals, interests,** and **trust**. With such a broad list of contributing factors, it is important to realize that conflict can happen at anytime, sometimes without warning.

You and your roommate/apartment mates are a diverse group of people with unique backgrounds, habits, and lifestyles. When individual needs differ, it is important to keep the following things in mind:

- Conflict is an inevitable process to be *managed*, not *avoided* or *escalated*.
- In order to manage conflict, differences must be addressed.
- Conflict builds relationships as personally important topics and feelings are brought to attention.

Managing Conflict

If you decide to manage conflict, you'll be taking an important first step. Avoiding conflict satisfies no one's concerns while escalating the problem makes matters worse for everyone involved. Here are four ways people manage conflict, some are more productive than others.

Accommodation: I satisfy your concerns at my expense.

Competition: I satisfy my concerns at your expense.

Compromise: I give-up some concerns and you give-up some too.

Collaboration: We come up with solutions to satisfy all concerns.

While **accommodation** and **competition** may be tempting short term solutions, they often result in resentment and conflict escalation. With **compromise** and **collaboration**, a meaningful and lasting resolution can develop.

A key to maintaining healthy roommate/apartment mate relationships is to reduce potential conflict by discussing issues ahead of time.

As Conflict Arises...

Steps to Confront Conflict

You've decided to manage the conflict. Stay calm, and follow these steps as a guide to get you through it.

- **GET TOGETHER:** Get everyone involved in the conflict together in a neutral meeting place.
- **DEFINE THE PROBLEM:** Acknowledge that a problem exists and define the source together.
- **CLARIFY:** Ask questions and ensure everyone is on the same page.
- **DISCUSS/LISTEN:** Have each person present his/her side of the story. Listen attentively.
- **LIST SOLUTIONS:** Brainstorm a list of possible solutions using *compromise*, *collaboration*, or both.
- **CHOOSE SOLUTIONS:** Decide on a solution as a group.
- **MONITOR AND MAINTAIN:** Monitor progress toward the solution and talk regularly about whether or not it's working.

Additional Tips for Success

- Verbalize and demonstrate your desire to solve the conflict. Show that you care.
- Don't blame or attack each other. Depersonalize the situation as much as possible by focusing on the issue at hand, not personalities and personal characteristics.
- Use neutral language and avoid "accusing pronouns" (discuss "the concern" instead of discussing "your" mistakes.)
- Listen actively to each other, no matter how hard it may be. Focus on the future (no the past) and solve the problem.
- If you're angry, arrange a time when you are more likely to be civil.
- Be open to your roommate/apartment mates' criticism and only present constructive criticism to them.
- In conflicts that cannot be resolved through compromise or collaboration. It may be necessary for each roommate/apartment mate to reassess their *desires* versus their *needs*. Sometimes desires must be given up in lieu of needs.
- Keep in mind the positive traits each of your roommate/apartment mates possess. Focus on everything that has gone well.

As Conflict Arises...

Respect your roommate/ apartment mates for who they are.

What if nothing seems to work?

If you tried hard to manage your conflict without success, ask your Community Assistants for help. They can give you advice and (if the situation warrants it) help to mediate a solution with the group. **Utilize your CAs as a resource. They're here to help you.**

The Year Ahead

Sharing Spaces might be the first you have of many of these issues, but hopefully it won't be the last. College changes people; habits, like, dislikes, and values of you and your roommates evolve, make time to talk about the differences.

Over the next few months, apartment conflicts might arise and friendships might be strained. Having a written agreement can be helpful in managing a conflict. Review the agreement, keep communication open, and continue to discuss and revise it throughout the year.

Roommate/Apartment mate Rights

- To sleep without disruption.
- To read and study peacefully in one's own room.
- To have Privacy.
- To live in a clean and healthy environment.
- To have free and equal access to the apartment.
- To receive respect for one's self and personal property.

Individual freedom must be balanced with mutual consideration. Remember, along with every right comes the responsibility to ensure your roommate/apartment mates are afforded the same rights.