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Colin Daileda

cdaileda@radford.edu

Students searching for an apartment, townhome or house at college are often looking for their own place to live for the first time. After searching for whatever is deemed the ideal place, soon-to-be residents are presented with a leasing agreement. These agreements are long and filled with legalese and must be scrutinized more carefully than the average student is willing to do before signing a yearlong deal.

First things first, make sure you know whether the lease you sign is separate or joint. Joint leases are fine, but you must really trust your roommates. If they ditch you in the middle of the year, you're still stuck with the bill. With a separate lease, each tenant is responsible for his or her portion of the rent and nothing more.

No matter what type of lease you sign, every company will ask for a security deposit up front. The prices vary, but often this security deposit is a sort of incentive to not absolutely destroy the place you're renting. Leasing companies will usually return the security deposit to tenants if the place is kept in the same condition it was rented to them in.

But no leasing company will give you the money back if you simply promise you didn't do any damage to it. Tenants must take pictures of any damage that already exists as soon as their lease starts. These pictures should be time-stamped so there's no debate as to when the damage occurred. Don't leave any doubt in the leasing company's mind that you didn't do the damage.

Pay attention to what the leasing company is liable for. When potential charges come up at the end of the year, tenants must know what the leasing company is liable for in order to potentially save money.

Dogs and cats are common throughout the university community, so if you want a pet, make sure you know the leasing company's policy toward them.

Some leasers allow pets on all properties and with some it varies. Some companies make

tenants pay a one-time fee, others charge by the month and some do both.

If the property you choose has a no-pet policy and you decide you want one during the middle of the year, check to see the amount of money you will owe if and when the leasing company discovers your furry friend.

Finally, make sure to know your leasing company's alcohol policies. Not many have them, but some don't allow kegs in apartments and many prefer that you not have an excessive amount of guests over at any one time.