Questions to Ask About a Rental

Rental ads can be brief and may not provide enough information about the rental. Below you will find examples of questions that you can ask a landlord over the phone or at an open house.

This list is not exhaustive and questions should be tailored to your specific concerns. Read the rental advertisement thoroughly before calling a landlord. Focus on any holes in the information. For example, if the rental is listed as being in a neighborhood you are unfamiliar with, ask for the cross-streets or local landmarks. If the ad already tells you there is a washer and dryer, don’t ask.

Financial questions:
- How much is the deposit?
- Can it be paid over two months?
- Is the deposit negotiable?
- Are any utilities included?
- Has there been a recent rent increase?
- Do you accept multiple rent checks or do you want the entire amount in one check?
- How much do the utilities for this property usually run?
- How are the utilities split? This is especially relevant in shared housing or if there is only one meter for more than one rental.

Tenants:
- How many tenants are allowed in the unit?
- Is subletting permissible as long as the landlord is notified?
- How long do tenants usually rent here?

Amenities:
- What appliances are included? Are there washer/dryer hookups (if washer/dryer is not included)?
- Does the unit have off-street parking? If so, what is the cost? How many parking spaces? Are parking permits required for street parking?
- Is the unit furnished?
- What type of heating does the unit have (forced air, wall furnace or other)? Gas or electric? This can impact your utility bill. Is the unit insulated?
- Is the stove gas or electric?
- Is there a back yard?

Other:
- Where is the rental located? What is the address?
- Is there a bus stop nearby? How far?
- Did the house have any noise violations in the past 12 months? This would mean that in the event that you receive a noise violation, it would not count as the first one and would be more expensive. Check the Santa Cruz Police Records to find out if the rental has been flagged in the last twelve months.
- Are the tenants responsible for the upkeep of landscaping? (They usually are.)
- How long will the rental be available? Some landlords may only plan on renting during the school year while you may want to keep the rental over the summer. It is best to know this up front.
- Were the locks changed after the last tenants vacated?