

The 5 key ingredients for a successful DIY property inspection

When it comes to property inspections, there is a lot on the line. While the price tag of a security deposit can vary based on many factors, they tend to be equal to about two months rent, which, for the average American living in a one-bedroom apartment, comes out to \$2,156, according to data scientist [Sydney Temple](#). A withheld deposit can also result in further legal fees, meaning the cost of getting the inspection wrong is high. Thankfully, with the right tools and ingredients, tenants can protect themselves while also building a constructive and mutually beneficial dialogue with their landlords from the get-go.

Particularly in today's environment, simply finding an affordable space that meets your needs can already feel like a victory. However, tenants and landlords alike must still take precautions to ensure they are on the same page about any potential issues in the home and the terms of their financial arrangement, even in situations where face-to-face interactions are unworkable, whether due to distance or the COVID-19 pandemic.

To get a sense of how property managers and tenants should navigate this landscape, we reached out to two experts in the property management field: Kenton Girard, who has owned and managed properties in Chicago for twenty years, and shares this knowledge on his YouTube channel, [KentonKnows](#); and Tim Sabo, who has been renting out properties in southwest Pennsylvania since 2008 with his wife.

In addition to our experts' advice, there is one more tool to place under your belt for both tenants and property managers alike: RentCheck. This property inspection solution helps landlords save time on inspections and works to protect renters from losing their security deposit. Whether you are a property manager or a resident, RentCheck can help make your home inspections easy, in addition to following these five important steps.

1. Why Landlords and Tenants Need a Rental Checklist

To facilitate an efficient and organized property inspection, many advise that landlords adopt a checklist system. On Sabo's move-in and move-out checklists, he asks about the condition of items like doors, smoke detectors, utilities, and any features that could experience damage in the future. During the move-in inspection, the landlord and tenant would do a walk-through of the home together, using the checklist to itemize any damage and ensure that residents are not penalized for existing problems when they move out.

When using RentCheck, landlords don't need to worry about what questions to ask during an inspection, because RentCheck creates customized checklists for residents based off of their homes. After selecting what rooms you have in your home, RentCheck will prompt the user to rate the condition of elements in their apartment as either poor, fair, or good. This is a great option for landlords who want to save time but still value the rental checklist.

Why are these checklists so important? Not only do they protect residents and their security deposits, but they also give the landlord an opportunity to show the fairness behind their process.

"It's hard, because no matter how you look at it, it seems like everyone thinks the landlord is the bad person taking advantage of the tenant, and it seems like that is the scenario every time," Girard said. "So from a landlord's perspective, the more consistent and the more standardized of a process they can have, the less likely that narrative gets told."

2. Don't forget to sign: A document that holds up in court

When doing these walk-through inspections with a tenant, Sabo stressed the importance of not only documenting the state of the home, but also getting signatures throughout the entire process. While a checklist is helpful, the signatures are vital if the landlord and tenant go to court over a security deposit dispute.

"If I have a checklist from a tenant that they signed three days after they moved in that said there were no problems, that's going to stand up in court," Sabo said. While these signatures are not required when using an inspection checklist as evidence in court, they could be the difference in the outcome of the hearing.

"By both parties documenting what the status is, there shouldn't be room for any dispute later on," Sabo said. "It eliminates the concept of 'he said she said.'"

3. Take time-stamped photos upon moving in *and* moving out

To make the documentation even more bullet-proof, take photos of the home upon arrival and departure, and make sure they are time-stamped. By adding these dates, the photos can hold their own in court and provide evidence in the event of a security deposit dispute. RentCheck prompts each user to take these photos throughout every inspection, time stamping each photo and immediately uploading it to the Cloud.

4. Create positive dialogue with the tenant

The most important step in the property inspection process is to establish trust with the tenant. For Sabo, that means making sure that he is reliable and can respond quickly when asked to make repairs. Deferred maintenance is so costly that future expenses could be up to fifteen times the initial repair cost, Buildings.com reports. Sabo knows that being diligent when it comes to repairs is an opportunity to build on the relationship with the tenant and value both of their time and money. But however landlords choose to build a positive relationship with their residents, it is also important to create a strong foundation for this trust with careful inspections and verification.

“You want to trust the tenant, you want them to trust you, but document it, because you want to make sure that you protect your corporate interests,” Sabo said.

RentCheck also serves to facilitate positive communication between the tenant and the landlord. Because it streamlines the process in an organized manner, it allows everyone to be on the same page and empowers trust in both parties. And with this tool, property managers can set reminders for their tenants to complete their inspection, keeping everyone in the loop.

5. Conducting Thorough Home Inspections Remotely

A new Axios-Ipsos survey reports that as of Nov. 24, three-quarters of Americans see spending time inside public spaces with others as a risk. With these percentages only rising, indicating the discomfort people feel being inside with those outside of their pod, it's clear that a remote alternative to property inspections is needed. But how can landlords facilitate property inspections without being inside the apartment? RentCheck can make it happen.

When using RentCheck, landlords can choose to have the app guide the tenant through the inspection, giving them detailed reporting instructions to make sure that the inspection is thorough and done to a high standard. They can be empowered to complete the entire inspection independently, while taking time-stamped photos and uploading them so the information can be easily shared.

The quality of the inspection does not need to be sacrificed when doing it remotely. RentCheck is transforming the property inspection, making it user-friendly, COVID-friendly, and a tool that benefits both the landlord and the resident.