

GRANDPA WALT'S

Security Deposit Protection Kit

Document it on day one, fix it right on the way out, and give yourself the best shot at getting your deposit back.



Hey there, kiddo.

Most deposit fights come down to one thing: proof. Who can show what the place looked like on move-in day?

This kit makes sure the answer is you. Start it the day you get the keys.

Walt

What's inside

1. Deposit basics
2. Wear and tear vs. damage
3. Move-in photo guide
4. Room-by-room move-in checklist
5. Repair request log & template
6. Move-out repair guide
7. Move-out cleaning checklist
8. Walkthrough & deposit request letter
9. Key dates & contact tracker

Grandpa Walt is an AI character. This kit is general information, not legal advice. Security deposit rules vary by state and city, and your lease matters. Check your state's laws or a local tenant-rights organization for your specific situation, and get your landlord's permission before making any repair or change. Personal use only; please don't resell or share copies.



Deposit Basics

How deposits generally work (your state's rules decide the details)

Walt's take: a deposit is your money. The landlord is holding it to cover unpaid rent or damage beyond normal use. Your job is to make "normal use" easy to prove.

What landlords can usually deduct for

- ☐ Unpaid rent or fees under your lease
- ☐ Damage beyond normal wear and tear
Holes, burns, broken fixtures, pet damage, stains that won't come out.
- ☐ Cleaning to get the unit back to its move-in condition
Rules on cleaning charges vary by state.
- ☐ Anything else your lease spells out, if your state allows it

What most states require of landlords

- ☐ Return the deposit within a set number of days after you move out
The deadline is set by state law. Look up yours and write it on the tracker page.
- ☐ Give you an itemized list of any deductions
Many states require this in writing.
- ☐ Send it to your forwarding address
So always give your new address in writing.

Look up your state's rules

My state	
Days the landlord has to return the deposit	
Itemized list required? (yes / no)	
Where I found this (website)	

Where to look: search "[your state] security deposit law," and look for your state attorney general's site or a local tenant-rights organization. Those are more reliable than random blogs.

Wear and Tear vs. Damage

The line that decides most deposit disputes

General rule: things that wear out from normal living are usually the landlord's cost. Things that get broken, stained or damaged by accident or neglect are usually yours. Exact rules depend on your state and lease.

Usually normal wear and tear	Usually damage you could be charged for
Paint that's faded or slightly scuffed over time	Big marks, crayon, or a paint color you added without permission
A few small nail holes from hanging pictures (varies)	Large holes, many anchors, or holes from TV mounts
Carpet worn in walkways	Burns, rips, pet stains, or large spills that won't come out
Loose door handles or sticky locks from age	Broken doors, frames or locks
Minor scratches on floors from normal use	Deep gouges, water damage, or pet scratches
Grout that's aged or slightly discolored	Mold or mildew from never cleaning or ventilating
Blinds faded by the sun	Bent, broken or missing blind slats
Appliances that wear out with age	Appliances broken by misuse, or left very dirty
Window screens worn over time	Torn or missing screens

Walt's rule: if something breaks while you live there, report it in writing right away (page 5). A repair you reported early looks like normal wear. One the landlord discovers at move-out looks like damage.



Move-In Photo Guide

Do this before you move a single box in

Why before the boxes? An empty unit shows every scratch, stain and hole. Once your furniture is in, the photos stop proving anything.

How to shoot it

- ☐ Take a slow video walking through every room
Narrate what you see: "Living room, scuff on the left wall, carpet stain by the window."
- ☐ Take a wide photo of each wall, the floor and the ceiling in every room
- ☐ Take close-ups of every flaw, with something for scale
A coin, a pen, or a tape measure next to the mark.
- ☐ Open everything: oven, fridge, freezer, dishwasher, cabinets, closets
- ☐ Test and film: faucets, toilets, lights, outlets, AC, heat, smoke alarms
- ☐ Photograph the outside: doors, windows, screens, patio or balcony

How to make it count

- ☐ Keep the photos' original date and time
Don't edit or filter them.
- ☐ Email the photos and video link to yourself and your landlord
That creates a dated record that you both had them.
- ☐ Back them up in two places
A cloud folder plus a USB drive or second account.
- ☐ Fill in the move-in checklist (next pages) and ask the landlord to sign it
Keep a copy.
- ☐ Keep a copy of your signed lease and any move-in report the landlord gives you



Move-In Checklist

Room by room. Note every flaw, no matter how small.

Item	Condition*	Photo ✓	Notes (what and where)
Kitchen			
Walls & ceiling		☐	
Floor		☐	
Cabinets & drawers		☐	
Countertops		☐	
Sink & faucet		☐	
Stove / oven		☐	
Fridge / freezer		☐	
Dishwasher / disposal		☐	
Bathroom			
Walls, ceiling, floor		☐	
Tub / shower, caulk, grout		☐	
Toilet		☐	
Sink, vanity, mirror		☐	
Exhaust fan, lights		☐	
Living room			
Walls & ceiling		☐	
Floor / carpet		☐	
Windows, blinds, screens		☐	
Lights, outlets, switches		☐	



Move-In Checklist (continued)

Bedrooms, the rest of the place, and sign-off

Item	Condition*	Photo ✓	Notes (what and where)
Bedroom 1			
Walls, ceiling, floor		☐	
Closet & doors		☐	
Windows, blinds, screens		☐	
Bedroom 2			
Walls, ceiling, floor		☐	
Closet & doors		☐	
Windows, blinds, screens		☐	
Everything else			
Entry door, locks, keys		☐	
Hallways & stairs		☐	
Washer / dryer		☐	
Heat & AC working		☐	
Smoke & CO alarms working		☐	
Patio / balcony		☐	
Other		☐	

Sign-off

Tenant signature & date	
Landlord signature & date	
Date photos emailed	

*Condition: G = good, F = fair, P = poor



Repair Requests

Always in writing. Always dated.

Walt's rule: a phone call isn't proof. After any call, send a short email or a message through your tenant portal that says what you reported and when.

Request template

Copy into an email or portal message

Hi _____,

I'm writing to report a repair needed at _____, Unit _____.

The problem: _____

When I noticed it: _____ Photos attached: yes / no

Please let me know when someone can come take a look. You can reach me at _____.

Thank you,

Repair request log

Date sent	Problem	How sent	Date fixed	Notes

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Move-Out Repair Guide

Small fixes that head off common deductions

Check your lease first. Some leases say tenants can't make repairs or paint, and a bad DIY job can cost more than the original problem. When in doubt, ask your landlord in writing.

- ☐ **Fill small nail holes**
Spackle, let it dry, sand smooth, and touch up only if you have the exact paint color. A mismatched patch can look worse than the hole.
- ☐ **Remove scuffs from walls**
Try a damp cloth or a melamine sponge gently. Test in a hidden spot first so you don't take the paint off.
- ☐ **Take down hooks, anchors and command strips the right way**
Pull command strips straight down along the wall, slowly.
- ☐ **Replace burned-out light bulbs**
Match the type and brightness that was there.
- ☐ **Clear slow drains**
A plastic drain snake handles most hair clogs.
- ☐ **Tighten loose cabinet handles, towel bars and door knobs**
- ☐ **Test smoke alarms and replace weak batteries**
- ☐ **Straighten or replace bent blind slats**
If they were damaged during your stay, a matching replacement blind is often cheap.
- ☐ **Return everything to its original spot**
Shelves, blinds, shower heads and anything you swapped out.

Leave the big stuff alone. Carpet replacement, wall repainting, appliance repair and anything electrical or plumbing beyond the basics should go through your landlord.



Move-Out Cleaning Checklist

Leave it as clean as you found it (or cleaner)

Kitchen

- ☐ Clean inside the oven and the stovetop
- ☐ Empty, defrost and wipe the fridge & freezer
- ☐ Wipe cabinets inside and out
- ☐ Clean the sink, faucet and counters
- ☐ Clean the range hood filter
- ☐ Run the dishwasher empty, wipe the door
- ☐ Sweep and mop, including under the fridge if it moves

Bathroom

- ☐ Scrub the tub or shower, grout and fixtures
- ☐ Clean the toilet, including the base
- ☐ Clean the mirror, sink and vanity
- ☐ Wipe the exhaust fan cover
- ☐ Mop the floor

Every room

- ☐ Dust ceiling fans, light fixtures and vents
- ☐ Wipe baseboards, door frames and light switches
- ☐ Clean windows, sills and tracks
- ☐ Wipe blinds
- ☐ Vacuum carpets; spot-clean small stains
- ☐ Empty closets and wipe shelves

Last steps

- ☐ Take out all trash and recycling
- ☐ Leave nothing behind, inside or out
- ☐ Take dated move-out photos and video of every room
Same angles as move-in, if you can.
- ☐ Return every key, fob and remote



Walkthrough & Deposit Request

Close it out in writing

- ☐ Ask for a move-out walkthrough with the landlord or manager
Bring your move-in checklist and photos.
- ☐ Take your own move-out photos and video, even if they do a walkthrough
- ☐ Give your forwarding address in writing
Use the letter below. Keep a copy.
- ☐ Note the return deadline from page 1 on your calendar

Deposit request letter

A starting point, not legal advice

_____ (date)

Dear _____,

I moved out of _____, Unit _____, on _____ and returned all keys. I left the unit clean and in the condition documented at move-in, apart from normal wear and tear. My move-in and move-out photos are available if needed.

Please send my security deposit of \$_____, along with an itemized list of any deductions, to my forwarding address:

Thank you,

_____ Phone / email: _____

If something goes wrong: if the deposit doesn't arrive by your state's deadline, or the deductions don't look right, reply in writing and ask for details. If you still can't resolve it, a local tenant-rights organization or legal aid office can explain your options.



Key Dates & Contacts

Everything you'll need at move-out, in one place

The rental

Address & unit	
Landlord / management company	
Phone / email / portal	
Lease start date	
Lease end date	
Notice required to move out	
Deposit amount & date paid	
Move-in photos taken / emailed	

Move-out

Notice given (date & how)	
Move-out date	
Walkthrough date	
Keys returned (date & to whom)	
Forwarding address sent (date)	
Deposit due back by	
Amount received & date	

From Walt: thanks for picking this up. New DIY fixes every week on Instagram at [@grandpawaltdiy](https://www.instagram.com/grandpawaltdiy), plus more tools for renters and homeowners at grandpawalt.com.