



What Is the Process for Screening a Tenant?

Application

1. When a landlord finishes showing a tenant the apartment, the two parties sit down and discuss terms. If the tenant is interested in the apartment, he must fill out an application that asks for his name, previous addresses, [phone](#), social security number, employer, and the name and number of previous landlords. The prospective tenant must also pay an application fee in most cases.

Credit Check

2. The landlord will then run a credit check on the tenant. This will give the landlord a full account of the applicant's payment history. The landlord needs to know how reliable the tenant will be making on-time payments. [A credit score](#) above 750 is generally considered to be excellent; a score above 600 is acceptable. Anything under 600 would likely give the landlord pause. The most important detail that most landlords look for on an applicant's credit report is a foreclosure or other negative information related to the tenant's past residences. If a potential tenant has a history of having trouble paying for a house, especially ignoring payments and allowing the home to go into foreclosure, that is a clear message to the landlord that this tenant could be a high risk.

Call Last Landlord

3. Another check the property owner will perform is to call the previous or current landlord. This person is an invaluable resource for making a decision on the character of a tenant. The previous landlord will rarely have a motivation to fabricate a story about the tenant (except maybe to speed up the process of getting her moved out). The prospective

landlord will then make a decision, pass or fail, based on the information that is revealed by the previous landlord.

Criminal Background Check

4. An important check in the tenant screening process is a criminal background check, though a landlord will usually perform this search at his own discretion and on a case-by-case basis. Criminal records are public information---the landlord can use the information given on the application form to do a thorough records search to find out if the prospective renter has been arrested or involved in criminal behavior. This is a gauge of character, and in many cases a landlord will deny the rental if the tenant has a violent or drug-related crime on his record. Some states will allow you to search criminal backgrounds by first and last name online.

Eviction Check

5. Possibly the most imperative check that is done during the tenant screening process is for past evictions. This is a check, separate from the credit check, that can be paid for using an [online service](#) or by calling the court administration offices of the prospective renter's past towns of residence. If a tenant has been evicted in the past that indicates two things: she does not pay rent and she will refuse to leave the property on her own will if there is an issue. Most landlords will instantly reject an application from someone who was evicted, especially if it was recent.