

# Housing Guide

## Your Canadian Housing Search

This resource provides important information to help you with your housing search. If you have any questions, please reach out to your International Transition Coordinators (ITCs). ITCs provide specialized service to international students to support their transition to Canada and Conestoga College, including early college onboarding, travel preparedness, housing search, accessing college and community resources, and more!

Students can [book an appointment with an ITC](#) on the [Student Success Portal](#), or reach out via [email](#).

## How much does housing cost?

Many factors contribute to the cost of housing, including but not limited to the location, availability, size, and the amenities included. You can find average rental rates on the [Cost of Living](#) section of the [Conestoga International Student Support](#) website.

Keep in mind, there may be other expenses in addition to paying monthly rent. These may include utilities (water, electricity, gas), Internet, parking, laundry, etc.



# 6 steps to securing housing

1. Set your criteria
2. Search housing listing websites
3. Contact landlords or property management companies
4. View rental unit
5. Complete rental application form
6. Get approved by landlord or property management company
  - a. Sign lease agreement
  - b. Provide initial rent payments



## Step 1: Set your criteria

Focus your housing search on finding a place that meets your needs and your budget. Create a list of criteria by asking yourself the following questions:

1. What is the maximum amount you can afford to pay in rent?
  - a. Expect to spend on average \$850 per month for a single room in shared apartment or house.
  - b. Remember that utilities such as heat, electricity, gas, and water may not be included in the rent and will add to your monthly costs.
  - c. When determining how much you can afford in rent, consider additional costs such as food, mobile phone, transportation, and rental insurance.
2. Do you want to live alone or with roommates?
  - a. Living with roommates can make rent more affordable.
3. How close are you to things you consider necessary for day-to-day living; Is the rental near [public transit with easy access to campus](#) and other amenities such as grocery stores and pharmacies?



## Step 2: Search housing listing websites

The most common way to find housing is through rental websites and by networking with local family, friends, and Conestoga students. You can find more information on housing listing websites and ways to connect with other Conestoga students on our International Student Support webpage under [Housing resources | International | Conestoga College](#).

Please note: the websites listed on the housing resources webpage are not affiliated with or monitored by Conestoga College. Please use caution and be aware of scams!

### Be aware of housing scams!

Potential signs of a scam may include the following:

- The cost of rent is lower than other comparable rentals and seems too good to be true — it probably is!
- The landlord is too eager to rent to you and offers it without following the regular application and screening process.
- The landlord or property manager asks for your passport, banking, or Social Insurance (SIN) information — this information is never required for a rental application.
- The landlord or property manager will not show you the rental unit and makes excuses such as they are currently out of town, or they have had a family emergency, or the unit is under renovation.
- The landlord or property manager will only communicate via text or on WhatsApp, as opposed to email or phone calls.
- Photos in the rental listing do not match those on Google Streetview.
- The account used to create the listing is new or the account history shows similar-looking listings in different cities.
- Facebook pages described as being for Conestoga College students to connect are not affiliated with or monitored by Conestoga College. These groups may expose students to scams or inappropriate online behaviour. Please use caution when engaging on these sites.



## Step 3: Contact landlords or property managers



### Make a positive first impression

Be polite, respectful, organized and show gratitude in your communications.

### Express interest

Let them know you are interested and ask for additional information such as whether utilities are included, or whether there are already roommates living in the rental.

### Avoid providing too much personal information

Do not give your passport, banking, or Social Insurance (SIN) information to a potential landlord. This information is not required.

### Request an appointment to view the rental

### Present yourself as the ideal tenant

Make sure to respond to the landlord right away when they contact you. Being responsive will help build trust.

Do not email the landlord multiple times if they have not responded to an email. Being persistent will not be well received by Canadian landlords or property managers.

## Sample script for contacting a landlord

Consider using the following sample script for your first contact with potential landlords. Fill in the personalized details where indicated in purple:

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am interested in your (apartment/room for rent) that I found advertised on (name of rental search website). I am a responsible student and will be studying at Conestoga College this (fall/winter/spring). Is the rental still available? If so, could you please provide more information about the unit and when we can arrange to meet for a viewing?

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you soon!

Your name

Your Conestoga College email address

Your mobile number

## Step 4: View the rental

There are three options for viewing potential rentals:

- 1. In person:** If you are in Canada, we strongly recommend viewing the rental in person.
- 2. Virtually:** If you are not in Canada, the second-best option would be to request a virtual viewing via FaceTime or WhatsApp (ask your landlord what they would prefer to use).
- 3. Ask a friend or family member to view the rental on your behalf:** If you know someone locally, ask them to view the rental for you and to show you on a video call. Let them know any questions or concerns you may have in advance, so they can clarify with the landlord during the viewing.

### Tips for viewing a potential rental:

- Use polite language and dress to make a good impression.
- Ask all the relevant questions and confirm details from the listing such as whether utilities are included, where laundry is located, etc.
- Be prepared to answer questions that the landlord may have for you. For example, questions about your income and employment, credit check information, who will be living in the rental, if you have any references or can provide the contact information for previous landlords.
- Be aware that under Ontario law, as stated in the Ontario Human Rights Code, landlords cannot legally ask a tenant about their ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, or any other questions that infringe on their human rights.
- Consider safety when viewing the rental. Check that smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are present and work and that the windows and doors are accessible and have functioning locks.



## Step 5: Complete the rental application

If you decide the rental is suitable to your needs and budget, ask the landlord for a rental application form.

It is common to be asked to provide references, as well as your rental and work history on rental application forms.

If you are a newcomer to Canada, you will not be able to provide Canadian rental references. However, it may be helpful if you can provide other references, including professional references that speak positively to your character and reliability. If you have a professional background, or are planning to stay in Canada long-term, emphasize these facts when communicating with the landlord.

### Tips for filling out the rental application

1. Write clearly. If certain sections of the application do not apply to your situation, write N/A in the answer space so the landlord knows you have read everything carefully.
2. If you are still in your home country, write your home address in the current address section and indicate that you are “Moving to Canada on **(date of arrival)** to attend Conestoga College.”
3. If you are already in Canada and currently staying with family or friends while you search for housing, you can use their address in the current address section.
4. Landlords need proof that you can pay the rent in full and on time each month. Share with them that, as part of the requirement for entry into Canada, you had to prove that you could support yourself financially while studying. You can provide the landlord with the [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada \(IRCC\) website](#) for further reference. If you plan to work in Canada, you can also share this information with the landlord.
5. Be sure to use the same signature as the signature on your proof of ID (i.e., passport) to sign the application.
6. When you submit the application, you can ask the landlord when they plan to make their decision and if you can follow up at that time.



Some landlords may be confused about why they are being contacted by a potential renter who is currently not in Canada. Even if they do not ask directly, it can be helpful to provide them with a rental application package.

### **Suggested documents to include in your rental application package:**

- Rental application form
- Proof of your student status and intent to come to Canada
- Proof of financial security
- Character references
- Guarantor or co-signer information\*
- Evidence of financial security
- Evidence of intent to stay in Canada long-term (proof of length of your program at Conestoga)
- Evidence of reliability in other situations (employment, school, past rental history, etc.)

\*A 'guarantor' is someone who signs a contract taking responsibility for payments if you cause damage, break your lease, or do not pay rent. In Canada, a family member or family friend can function as a guarantor.

If you do not have someone in Canada that can function as your guarantor, briefly explain that you are an international student and ask if you can provide any of the following information for consideration instead:

- Evidence of financial security
- Evidence of intent to stay in Canada long-term (proof of length of your program at Conestoga)
- Evidence of reliability in other situations (employment, school, past rental history, etc.)

## Step 6: Get approved, sign the lease agreement, and provide initial rent payments to the landlord

Once your application has been approved, the next step is to sign the lease agreement (sometimes referred to as the rental agreement or residential tenancy agreement) and provide your initial payments.

### What is a lease or rental agreement?

A lease is a legally binding document between a landlord and a tenant that gives a tenant the right to live in a rental unit for a fixed period at a fixed rate of payment.

Leases in Canada are typically for one year. However, 4-month and 8-month leases can be negotiated with some landlords who focus on student rentals.

It is important to read the lease carefully, ask questions, and make sure all information is correct before you sign.

After you have reviewed and agreed to the terms of the lease, you and the landlord will both sign the document. Be sure the landlord provides you with a copy of the lease immediately after it has been signed by both parties. Keep your copy of the signed lease in a safe place for future reference.

Ontario landlords of most private rentals must use a standard lease form (residential tenancy agreement). You can find an example of the [Residential Tenancy Agreement \(Standard Form of Lease\)](#) on the Ontario Government website.





## Rent payment

After signing the lease, you will be expected to provide two payments:

1. Last (or final) month's rent: This is payment for the very last month that you will live in the unit. For example, if you sign a one-year lease and you begin renting the unit in January 2025, this payment will be for the final month of rent in January 2026. You will pay last month's rent after the lease is signed.
2. First month's rent: This is payment for the first month you will live in the rental unit.

Rent should be paid using cheque or e-transfer (electronic funds transfer) so that you have proof of payment. Avoid paying rent in cash. If you must pay in cash, be sure to get a receipt of payment from you landlord at the time you provide them with the money so there is a record of the transaction.

Rent is not negotiable. You must pay on time each month according to the terms of the lease agreement.

## Rental rights and responsibilities

As a tenant in Ontario, you have legal rights that are explained in the [Human Rights Code](#) and the [Residential Tenancies Act](#). The Human Rights Code applies to every person in Ontario. The Residential Tenancies Act applies to most people who rent housing in Ontario.

This [online tool](#) from Community Legal Education Ontario helps renters determine if they are covered under the Residential Tenancies Act.

### What is the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA)?

The Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) is a law that details the rights and responsibilities of both landlords and tenants. For example, it provides rules for rental rate increases and tenant eviction. The policies in the RTA are enforced by the [Landlord and Tenant Board \(LTB\)](#).



# Legal resources

## CSI Legal Protection Program

CSI Legal Protection coverage is included in tuition fees for full-time students. The program provides access to a toll-free legal helpline for advice on any area of law including counsel on housing and employment disputes.

Visit the [CSI Legal Care](#) section of the CSI website for further information.

## Legal Aid Ontario

Legal Aid Ontario provides free and confidential legal consultation, including Ontario housing law.

Call 1-800-668-8258 or visit [Legal Aid Ontario website](#) for further information.

## Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO)

CLEO is a free [online resource](#) that provides practical information about [Ontario housing law](#).

## Steps to Justice

Steps to Justice is a free, online resource that provides [guidance on Ontario housing law](#).

## Have questions?

### Connect with us!

**International Transition Coordinators (ITCs)** provide specialized support to international students for a smooth transition to Canada and Conestoga College, including help with early college onboarding, travel to Canada, housing and settlement, acculturation, and guidance on accessing college and community resources.

Students can reach us via [email](#) or [book an appointment](#) on the [Student Success Portal](#).

To access the Student Success Portal (SSP), you will need to use your [Conestoga ID and Password](#).

