Living With a Roommate
Feeling a bit uneasy?

Are you thinking, “what about my roommate”? “Will we get along?” “What will it be like to live with someone else?” “But of course we’ll get along; I’m an easy person to get along with, and besides, my roommate is a college student just like me.”

True enough, but if only it were that easy! For most college students, sharing a living space in one room is a new experience. In some cases, a roommate may be an old high school friend; but in most cases, a roommate is someone you don’t know. Your roommate could be from the same geographical area as you or from another country. In either case, living with a roommate can be an enriching experience that opens up new opportunities for friendship and understanding.
There are specific things you can discuss with your roommate from the beginning that will start both of you on your way to a successful and enjoyable year. These strategies will help prevent misunderstandings and help you adjust to living with someone new.

The tips presented in this brochure serve as a starting point in:

• Getting to Know Your Roommate
• Communicating Effectively
• Clarifying Expectations and Needs

After settling in, but preferably within the first few days, take some time with your new roommate to go over the questions and suggestions that follow. This booklet is designed to be a working document to help you get to know your roommate. Use it and you’ll be on your way to a great year.

Getting to Know Your Roommate

Asking Questions...

Take time to learn about each other. When you notice some differences, begin to consider adjustments needed or compromises that might need to be reached.

• Where are you from?
• Do you know what you would like to major in?
• Why did you choose UM? Have you liked things so far?
• Do you have any brother or sisters? What is your family like?
• What was your high school like? Did you enjoy it?
• Are you a morning or a night person?
• What time do you usually get up?
• What time do you usually go to sleep?
• Are you a light or heavy sleeper?
• How much noise/light do you prefer while sleeping?
• What kind of music do you like?
• How neat and clean are you used to keeping your room?
• Have you ever shared a room/bedroom before?
• What is your favorite thing to do?

Academic Goals/Study Time

• How important are your grades to you?
• How much time do you expect to spend studying?
• Where do you like to study? In the room? Study lounge? Library?
• When do you usually study? Daytime? Late at night?

Suggestion: Get to know your resident assistant. Each RA has been extensively trained to help you become accustomed to college life. Each residential college and the apartment area also have a residence coordinator who is professionally trained and available to help students.
Communicating Effectively
Understanding Your Roommate

Realize that your mood often affects the mood of your roommate. Unless told otherwise, your roommate may think he or she upset you. If you’ve had a bad day, let your roommate know the reason. In many cases, misperceptions arise from a lack of communication and/or misread non-verbals.

Throughout the coming year the success of the relationship with your roommate will depend a great deal on your ability to discuss and resolve concerns with your roommate. Keeping in mind the following points will help you throughout the year as well as in the initial process of establishing expectations and limitations on more sensitive issues.

Once you begin sharing stories, needs, and hopes, mutual respect and trust between roommates can easily follow. Understanding his or her emotional style can help you “read” each other’s feelings accurately and facilitate effective communication when resolving differences.

Discuss the Following Questions:

- What are you like when you are under stress/pressure?
- How do you act when you are down or upset about something?
- When you are depressed, what helps lift your spirits?
- Are there times when you’d like to be left alone? How would I know?
- How do you act when you are annoyed or angry?
- Do you have “pet peeves”? What are they?

The Do’s

- Be genuine and say what is going well and what is going wrong.
- Be flexible. Make every situation a win/win. Compromise is a key ingredient to a successful roommate relationship.
- Listen carefully. Remember, there is a distinct difference between simply hearing what someone is saying and actively listening.
- Be sensitive to each other’s moods. Everyone has bad days, so try to understand when your roommate has one too.
- Share belongings you feel comfortable sharing and clearly state what you do not want to share.
- Ask your RA for advice when it is difficult to work things out. No one is expected to be an expert at living with someone new. Your RA has been trained to help you make the adjustment.

The Do Not’s

- Do not be antagonistic, arbitrary, or patronizing.
- Avoid using inhibiting remarks like “Why don’t you listen to reason?” or “We’ve already tried that.”
- Do not interrupt. Listen carefully to other people and do not jump to conclusions.
- Avoid discussing your roommate problems or conflicts with your friends and neighbors. Discuss the situation with your roommate.

Clarifying Expectations and Needs

Now that you have been given a basis for understanding and working through differences, it is time to discuss more sensitive issues that may require some creative solutions and a little flexibility. Clarify or respect what your roommate says in order to make sure you are getting messages clearly. As the questions become more challenging, slow down and take your time.
Discussion Questions

Personal Property
- What are you comfortable sharing, and what cannot be borrowed or used?
- Do you mind if friends or visitors use appliances such as the microwave, television, computer, stereo, etc?
- Do you want me to ask before borrowing?
- Would you like to share food in the room if we decide food will be allowed?

Friends and Guests
- Are there times when you would prefer friends of either sex not be in the room? Are there specific times you are uncomfortable with friends of the opposite sex visiting?
- If people are visiting when you need privacy or quiet time, how would you like me to let you know?

“Room Keeping”
- How neat and clean do you like things to be?
- How do you feel about eating food in the room?
- Who will take out the trash, clean the bathroom, dust, and vacuum? How often does this need to be done? (Be sure to discuss bathroom cleaning with your suitmates/apartmentmates, and be very clear on establishing a schedule and sticking to it. This is a common source of conflict.)
- If problems arise over cleanliness, how would you like to be confronted?
- Would you (if 21 or older) prefer alcoholic beverages not be kept or used in the room?
- Do you like the room arrangement? What would you prefer to change? Would you like to be asked before any changes are made in the arrangement?

Personal Preferences
- When you do something that I do not like, how would you like to be confronted?
- Do you want to be included in each other’s social activities?
- How much noise is too much noise?
- If one of us decides we would like to change rooms for whatever reason, how would you like to be approached? Would you like the RA to help us come to an understanding so that any possible resentment can be avoided?

And Finally...

Roommates need not be the best of friends. It is not necessary to share every aspect of college life together. In fact, learning to accept each other’s differences—without infringing on one another’s rights—will be a valuable part of your education. Remember, developing a good relationship is a process—it does not take place overnight. It takes time and effort. The key to every relationship, including the one with your roommate, is communication. You need to be open.