Sharing Spaces
In the Residence Halls

A quick and easy guide to starting the year off on the right foot. Get to know your roommate today; avoid conflict tomorrow.

HOUSING & RESIDENCE LIFE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH
A valuable and memorable experience of college life is living with a roommate(s). Whether he, she, or they are from across the state or across the world, each person is unique in their background, personality and habits.

Knowing your roommate(s) and building a relationship are not easy tasks. Getting along with your roommate(s) and preventing unnecessary conflict requires:

- open lines of **COMMUNICATION**
- mutual **UNDERSTANDING**
- mutual **AGREEMENT**

In this brochure, a five step process will help you begin to discuss roommate issues that, if not addressed, might lead to conflict.

If you and your roommate(s) already know each other, it is still important to complete this roommate guide. Friends might discuss important topics less often than those who have just met, which could lead to misunderstanding and conflict. Being friends with people is different than living with them.
Take turns responding to each item before going on to the next one. If you are not exactly sure what your roommate is saying, ask for clarification, or try to state your perception of what is said in order to check for understanding.

As you go through the questions, be honest and open-minded. If you don’t understand some of the answers your roommate(s) gives, ask questions! Dialog is more productive than assumption.

If you find you are skipping questions or responding in only a joking manner, think about why you are reacting that way, talk about it, and then try to get back to the question. If some item truly stumps you, or you feel reluctant to discuss the issue, take a rain check and try to go back to it sometime later.

At your first floor meeting, your Resident Advisor will ask you and your roommate(s) to complete a “Roommate Contract”. Following the five step process outlined in this brochure will help you and your roommate(s) come to an agreement on how to live with one another.

People don't need much in common to get along with each other! All they need is respect and communication.
Getting along with your roommate(s) requires that you understand him/her and understanding requires a sense of where your roommate(s) is coming from. Spend some time getting to know each other with the following questions.

If you and your roommate(s) already know each other, spend less time breaking the ice and move on to part two.

- Where are you from? What is it like?
- Where did you go to school?
- Who are the members of your family? What are they like?
- Who are your friends? How did you meet?
- Do you have any pets?
- What are some of your hobbies and interests?
- What did you do this summer?
- Did you have a job the last few months?
- What is your major? What classes are you taking?
- What co-curricular activities are you involved in?
- Do you have a job?
- What kind of music do you listen to?
- What TV shows do you watch?
It helps to understand one another’s habits, personal traits, and emotional style. By discussing characteristics, you will gain a better idea of the things you have in common with your roommate(s). You will also notice differences which may require adjustments, accommodations or compromises. Take time to discuss and give your reactions to each question below.

- How would you describe your **personality, mood** and **sense of humor**?
- Do you ever need time **alone**? If so, how and when?
- How do you let people know if you are **angry**? **Happy**? **Upset**? **Excited**? **Frustrated**?
- How do you usually deal with **stress**?
- Do you **exercise** or **workout**?
- How much **sleep** do you need and when do you sleep?
- Describe your **study** habits. When and where do you study?
- What type of **environment** do you need to study well?
- Do music, computer, telephone, conversations, and/or **TV** affect your ability to study?
Now that you have a better sense of your roommate(s), spend time identifying individual needs and preferences. The questions below will help get you started. If something important to you is not on this list, bring it up to your roommate(s). It is essential that roommates take part in creating an environment that supports individual freedom and mutual consideration.

- What time do you usually **wake up**?
- What time do you usually go to **bed**?
- What does “**clean**” mean to you?
- How clean would you like our **room**? Do you tend to be tidy, messy, or in between?
- What personal belongings are you willing to **share**? (e.g., computer, clothing, videogames, microwave, DVDs, etc.)
- When should we **lock** the door (e.g., at night, when we’re down the hall, if we step out for just a second)?
- At what room **temperature** are you comfortable?
Part Three (cont’d): Living Area

- Do some odors bother you? (food, garbage, personal hygiene)

- How will we share refrigerator space?

- How will we take messages? (e.g. friends stopping by, family phone calls, voice mail)

- How can we help keep our floor’s common areas safe and clean? (bathroom, hallways)

- How can we contribute to making our floor/area a better place to live?
Part Four: Guests

Depending on the time of day, guests can be a friendly addition to the room or an unwelcome nuisance. While you certainly may invite friends into your living area, socializing too much or at inappropriate times can have an adverse effect on your roommate(s). Discuss the following questions to prevent visitor conflict.

- At what times is it ok to have guests over?
- How many guests is too many?
- Does the gender of the guest make a difference?
- Can friends be over while you’re studying?
- Is it ok for my friends to be in the room while I am away?
- What are your feelings about having a guest(s) stay overnight?*
- If overnight guests are ok, how far in advance would you like to know?
- If you are gone, may my guest use your bed?

* See UMD Housing & Residence Life Guidebook at www.d.umn.edu/housing/guidebook for official overnight policy.
**Part Five: Getting Personal**

- How comfortable are you when making new **friends** and interacting with people you don’t know?

- What are your **pet peeves**?
  - What makes you tense or uptight?

- What are your **goals** for this year?
  - For five years?
  - What do you want out of life?

- What **beliefs** and **values** are important to you?

- The University prohibits alcohol and drugs on campus. How do you feel about **alcohol** and **drug** use in the room?

- In an emergency, time and information are critical. Do you have any **allergies** or **medical conditions** I (we) should be aware of?

- If things aren’t working out with us, what do we **expect** of each other?
Few people enjoy conflict and confrontation. Whether you and your roommate(s) are best friends or new acquaintances, personal conflicts might arise at some point. While conflict was once viewed negatively, it is now seen as a natural and neutral part of life. In fact, conflict can be an extremely positive tool if managed correctly.

**What Triggers Conflict?**
Conflict is the result of real or perceived differences concerning *personally important* topics. Possible sources of conflict include *decisions, behavior, values, goals, interests,* and *trust.* With such a broad list of contributing factors, it is important to realize that conflict can happen at anytime, sometimes without warning.

You and your roommate(s) are diverse with unique backgrounds, habits, and lifestyles. When individual needs differ, it is important to keep the following things in mind:

- Conflict is an inevitable process to be *managed,* not *avoided* or *escalated.*
- In order to manage conflict, differences must be addressed.
- Conflict builds relationships as personally important topics and feelings are brought to attention.

A key to maintaining healthy roommate relations is to reduce potential conflict by discussing issues ahead of time.
Managing Conflict

If you decide to manage conflict, you'll be taking an important first step. Avoiding conflict satisfies no one's concerns, while escalating the problem makes matters worse for everyone involved. Here are the four ways people manage conflict; some are more productive than others.

**Accommodation:** I satisfy your concerns at my expense.

**Competition:** I satisfy my concerns at your expense.

**Compromise:** I give-up some concerns and you give-up some as well.

**Collaboration:** We come up with solutions to satisfy all concerns.

While accommodating and competing may be tempting short term solutions, they often result in resentment and conflict escalation. With compromise and collaboration, a meaningful and lasting resolution can develop.

**Steps to Confront Conflict**

You've decided to manage the conflict. Stay calm, and follow these steps as a guide to get you through it.

**GET TOGETHER:** Get everyone involved in the conflict together in a neutral meeting place.

**DEFINE THE PROBLEM:** Acknowledge that a problem exists and define the source together.

**CLARIFY:** Ask questions and ensure everyone is on the same page.

**DISCUSS/LISTEN:** Have each person present his/her side of the story. Listen attentively.

**LIST SOLUTIONS:** Brainstorm a list of possible solutions using compromise, collaboration, or both.

**CHOOSE SOLUTIONS:** Decide on a solution together.

**MONITOR AND MAINTAIN:** Monitor progress toward the solution and talk regularly about whether or not it's working.
Additional Tips for Success

- Verbalize and demonstrate your desire to solve the conflict. Show that you care.

- Don’t blame or attack each other. Depersonalize the situation as much as possible by focusing on the issue at hand, not personalities and personal characteristics.

- Use neutral language and avoid “accusing pronouns” (discussing “the problem” instead of discussing “your” mistakes).

- Listen actively to each other, no matter how hard it may be.

- Focus on the future (not the past) and solve the problem.

- If you’re angry, arrange a time when you are more likely to be civil.

- Be open to your roommate’s criticism and only present constructive criticism to him, her, or them.

- In conflicts that cannot be resolved through compromise or collaboration, it may be necessary for each roommate to reassess their desires versus their needs. Sometimes desires must be given up in lieu of needs.

- Keep in mind the positive traits your roommate(s) possess. Remember all that’s gone well!

Respect your roommate(s) for who they are!
In a roommate conflict, residents may think their RA can find an easy solution to their problem. The reality is that roommate conflicts are complicated situations and resolutions sometimes do not come easily. The RA must remain neutral in these situations. Your RA is there to help mediate the conflict. The responsibility of a successful conflict resolution rests on you and your roommate.

Here is what your RA will do when you come to them for help:
1. Listen to your concerns
2. Provide resources to help you address roommate issues
3. If necessary, serve as a mediator between you and your roommate
4. Review the roommate contract with you and your roommate
5. Remain unbiased during the course of mediation
6. Address policy issues as necessary

Here is what your RA cannot do:
1. Take sides
2. Choose which person will move
3. Solve the problem for you
Some things to think about before you go to your RA for help

Emotions can run high in conflict situations. Solutions take time and usually occur with the residents making difficult choices and sacrifices. Below are some questions to consider:

Have I spoken with my roommate about the issues that bother me?

Have I been reasonable and fair in my response to my roommate conflict?

Have I kept my RA in the loop about my roommate conflict?

What will happen when I tell my RA about my roommate conflict? Will my RA want to meet with me and my roommate together and go over the roommate contract?

If my conflict cannot be resolved, who will move out? How long will it take for me or my roommate to change rooms?
**How do I Change Rooms?**

The room change process does not occur over night and is contingent upon availability of space and whether or not you and your roommate have made a reasonable attempt to resolve your conflict.

The first step in the room change process involves meeting with your RA to receive a room change verification form. If your RA is not familiar with your situation you can expect that they will want you to fill them in on the details. Once you receive the room change verification form from your RA, here is what needs to happen:

1. Take the room change verification form to 149 Lake Superior Hall (Housing Office). You will either be given a list of rooms with openings or be placed on a waiting list.
2. If Housing is at full occupancy, you will be placed on a waiting list. You can expect this to be the case for most of fall semester.
3. If you are given a list of openings, it is your responsibility to meet potential roommates.
4. Once you have selected a room to move into, you must return to the Housing Office (149 LSH) to complete paperwork and receive final approval before you can move. Final approval is contingent upon a “check out” inventory of your current room with your RA.
5. Contact your new roommate and schedule a mutually convenient time to move.

**UMD Housing will not choose an assignment for you.**

The decision is yours and yours alone.
The Year Ahead

Sharing Spaces might be the first dialog you have on many of these issues, but hopefully it won’t be the last. College changes people; as the habits, likes, dislikes, and values of you and your roommate(s) evolve, make time to talk about the differences.

Over the next few months, conflicts might arise and friendships might be strained. Review your “Roommate Contract”, keep communication open, and continue to discuss and revise it throughout the year.

Roommate Rights

- To sleep without disruption.
- To read and study peacefully in his/her own room.
- To privacy.
- To free access to room.
- To live in a clean and healthful environment.
- To live in a place free from fear, intimidation and harm.
- To respect of self and personal property.

Individual freedom must be balanced with mutual consideration. Remember, along with every right comes the responsibility to ensure your roommate(s) are afforded the same rights.

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