

Trading Spaces: A Packing List of Essential Stuff for Your Dorm Room

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Many families know some of the usual items that a college student should bring, but it's hard to think of everything. Of course, personal items from home will aid in the transition, but you'll need more than photos and a teddy bear to get through the year.

Before you buy or pack anything, be sure to check with your school about what items are and are not allowed. Most schools have to be very careful about health and safety regulations, and rules differ from place to place. One school might not allow microwaves; another might have specific regulations about what size refrigerators are allowed. (See more examples below).

Also, consider talking to a current student about what to pack. They can tell you about the "don't bothers" and "must-haves" for the residences at your new college. They may even know specifics about your building that will be a real help.

And be sure to carefully complete and review your housing contract. By omitting certain information or sending it back incomplete, this could alter your living situation very dramatically. Once you arrive on campus, you could be locked into a living situation you do not care for simply because of a few errors.

In the meantime, here's a list to help you start planning your move. Good luck!

Bed and Bedding

- Sheets. Make sure that you know whether your bed will be regular or extra long. Many college dorms have twin extra-long beds so you will have to buy special sheet sets.
- Comforter and/or quilts, blankets, etc. Consider bringing sturdy, easy-to-wash items.
- Towels: bath, washcloths and hand towels. Consider marking your name on a tag in permanent marker, especially if you have plain white or other "anonymous" towels.
- Alarm clock.
- Extra pillow(s) if you will lounge/study on the bed.

Health and Grooming

- Shower shoes, especially if you will be sharing a shower.
- All necessary toiletries (toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, shampoo and all grooming/cosmetic) items. Since space will be cramped, consider buying smaller sizes, at least at first.
- Shower bucket/basket/caddy to carry items.

- Women who wear makeup might want a portable makeup kit/box, since it may not be feasible to store cosmetics near where the mirror is.
- Bathrobe. Especially important if the shower is down the hall.
- Prescription medicines and copies of the prescriptions.
- First Aid kit, including basic adhesive bandages, disinfectant, aspirin, etc. This will cut down on trips to the health center.

Clothes and Laundry

- Clothes. Your space will be limited, so only bring what you think you will wear. You can always bring more back to school after your first trip home.
- Weather-appropriate outer clothes. You will probably be walking to class; be sure your coat or jacket is right for the climate.
- Sewing kit, including black and white thread, scissors, and needles. If you don't know how to sew on a button, now is the time to learn.
- Laundry basket and/or bag.
- Laundry detergent, dryer sheets, stain remover stick or spray.
- A small coin purse or jar with lid to carry quarters for the machines.
- Iron and small ironing board, or a small steamer.

Decor

- Posters. You will probably also be able to buy some of these on campus.
- Sticky wall mounts and removable adhesive hooks. Most schools do not allow you to put nails in the walls, so you will need other ways to hang your décor.
- Personal pictures, photos, and other favorite items. Avoid heavy frames, since you may not be able to hang them.
- Curtains and spring rod, if you like them and your school allows them. Some people like this touch in their room.
- Rugs or a piece of carpet if you have vinyl floors, which can be cold and uncomfortable. Check to see if the school allows this.

Study Stuff

- A sturdy backpack or book bag for everyday use
- Computer and any necessary supplies/accessories. Some schools also offer great discounts on or provide computers, printers and other needs and even a few places allow their students (and recent graduates) a place to post item for sale on their website. Check before you pack.
- School supplies, including a calendar or planner as well as basic pens, paper, pencils, notebooks.
- Dry-erase board and marker. You'll want this so people can leave you messages.
- A small extra bookshelf, if there is room.

Furnishings

- Storage for under the bed.

- Other storage or organization units. A few stacking plastic crates will come in handy.
- Folding chairs for cheap extra seating. Or consider a bean bag chair or other soft, portable furniture.
- Trashcan and trash bags
- Lamps. Many schools have special fire-safety rules about the size and power of lamps that are allowed, so make sure your lamps are within regulations.
- Cleaning supplies. Find out what areas you will be responsible for cleaning. If you have a private or semi-private bathroom, for example, you may be responsible for cleaning the shower and/or toilet.
- If you have hard floors, bring a broom. If you have carpet, consider bringing a small, light vacuum. Your floor will get pretty disgusting without it!
- Fan (box or floor). Depending on the climate control in the building, you may want this to adjust to your individual needs.

Electronics and Equipment

- Multiple outlet surge protectors and extension cords. Check out school safety regulations about allowed cords.
- Telephone and answering machine. Some schools have voice mail available.
- TV, Stereo, DVD player, VCR, game systems, etc.
- Always check with your new roommate(s) on phones/answering machines, stereos, televisions, VCR/DVD, etc. Although many students like to have their own things, space and electrical outlets might not allow them to bring everything. (Of course, it is always a good idea to talk with your roommate(s) during the summer to help in the transition to college.)

Food and Snacks

- Small refrigerator. During the first week of school, schools may have refrigerators and microwaves to rent or buy.
- Microwave, hot plate, coffeemaker, etc. Check first--many schools have especially strict safety regulations about these items. Also, find out what communal kitchen space may be available.
- A few unbreakable dishes: plastic cups, microwave-safe bowl, and small plastic food storage tubs.
- Sandwich bags, aluminum foil, and/or plastic wrap. You'll want to store that extra piece of pizza in the fridge for tomorrow's breakfast.
- A small bottle of dish soap, scrubber, small dishtowel.
- Snacks: popcorn, chips, sodas, etc. Check about food regulations.

Misc.

- Batteries and flashlight
- A small and inexpensive tool kit.
- A large backpack or shoulder bag for possible weekend trips you might take.

- Calling card, unless you have other long-distance arrangements.
- If your school allows it, consider a plant or an aquarium with fish to liven up your room and give you some company.