

Activity 3: Contacting landlords

Level:

CEFR B2

Time:

60 minutes

Resources:

- ▶ Handouts
- ▶ Dice

Aims:

- ▶ To review key words connected to renting and being a tenant / landlord
- ▶ To provide learners with fluency speaking practice
- ▶ To make learners aware of the roles of a landlord and the rights of tenants
- ▶ To give learners practice in planning and writing a formal email
- ▶ To raise learners' confidence in giving views and opinions; explaining, and giving reasons; expressing feelings, dislikes and hopes; making suggestions and recommendations; making requests and describing places

Exam task focus: Task 3

Procedure

1. Explain that the focus of the lesson is on renting and contacting landlords. Elicit different types of properties people can rent (eg a room in a shared house; a council flat / house; a privately owned flat / house) and briefly ask learners why they think more and more people are renting these days (eg shortage of council properties; unaffordable house prices). Make a note of any useful emerging language.
2. Consider turning Activity 1A into a kinaesthetic activity. Explain that learners are going to be looking at key words connected to renting. Ask them to look at the words first in small groups and discuss which words they are familiar with and what they know about them. Monitor. Allow learners a few minutes to share what they know before giving them the definitions. Ask them to match the definition to the words. Conduct whole class feedback and provide learners with further information as necessary.

Answers:**1.b / 2.h / 3.e / 4.a / 5.c / 6.f / 7.d / 8.g**

Alternatively, if it's not possible to print and cut up the words and phrases, you could dictate the words and ask learners to write the words they know under one column and the words they don't know under another column. They can then compare their lists with a partner and finally check their spelling and match the definitions on the handout.

3. Tell learners they are going to discuss renting. Display Activity 2B to set up the activity. Place learners in small groups and give each group a dice. Tell learners they need to throw the dice and then discuss the question with the same number they have thrown. As learners are discussing the questions, monitor and make a note of interesting comments and / or questions. When conducting whole class feedback, you can focus on what you heard learners discussing and make them aware of some of the sites below depending on their relevance. Encourage learners to share their experiences and offer advice as necessary.
4. Elicit problems tenants can have when they rent and briefly discuss what tenants can do about these problems. Explain that learners are going to read some posts in Activity 2A that different people have posted on a forum about problems they're having. The problems focus on noisy neighbours; inadequate furniture; dirtiness; health and safety (mould, smoke detectors) and gardens. Should these be mentioned in the initial discussion avoid spending too much time discussing these. Ask learners to read the posts and decide who is responsible for dealing with the problems: the tenant (T) or the landlord (L). When they have done this, place learners in small groups and ask them to look at Activity 2B and compare who they think is responsible; what they think should happen and what they would do in these situations. Allow learners sufficient time for this activity and draw their attention to the **glossary**. The words in the **glossary** can then be covered during feedback.

Suggested answers: Maya (L); Vidi (L for fittings that are broken but the curtains are not damaged); Priya (T); Mo (L); Rami (L / T); Theo & Matti (T, usually this will be covered in the tenancy agreement). Conduct whole class feedback and focus on the importance of tenants reading their tenancy agreements very carefully and being aware of their rights.

5. Tell learners they are going to focus on one of the problems mentioned on the forum in Activity 3A: Rami's problem with damp and mould. Explain that he has tried to contact the letting agent and the landlord but has had no luck and has been advised to write an email to the letting agent. Rami has never met his landlord. Explain that they are going to plan an email Rami could write to the agency. Elicit what type of email learners will be writing (formal) and what they already know about writing formal emails. At this stage consider reviewing how a formal email differs from an informal email. Focus on language you feel would benefit the learners.
6. Go through the information in the **Exam hint** box as a class and address any questions learners may have. Place learners in pairs and ask them to start planning the email. Tell them you want them to plan the email as if the Rami's problems were problems they have. In the exam they won't be asked to write an email for someone else. Some learners may need extra support so consider writing the following prompts on the board to help with their planning. Monitor and offer support as necessary.

Dear Sir/ Madam *	or	Dear Mr, Ms**
Paragraph 1 Introduction - why you are writing and who you are		
Paragraph 2 Explain what has happened		
Paragraph 3 Explain why it is a problem		
Paragraph 4 Say what you want the landlord to do		
Yours faithfully*		Yours sincerely **

Ask pairs of learners to share their planning with another pair. Encourage them to ask and answer questions on content, organisation, and language. Conduct whole class feedback and find out how confident learners feel about going to the next stage and writing the email. Encourage learners to explain how they feel and offer advice as necessary.

7. Depending on time, learners could be asked to write the email at home or, if there is time, give the learners the choice to either write the email on their own or to write the email with their partner. Monitor and offer support.
8. **Extension activity.** Collect all the emails and ask learners to produce a checklist that can be used to review each other's emails. Place the emails around the room and ask learners (ideally in pairs) to review one or two emails using their checklists. Explain that they will be giving each other feedback on their emails.

Notes on cultural awareness and appropriacy

A lot of learners are likely to be living in accommodation that they are renting and will probably have problems at some point. It's useful for them to be presented with language to describe the problems they might have so you could extend the lesson by focussing on other problems they may have in their accommodation. It is also useful for them to learn about organisations that can help them find out about renting social housing and what to do and who to contact in case they have difficulties.

You could share these websites with them.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-rent> (clear guidelines on the process of renting)

<https://www.entitledto.co.uk/> (benefit calculator)

<https://homefinderuk.org/> (finding social housing outside the local area)

https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice

Handout activity 1

Activity 1A

Look at the following words connected to renting a property in the UK. Match the words to the definitions.

1. A credit score	a. a document that someone who knows you writes, to describe you and say if you are suitable for something
2. Universal Credit	b. a number given to a person to show how likely they are to pay back money that they borrow to a bank or an organisation
3. A deposit	c. a person who agrees to pay a tenant's rent if they can't pay it
4. A reference	d. a contract between you and the landlord
5. A guarantor	e. the sum of money that a landlord can ask for at the beginning of a tenancy
6. A tenancy	f. the right to live in a room, flat or house in exchange for rent
7. A tenancy agreement	g. an organisation / a person whose job it is to rent property for people
8. A letting agent	h. a payment to help with living costs. It's usually paid each month

Activity 1B

Over 13 million people rent in the UK and the number of people renting is increasing. Talk about what you know about renting. Roll the dice and discuss the questions.

<p>1. What should you think about before renting a place?</p>	<p>Renting</p> 	<p>4. What makes a good landlord?</p>
<p>2. What do you have to do to become a tenant and rent a place?</p>		<p>5. What makes a good tenant?</p>
<p>3. Where can you look for places to rent?</p>		<p>6. What experience do you or your friends have of renting in the UK?</p>

Handout activity 2

Activity 2A

Read the comments different tenants have posted about problems they're having. Decide who is responsible for solving the problems: the tenant (T) or the landlord (L).

Tenants Speak Up				
Home Page	Help & Advice	Our story	Our services	Contact us
Home / Your home blog				
Tell us what the problem is and our panel will get back to you as soon as they can				

Hi guys,

I've just got the keys to my new flat. I was pleased to be moving into a bigger space, but the last tenants have left the flat in a real mess. There's rubbish everywhere and the flat is filthy. It's not been properly cleaned. I'm not sure what to do. We can't move into it in this state! It needs to be professionally cleaned. Am I responsible for clearing this mess up or is my landlord? Be great to hear what you have to say. **Maya**

Hello,

I'd really appreciate your advice. I've been living in my new home for a month now and just can't sleep at night. The bed my landlord provided is broken and the blind is so thin that light from the streetlamps shines right on my face. Can I ask my landlord to change the bed and blind? **Vidi**

Hi there,

Really hope you can help me. I recently signed a 6-month lease on a flat. Living in my flat has been an absolute nightmare. The neighbours above me are up at all hours and don't seem to realise you can't play loud music and throw parties every night of the week. None of us can sleep at night. Can my landlord help us? **Priya**

I hope you can help me. I've only been in my house a few days now and there's only one smoke detector in the house and that keeps beeping. In my old place each room had a smoke detector and there was a carbon monoxide detector in the kitchen. Can I ask my landlord to put smoke detectors in all my rooms or is this something I have to do? Hope you can suggest what to do. I want my home to be safe for my family. **Mo**

We've got problems with damp. We've got a dehumidifier in the bedrooms, but I don't think they do much. The other day I saw mould growing on the walls in our bedroom. I'm really worried about my wife's health. My wife has asthma and eczema and we're worried it will get worse. Can you help me? I'm not sure what to do? **Rami**

We really love where I live. It's a small garden flat. The only problem we have is the garden. It's out of control. It's so overgrown. We know nothing about gardening. Surely, we don't have to do the gardening do we? It's our landlord's flat, not ours! Be good to hear what you think as we can't use the garden at the moment! **Theo & Matti**

Activity 2B

In your groups, compare who you think is responsible.

Discuss what you think should happen and say what you would do in these situations.

Glossary

fixtures and fittings - fixtures are attached to a property eg a boiler or radiators and fittings are not attached eg a bed or curtains

an inventory - a list of everything that is in the property you're renting

The Homes Act 2018 - this is an act that makes the landlord responsible for making sure the places they let are safe, healthy and free from things that could cause tenants serious harm

repairs - work carried out when something is broken, damaged or stops working

maintenance - activities that keep things in good condition by checking and repairing them on a regular basis

repairs and maintenance - landlords are usually responsible for repairing the structure and outside of the home. This includes outside walls; the roof; outside doors and windows

Handout activity 3

Activity 3A

Rami is really worried about the mould growing on the walls in his flat and how it is affecting his wife's health. He's tried calling the letting agent and the landlord but can't get through.

His friend tells him to write an email to the letting agent explaining what has happened and what he would like the landlord and / or agent to do.

Discuss and plan his email with your partner.

Before you start planning, read through the information below:

Exam hint

In Task 3 in the Level 1 Skills for Life Writing exam, you will be asked to either write a formal email or a letter (150 words).

Your work will be assessed on **content, organisation, appropriacy** and **accuracy of language**.

When planning your work think about the following:

Content and organisation

- What the purpose of the email / letter is eg to explain, to request
- What information to include so you achieve the purpose of the email or letter eg how much detail to give and how many words you have to use to write your answer. What does the person receiving the email or letter need to know?
- The number of paragraphs you need and what information to include in each paragraph. Remember you want to make sure the reader (the examiner) can understand and follow what you are writing. You need to organise your writing into logical paragraphs

Language (appropriacy)

In English there are formal phrases you can use when writing formal letters / emails. Make sure you are familiar with some of them.

- How to start your email / letter eg *Dear Sir / Madam or Dear Mr / Ms + surname*
- How to introduce yourself and explain why you are writing eg *I am writing to request / inform / complain about*
- How to close your email eg *I look forward to hearing from you*
- How to sign off eg *Yours faithfully (use this when you don't know the name of the person you are writing to; Yours sincerely (use this when you know the name of the person you are writing to)*

When you finish writing your email / letter check to see that you have **not** used contractions eg 'I am aware there are some problems' not 'I'm aware there are some problems.' Also look at your choice of vocabulary to make sure you have not used informal vocabulary eg, 'Thank you very much' not 'thanks'. You should also avoid phrasal verbs eg 'We can no longer tolerate these problems' not 'We can no longer put up with these problems.'

Language (accuracy)

Proofread your work carefully. Check your grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Be aware of common mistakes you make when you write and check your work for these.

Now plan your email.

Planning

Activity 3B

Write the email to the letting agent explaining what has happened and what the agent / landlord needs to do. Write about 150 words.

