

Language for ...

renting a house or a flat

Age: Adult / Young adult 

Level: Upper-intermediate-Advanced

Length: 90 minutes

Language Focus: key vocabulary and expressions associated with renting a flat or a house

Skills: Listening, speaking

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student

Aims: to allow students to effectively understand and use common language for renting a property

What are red words?

Ninety per cent of the time, speakers of English use just 7,500 words in speech and writing. These words appear in the Macmillan Dictionary in red and are graded with stars. One-star words are frequent, two-star words are more frequent and three-star words are the most frequent. 'Language for' lessons are based on red words and encourage students to improve their English through communicative tasks using collocation and commonly used phrases.

- 1 Start the lesson by writing the question *Who lives closest to the school?* on the board. Tell students to talk in groups, discussing where they live and who in their group has the shortest journey to English class. After a minute or so, decide as a class which student lives closest to the school. Now tell students that in today's class you are going to talk about factors to consider when renting a flat/house, as well as useful related language.
- 2 Hand out the worksheets. Ask students to work in pairs to discuss the questions in Exercise 1. Allow them a few minutes to do this. Monitor students as they speak. For the second question, you may wish to point out that renting is increasingly common for people in cities such as London, due to the high cost of houses. For the third question, some students may answer that they have never lived in a rented flat or house. For these students, ask them to talk about any experience they have of simply staying in paid accommodation (e.g. a tourist flat, boarding school, a hotel, etc). Finally, provide feedback, focusing on good language which they have used related to renting, flat-hunting and parts of a flat/house.
- 3 Refer students to Exercise 2. Read aloud the instructions above the ad and then allow them a moment to read the ad. Ask the class if the ad has any new vocabulary for them and, if so, write this on the board and elicit the meaning (e.g. *refurbished, open-plan, suburban, lively*).
- 4 Tell students that you are going to play the audio of Bhavna phoning the estate agent. Allow students a moment to read through Exercise 2a and then play the audio. After the first listen, ask students to compare their responses in pairs and then elicit the correct answers. Then repeat the above for Exercise 2b. At the end of the both listening tasks, you may wish to focus on some useful terms which have been used in the audio. Some suggested terms to elicit/explain: *furnished* (= has furniture), *costs* (could include agency fee, reference fee, deposit), *bright* (= benefits from natural light).
- 5 Read aloud the instructions for Exercise 3a. Allow students a moment to read the short email, telling them not to worry too much at this stage about vocabulary that they might not understand. Elicit the correct answer to the question under the box. Even though it is mentioned again in the next task, this could be a good moment to elicit a definition for the verb 'sublet'. Point out that the verb 'to let' can be used to mean 'to rent' a property. In the UK and other countries, it is common to see a sign with the words 'To Let' in front of properties which are up for rent.

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- 6 Ask students to complete Exercise 3b individually, then to compare their responses in pairs. Finally, elicit the correct answers from the class.
- 7 Refer students to Exercise 3c. Each of the six sentences has one word in *italic* text, which students should use as a clue (in each case, this word forms a common collocation with the incomplete word). Ask students to complete the task individually, then to compare their responses in pairs. Finally, elicit the correct answers.
- 8 Read aloud the instructions for Exercise 3d. Also refer them to the information at the end of the task, suggesting they refer to a dictionary or a property website. Ask students to work in pairs to complete the task. This is the most challenging task of the lesson, so monitor students as they work. Help weaker pairs by suggesting that they complete the table by elimination. Finally, elicit the correct answers.
- 9 Read aloud the instructions for Exercise 4. Allow students a few moments to read the ads. Then look at the questions underneath. To get the conversation going, ask for a volunteer to answer the first question, who will identify their favourite of the three flats and explain why. Then ask students to discuss these questions in pairs, reminding them to speak as much as possible and to try to use new language from this lesson. Note that some students may not know how to answer the question about prices and conditions in their own country. In this case, students could look up www.expatistan.com/cost-of-living/index to get a quick idea of the rental costs in their area. Monitor students as they speak, and finally provide feedback.
- 10 Put students in A/B pairs (ideally with different partners from in the previous task). Refer them to Exercise 5 and allow them a moment to read the instructions and glance through their table, which they will need to complete with brief information from their partner. To ensure balance, you could set a time limit for each interview (e.g. Student A has four minutes to interview Student B, then vice versa). Highlight that the main focus of this task is to speak: when students answer questions, they should elaborate their ideas to explain why certain items are essential for them and other items are not. Monitor the pairs as they complete the task. Finally, provide feedback.
- 11 If appropriate, refer students to Exercise 6, the extension activity, and read the instructions aloud. Ask a volunteer student to briefly describe their flat, and use this information to begin writing an ad for the flat on the board. From the other students, elicit the best language to use for the ad on the board, making sure that it sounds professional and gives a positive image of the flat. Tell students that they now need to write an ad for their own flats. They could do this in class, or the activity could be set for homework. Once they have written the ads, ask them to read each other's ads as a mingle activity. As per the worksheet, they should select the most attractive ad in the class. At the end of the lesson, you may wish to collect the ads for correction.
- 12 If there is more time, perhaps elicit other common 'renting' vocabulary from the class and write it on the board. You could also write some other common terms from property ads on the board and ask students to discuss the meaning.

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Some suggestions:

- *exposed brickwork* (a wall where it is possible to see the original bricks)
- *Juliette balcony* (a railing next to a door or a large window, like a balcony which it is not possible to stand on)
- *bay* (an area of a room that sticks out from the main walls of a house and usually contains a window)
- *mezzanine* (an area between two levels of a building)

3c.

1. heating
2. conditioning
3. double
4. squared
5. kitchen
6. wooden

3d.

Concept/Item	Vocabulary pairs
Type of building	converted & purpose-built
Size of property or rooms	spacious & compact
Length of lease	short-term & long-term
Age of property	period & modern
Kitchen/Dining area	open-plan & separate
Bedrooms	master & guest
Area the property is in	ever-popular & quiet
Garden, driveway, or entrance	communal & private
Wardrobes	fitted (also referred to as 'built-in') & stand-alone

KEY:

1. students' own answers

2a. Items mentioned:

The size of a bedroom.

How bright the flat is.

The distance from the flat to public transport.

The total costs to begin renting the flat.

Monthly expenses, apart from the rent

2b.

1. market
2. room/space
3. fairly big/south-facing
4. get
5. fee
6. utility
7. viewing
8. proof

3a. No, Bhavna can't have flatmates.
(She is not allowed to *sublet*.)

- 3b. 1. landlady*
2. lease
3. tenant
4. up-front
5. subletting
6. unfurnished

(* The male version of *landlady* is *landlord*)

4-6 students' own answers

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- Estate agent:** Hello, London West Estate Agency. Matt speaking. How can I help you?
- Bhavna:** Hi. Yeah, I'm calling about a flat I've just seen on flathousehome.com.
- Estate agent:** OK, can you just provide me with the reference number on the ad, please?
- Bhavna:** Yeah, it's CR237. It's a two-bed in northwest London. Near Wembley?
- Estate agent:** Ah, yeah. That flat actually came on the market yesterday. We've had quite a bit of interest in it already.
- Bhavna:** Right. Could I ask a few questions about it?
- Estate agent:** Sure. Go ahead.
- Bhavna:** Well, the ad says that the flat's got one **double** and one **single** room. Is the **single** room very small?
- Estate agent:** I'd say it's pretty large for a **single**. It'd be really ideal for a child or even just to use it as a guest room. There's room for a **single** bed, maybe a wardrobe and a small desk. Of course, the flat's unfurnished so those items would have to be provided by you though.
- Bhavna:** OK, that's fine. Does the flat get much natural light?
- Estate agent:** Well, it's a second-floor property so you do get quite a bit of light for most of the day. The living room has fairly big windows and they're south-facing so it's quite a sunny space, really.
- Bhavna:** Great. And do you know how far a walk it would be for public transport?
- Estate agent:** Probably just over a ten-minute walk from the nearest tube station. But you've also got the number 155 bus route that passes right in front of the flat. The area is quite easy to get to, generally.
- Bhavna:** Super, sounds great. And can I ask about the overall amount to secure the contract?
- Estate agent:** Right, so that flat is at fifteen hundred a month for rent. The **deposit** is set at two-month's rent and then there's also an agency **fee** of another month and a half on top of that.
- Bhavna:** And does the rent include any bills?
- Estate agent:** No, I'm afraid that rent is exclusive. You'll have to cover your own water and electricity. Oh, and the central heating runs on gas so there's that too.
- Bhavna:** Right. And do you know the rate for council tax?
- Estate agent:** Let me just have a look for you now. [*Sound of typing.*] Council tax for that particular property is at 170 a month, so that'll be on top of your utility bills.
- Bhavna:** OK, and just finally, can I ask if there's any parking available for the flat?
- Estate agent:** The flat itself doesn't have any allocated parking space but there is on-street parking for residents so you'd just need to apply on the council website for your permit.
- Bhavna:** That's fine, no problem. OK then, would I be able to go and see the flat at some point?
- Estate agent:** Course. I'll be holding viewings this Saturday all morning. Would you be able to get there for ... about 11a.m.?
- Bhavna:** This Saturday at 11? Sure!
- Estate agent:** Great. And in case you're interested when you see it, can I just ask that you bring along your documentation? So that's ID, bank details, work contract and **proof** of income. Does that sound OK?
- Bhavna:** Absolutely. Great. See you on Saturday, then.

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1 Warmer



Discuss:

- Do you like the house/flat where you live? Explain.
- In the UK, the most common ways of living are buying a property, renting a property, or sharing a flat/house. What are the most common ways in your country? Why?
- Have you ever lived in a rented flat/house? If so, talk about your experience.
- In your country, is it common to use an estate agent* to rent a property?

(*An **estate agent** is a professional who helps people to buy, sell, or rent a property. They usually work for a company called an **estate agency**. In American English, this person is usually called a **real estate agent** or a **realtor**.)

2 Listening

Look at the ad below from a property website. Bhavna is interested in the flat and decides to phone the estate agent.

Flat for rent in northwest London

flathousehome.com



Monthly rent: £1,500



Bedroom(s): 2

Recently refurbished flat in **modern** property. Open-plan kitchen/living area, 1 **double** bedroom, 1 **single** bedroom, bathroom. Suburban London (Zone 4), near the Wembley neighbourhood. Approximately 30 minutes by train to central London, lively neighbourhood with shops and green areas.

(Reference code: CR237)

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a. Listen for the first time. Tick (✓) the items which Bhavna asks questions about.

- | | |
|--|---|
| Whether the flat has furniture. <input type="checkbox"/> | The size of a bedroom. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The distance from the flat to public transport. <input type="checkbox"/> | How bright the flat is. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The total costs to begin renting the flat. <input type="checkbox"/> | What documents she needs to provide. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How much the deposit is. <input type="checkbox"/> | Monthly expenses, apart from the rent. <input type="checkbox"/> |

b. Listen for the second time. Write a word to complete each gap.

- The agent says that the flat has been on the _____ for just one day.
- The **single** room is quite big, so there is _____ for a bed, a wardrobe and perhaps a desk.
- The living room has a lot of natural light because its windows are _____.
- The neighbourhood is fairly easy to _____ to, with various public transport options for residents.
- If Bhavna wants the flat, she will need to pay the initial rent, a **deposit** and an agency _____.
- Apart from the monthly rent, Bhavna will need to pay council tax* and _____ bills.
- On Saturday morning, the agent can meet Bhavna for a _____ of the flat.
- The agent tells Bhavna that she will need to provide _____ of her earnings.

(***council tax** is a local tax that all UK households pay to cover local services such as rubbish collection, police, fire services, libraries, leisure and recreational services, etc.)

3 Language in use

Bhavna went to see the flat in Wembley and really liked it. A few days later, she received the email below from the estate agent.

a. Read the email and then answer the question below it.

x

Hi Bhavna,

I've spoken to the **landlady** and I'm pleased to say that she has accepted you as the new **tenant** for the flat. She's keen to meet you as soon as possible to sign the **lease**. If it's OK by you, she would like you to pay next month's rent up-front. She's asked me to remind you that she has a very strict policy against subletting, so the flat is for your use only. As you know, the flat is unfurnished, but she has offered to leave you the fridge and the large bookshelf if you need them.

Does that sound OK?

All the best,
Matt
(London West Estate Agency)

Is Bhavna allowed to share the flat with flatmates?

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b. Look again at the email and find a word or expression for each of the definitions below.

1. A _____ is a woman who owns a property that people can rent.*
2. A _____ is a legal contract in which you agree to pay to use somebody else's property.
3. A _____ is someone who rents a property from the person who owns it.
4. If you pay something _____, you pay it in advance (before you start to use it).
5. _____ means renting a room/flat/house to someone while you are renting it from someone else.
6. If a flat is _____, it is without any furniture.

(* Can you imagine the name for this person if it is a man?)

c. The sentences below describe common features in houses and flats. For each feature, complete the missing letters.



1. The house has just had a new *central H _ A _ _ _ _* system installed, with radiators in every room.
2. Ideal for hot summer nights, all the bedrooms have *air _ _ _ _ D _ T _ _ N _ _ _* units.
3. The flat has very little noise from the street due to *D _ _ _ L _ glazing* in all windows.
4. With an attic space of almost 80 *metres S _ _ _ _ R _ _*, the house has plenty of room for storage.
5. The flat has a fully *fitted _ _ T _ _ E _*, with newly installed cupboards, sink, cooker and fridge.
6. There is *W _ _ D _ _ flooring* throughout the flat, giving a clean, Scandinavian feel to each room.

d. The box below contains vocabulary that is often heard when describing properties for rent. Each word has an opposite. Find the vocabulary pairs, then look at the table on the next page and match the words to the descriptions. The example is there to help you.

separate	communal	period	short-term
converted	quiet	ever-popular	open-plan
compact	purpose-built	spacious	guest
modern	master	private	fitted
stand-alone	long-term		

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Concept/Item	Vocabulary pair		
Type of building	<i>converted</i>	&	<i>purpose-built</i>
Size of property or rooms		&	
Length of lease		&	
Age of property		&	
Kitchen/Dining area		&	
Bedrooms		&	
Area the property is in		&	
Garden, driveway, or entrance		&	
Wardrobes		&	

If you need help, look in the Macmillan Dictionary or try looking at the following property websites:
www.rightmove.co.uk/property-to-rent/London.html
www.zoopla.co.uk/to-rent/flats/london/

4 Communicate

When Bhavna was looking for a flat, she saw a lot of ads. Look at two ads below for other properties. Then discuss the questions underneath with a classmate.

Studio in central London



Monthly rent: £1,700

Bedroom(s): 0

Compact studio flat in purpose-built, **modern** property. **Single** space with simple kitchen / sleeping area, **separate** bathroom. City centre (Zone 1), near the ever-popular, fashionable Shoreditch district. Within walking distance of the city's best bars, restaurants, theatres, nightclubs, etc.

(Reference code: JX879)

House with garden and beach view



Monthly rent: £1,200

Bedroom(s): 4

Spacious period property with charming **private** garden. Large living room, high-spec kitchen, dining room, 2 **double** bedrooms, 2 **single** bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, small office. Stunning beach views. Located in the coastal town of Margate, approximately 2 hours by train from central London. **Quiet** area, next to nature and just 10 minutes' walk from the beach.

(Reference code: SZ551)

Imagine that you work in central London and have a maximum budget of £1,700 per month to spend on rent. From the two advertisements above and the advertisement from Exercise 2, which property would you choose? Explain.

How do these prices and conditions from the UK compare to those in your country?

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5 Discussion

You are going to interview your classmate to find out his/her priorities when looking for a flat or house to rent. Ask your classmate questions to complete the table below.

NOTE: To avoid an extremely high rent, you may only select a maximum of TWO items each as 'Essential' and as 'An advantage'.

Example:

Student A: *How important is it for your flat to have at least two bedrooms?*

Student B: *I would say that's essential. I share my flat with my husband and our five-year-old son so even just two bedrooms would be quite small. Ideally, we'd have three or four, so that we can also have a guest room.*

When you have completed your table, swap roles.

Student A

Items	Essential (max. 2 items)	An advantage (max. 2 items)	Not necessary
Minimum two bedrooms			
Separate kitchen and living room			
Furnished			
Easy to get to (good public transport links)			
Garden			
Central heating			
Wooden flooring			

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Student B

Items	Essential (max. 2 items)	An advantage (max. 2 items)	Not necessary
Minimum two bathrooms			
Fully fitted kitchen			
Friendly landlord/landlady			
Bright			
Air conditioning			
Double glazing			
No agency fee			

6 Extension activity

Imagine that you are a landlord/landlady and that you want to find a new tenant for the property where you are currently living. Write an ad for your property, giving a short description of it and focusing on its positive aspects. When you have finished, look at your classmates' ads. Which ad would attract the highest number of potential tenants?

Red Words

deposit (noun) **	single (adjective) ***	air conditioning *	communal *
bright ***	landlord **	wooden ***	quiet (adjective) ***
fee ***	landlady*	separate (adjective) ***	long-term ***
proof **	tenant **	compact (adjective) *	private (adjective) ***
double (adjective) ***	lease **	modern ***	short-term **