

How do I adjust to living with a roommate?



The Roommate Handbook

By Skylar Singer



“Pick and choose your battles.”



When touring Loyola for the first time, you probably noticed the beautiful gothic architecture, the tall evergreen trees, and the positive energy radiating off the students. As a rising first-year, however, these certainly were not my main concern. My deepest worry was not knowing what to expect in terms of living with a roommate. We received a guide on how to register for classes and how to manage our time, but the lingering question on my mind was, “Where’s the guide that will teach me how to live with my new roommate whom I’ve never met before?” No such handbook exists; and I’ll tell you why. People possess all different characteristics and personalities. Thus, each person will have a different housing experience. Despite the lack of a formal

guide, I can still attempt to shed some light on ways to give yourself the best possible chance at a good experience.

The first piece of advice I have for incoming students is “pick and choose your battles.” In most cases, there is going to be a habit or two that your roommate has which you will probably find to be rather irritating (and vice versa). It’s totally normal. Nobody is perfect, so, you’re going to have to decide which issues you’d like to address and which you can live with. For example, take this scenario: Say you’re living with a kid who has two habits you’re not quite fond of. The first is that when he comes home from class each day, he throws his hoodie on the floor before jumping into bed. This bothers you because you prefer to

keep the room clean and the floor free of any clutter. The second is that he likes to play music at two in the morning while finishing up homework because he doesn’t start class until noon the next day. This bothers you because you have class at eight every morning and the music keeps you up at night. This is where you have to get over your cleanliness preference, ignore the hoodie on the floor, and address the music issue by asking him to put headphones in. Not sleeping will take a far worse toll on you than having to step over an article of clothing every once in a while. Your question now is probably, “Why can’t I address both issues?” The answer to that is simple. Resentment may occur if you start getting bothered by every little thing.

Therefore, if and when an important issue occurs, you want to be able to resolve it without feeling as though you've already been bugging your roommate too often with a ton of other menial complaints. A writer named Adam Dachis composed an article called, "How to Choose Your Battles and Fight for What Actually Matters" which supports my argument. In his piece, he shares advice that was given to him by therapist, Roger S. Gil. Gil expressed that one of the most important things to do is to "find your line." This means that we must consider how others will react to our choices or comments and determine how we feel about those results. Therefore, if students would like to maintain positive relationships with their roommates, they must find their "line" so as not to become overbearing. Decide what has to change and decide what you can let slide.

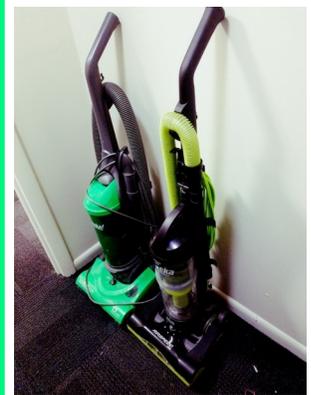
My next piece of advice is a personal lesson that was taught to me by my dad: "It's not always what you say, but how you say it that matters most." This tip can help you get along with just about anyone. Since I just spoke about communicating with your roommate regarding any important issues that may come up, I'd like to mention now that the way you approach him or her holds

equal importance. For example, if you've been taking out the trash all month long with no help from your roommate and you want to bring it to her attention, you need to make sure you do so in a respectful manner. If you speak to her on a day when you overslept, failed a quiz, and are filled with stress and anger, I can guarantee that all that emotion will unintentionally be put on to your roommate and that the conversation will not go well. Sometimes chores and tasks such as this can slip peoples' minds. Just make sure to ask nicely and be kind about it.

This is a common issue that a lot of people have. If you're the kind of person who wants to avoid confrontation at all costs, try to prevent this problem before it happens. I asked a friend of mine for advice on how she handles chores since she lives in a six-person suite. She said, "Our secret is to make a chore schedule. Everyone chooses a day that works best for them, the chores are split evenly, and everyone is happy. Ever since we made it, we never fought about cleaning again." These simple tasks of being mindful of our tones and creating schedules can help us achieve the optimal living



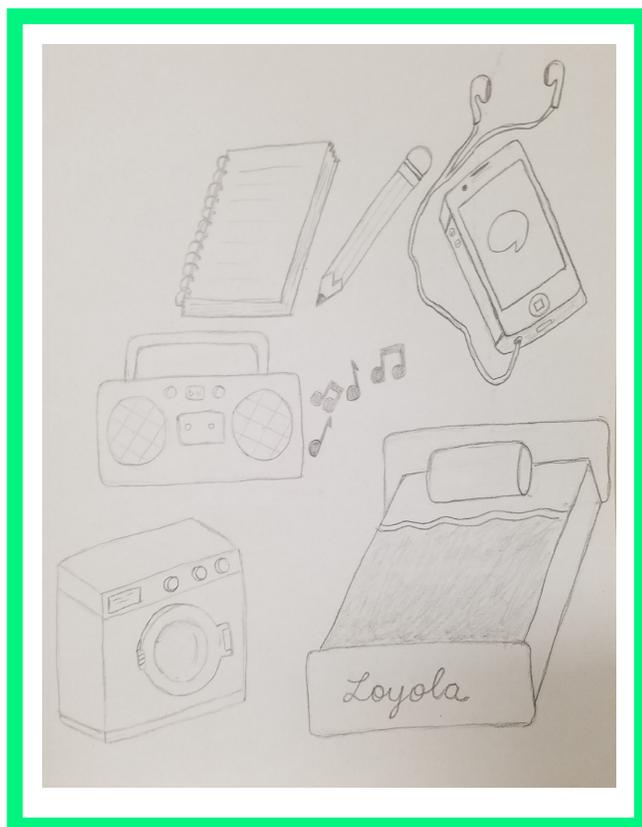
"It's not always what you say, but how you say it that matters most."



environment—one of felicity, civility, and respect.

Creating a positive living environment requires a team effort of all parties who live in a dorm or apartment. That being said, if a person proves to be absolutely resistant and fails to contribute to creating a healthy living space, you're not stuck there, so don't worry! All you would have to do is walk down the hall and talk to your resident assistant (RA) about your living situation. Then, he or she will guide you through the quick and simple process of moving into a different room if you wish. So now, extinguish the idea that your room assignment is set in stone, recognize its flexibility, and free all the butterflies that may have been fluttering around in your stomach.

Communicating and deciding what is most important to you is the best way to get along with a roommate. My intent here wasn't to scare or worry you. In many cases roommates end up getting along phenomenally and become best friends. These were just a couple helpful tips to help you and make the adjustment of living with someone new less of a battle and more of an enjoyable experience.



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