

Kaltmiete: The pure rental costs of the room/flat without utilities and other extras.

Nebenkosten: Utilities, often abbreviated “NK”. Includes heating and hot water, garbage fees, etc. You pay an estimated amount in advance and once a year your landlord/landlady will present you a detailed bill on how much you actually used. Depending on this bill you will either get some money back (if you paid for more than you actually used) or will have to pay some extra (if you used more than was estimated).

Not included in the NK are electricity and Wi-Fi, for which you will have to conclude separate contracts (for example with the “Stadtwerke”, the local power supplier, for electricity, and a provider like Telekom or Vodafone for Wi-Fi). In WGs (see below), usually one person has such a contract for the whole flat and you pay your share of the costs directly to this person.

Warmmiete: Kaltmiete + “Nebenkosten”. This is the amount of rent you will have to pay each month.

Untermiete: Sublease/Subtenancy. One of your roommates has the main rental agreement for the flat, they usually take care of all additional contracts (electricity, Wi-Fi, etc.) and manage contact with the landlord/landlady (paying rent, reporting issues with for example heating, broken equipment in the flat, etc.). You get a sublease from this roommate and pay your part of the rent to them, including all additional costs stated above.

Kaution: Security deposit. For every room or flat, the landlord/landlady will expect you to pay a security deposit for potential damages that are discovered after you move out or if the bill for your NK is not yet ready at the time you move out and they do not know yet if you have to pay extra or not. The amount is usually around two or three times the Kaltmiete and will have to be paid shortly before or with the beginning of your contract – but never before signing the contract! This is the point where you have to look out for scammers: legitimate landlords/landladies will give you a viewing and your signed contract before you pay anything.

WG (“Wohngemeinschaft”): shared flat. Usually, every member of a WG has their own room (called “WG-Zimmer”) in the flat, while the kitchen, bathroom/restroom and sometimes a common room/living room area are shared spaces. Depending on the preferences of the landlord/landlady you have separate contracts for each room, or one person has the main contract and the others have subcontracts. Everyday life in WGs can differ, some WGs like to do things together like cooking, game nights, going out together, or sharing hobbies, in other cases the residents keep more to themselves and rarely spend time together apart from sharing a cup of coffee in the morning or settling whose turn it is to buy toilet paper (this is often called a “Zweck-WG”).

GEZ: television and radio fee, currently called “Rundfunkbeitrag”. This is a fee that has to be paid for every apartment (regardless of the number of people living there) to support public broadcasting institutions. These are TV channels and radio stations that are independent from state and private investors (unlike private channels like RTL and ProSieben, which are owned by media companies and rely on making money through ads and promotions). The fee has to be paid regardless of whether you have the means to access these services or not (whether or not the apartment/your room has a TV connection, or you own a TV/radio). You may be exempt from paying this fee if you can prove that you have a low income (living on welfare/receiving Bafög) or have certain health issues.

Kehrwoche: This is a very swabian thing, where all tenants take turns in cleaning the building, especially sweeping and wiping the staircase, but sometimes also shovelling snow in the winter and cleaning the access path from the street to the building. Some buildings have a caretaker or janitorial service that takes care of these things, or you can commission a company to do it for you, but that’s usually not financially worth it.

Nachtabsenkung: In most buildings, the temperature of your hot water and heating system will be reduced to save energy. You will still be able to take a warm shower, but the water will not be hot enough to wash dishes and the temperature in your room might be a little lower. This is usually effective between 11 pm/midnight and 6 am but can differ depending on the building.

Mülltrennung: In Germany, we love to separate our waste to recycle it as efficiently as possible. There are different systems depending on the municipality, so if you are not sure about a certain item, ask your roommates/neighbours or look it up on the municipality’s website. In general, household waste is separated in general waste (Restmüll, black container), compostable/biodegradable waste (Biomüll, green container), recyclables (Gelber Sack, a yellow plastic bag you can get free of charge at several distribution points), and paper (Altpapier, blue container). Other types of waste like batteries, LED lightbulbs, broken electronic devices, etc, have to be brought to special collection points and are not allowed to be part of the household waste. If you separate your waste incorrectly, the waste collectors might refuse to empty your containers and in severe cases you may have to pay a fine. If you want to know what goes where in Tübingen, have a look at this website: <https://www.abfall-kreis-tuebingen.de/entsorgen/welche-abfaelle-habe-ich/>

Lautstärke: Everyone has their own perception of what is a loud noise, but there are certain rules that you have to follow – to keep the peace with your neighbours and also because there are actual laws on this subject. It is for example not allowed to play loud music between 10 pm and 8 am, all noise has to be on room volume (aka cannot be heard outside your room or flat, and if so, barely) during this time. So, turn down your music/TV show, do not use loud household appliances like a

blender or vacuum cleaner, and do not jump/run around as if you were part of an elephant stampede. There are also a few rules concerning loud noise on Sunday: loud domestic chores (mowing the lawn, drilling holes and other loud home improvement/diy-activities) are not allowed, as well as playing an instrument that can be heard outside your room/flat. Having friends over is always okay but try to schedule your parties for the weekend and, depending on how sensitive your neighbours are, inform them beforehand if you plan a larger gathering. If you have a neighbour whose noise bothers you, asking them politely to turn down the volume will resolve the issue most of the time. Please note that issuing these rules in the dorms is not always possible because of the large number of people living there.