

Case 16: Who wrote the new building rule?

An unsigned notice says the building's only step-free door locks at 8 p.m., and Sami's workshop runs later.

On your own Read What happened and underline the two changes the notice announces. About 5 minutes.



Mari hands a yellow sheet to Sami across a white table while Caio listens. This scene comes from Case 4.

Your role: You're the one who photographs the notice and writes down when and where it was found.
New skill: Find who has the authority to make a rule.

What happened

It is Monday morning in Sami's apartment building. A new notice is posted beside the common-room door. It says the rear door will be locked at 8:00 p.m. every night. It also says the common room is "for resident social use only," with "NO BUSINESS USE" in capital letters. The notice has no name, no date and no contact.

That rear door matters to Sami, who lives in apartment 3B and uses a manual wheelchair. It is the building's only step-free entrance. The front entrance has four steps and no ramp. Sami also runs a workshop in the common room, and it goes past 8 p.m.

Caio reads last year's house rules beside the notice. Those rules let residents reserve the common room for classes and resident-run workshops. The new notice does not say whether it replaces them. Before anyone starts arguing, Sami photographs the notice and writes down when and where she found it.

Your question: Who has the authority behind this notice, and what should Sami ask the building manager?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example, then write your first guess in the box. About 5 minutes.

Authority Authority is the power a person or group has to make or change a particular rule or decision.

En español: autoridad

In this case: The notice uses bold type and capital letters but names no issuer. Sami has to find out who has the power to make this rule.

Reasonable accommodation A reasonable accommodation is a change to a rule or practice that gives a person with a disability equal use of a place.

En español: acomodo razonable

In this case: Sami could ask the building for a key fob for the rear door, so she can get in after 8 p.m.

Documentation Documentation is a record, such as a photo, a note or an email, that shows what was said or done and when.

En español: documentación

In this case: Sami photographs the notice and writes down when and where she found it, before anyone argues about what it said.

Who is involved



Sami

Lives in 3B and runs a workshop in the common room

“Rear door locked at 8. That’s the only door I can get through. My workshop runs later. So, questions. Plural.”



Caio

Reading last year’s house rules beside the notice

“All caps, bold, no name, no date. Somebody made it look official. I still don’t know who.”

Before you look at the evidence, should Sami follow the new notice?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Reading passage

Authority, accommodation and the paper trail

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 6 minutes.

Words to know

- **Authority:** Authority is the power a person or group has to make or change a particular rule or decision.
- **Reasonable accommodation:** A reasonable accommodation is a change to a rule or practice that gives a person with a disability equal use of a place.
- **Documentation:** Documentation is a record, such as a photo, a note or an email, that shows what was said or done and when.
- **Decision-maker:** A decision-maker is the person or group with the power to make a particular choice.
- **Barrier:** A barrier is something that blocks or limits a person from taking part.

The story: A rule without an author

An unsigned notice appears beside the common-room door of Sami's apartment building. It declares that, effective immediately, the rear door will be locked at 8:00 p.m. nightly and the common room is for resident social use only, with "NO BUSINESS USE." It has no author, date or contact.

For Sami, 23, a design student who uses a manual wheelchair and lives in 3B, the stakes are concrete. The building's entrance plan shows four steps and no ramp at the front, a service-only side door and a step-free rear door to the elevator hallway. The notice would close her only accessible entrance each evening. It would also cast doubt on the workshop she runs in the common room, which runs past 8.

Her first action is documentary rather than rhetorical. She photographs the notice and records when and where she found it. Caio, 24, reads last year's house rules, distributed at lease signing, beside the new text. He resists both easy responses. The notice should not be ignored, because if it is real the door is locked tonight. It should not be broadcast to the building either, until they know who wrote it.

Your role is to help Sami keep a clean record of the notice before anyone starts arguing.

? Stop and think. Why is it important to separate the authority question from the access question?

Separating authority from access

Authority is the power a person or group has to make or change a particular rule or decision. The notice performs authority through typography and the phrase “effective immediately.” It does not establish it. The analytical task, and the new skill in this case, is locating the source of a rule: who issued it, under what power and in relation to which prior rule.

The skill draws on the ladder of earlier cases. From Case 1, the prior house rules serve as the original document. They permit reserving the room for “gatherings, classes and resident-run workshops” through the building office. From Case 4, the **decision-maker**, the person or group with the power to make a particular choice, is the unknown to be identified. From Case 7, the question of stage applies. The notice may be final, provisional or unauthorized. From Case 10, the question goes to the office positioned to answer it, the building manager.

Caio’s textual comparison surfaces the ambiguity that matters most. The old rules protect resident-run workshops. The new text bans undefined “business use” and does not say whether it supersedes the old rules. Until those gaps close, no one can say whether Sami’s workshop is affected.

Sami deliberately separates two questions that a less careful response would merge. The authority question asks who made the rule. The access question asks how she enters after 8. A **barrier**, the Case 10 term for something that blocks or limits a person from taking part, describes the locked door whatever its author’s intent. A **reasonable accommodation** is a change to a rule or practice that gives a person with a disability equal use of a place. A fob for the rear door is a concrete request that could preserve security and access together. **Documentation** is a record, such as a photo, a note or an email, that shows what was said or done and when. It preserves Sami’s ability to rely on the facts later.

 **Stop and think.** How did state approval requirements give the Atlantic Plaza tenants leverage, and what would give Sami similar leverage?

Law, guidance and tenant process

HUD explains that the Fair Housing Act bars housing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status or disability, with coverage of most housing and some exceptions (HUD, no date listed). HUD has also explained how people with disabilities can request exceptions to rules (HUD, January 31, 2014). Enforcement is real. The Justice Department announced a \$750,000 settlement with a property management company in a disability discrimination case in 2026 (U.S. Department of Justice, April 30, 2026). Paired-testing research found that renters with disabilities were told about fewer options (Urban Institute, July 2, 2015). The source of a rule matters in law too. In 2025, HUD withdrew fair housing guidance documents without any change to the Act (National Association of Realtors, October 7, 2025).

Law, guidance and tenant process, continued

Procedural leverage can be decisive. At Atlantic Plaza Towers in Brownsville, Brooklyn, tenants opposed a landlord's application to install facial-recognition entry, which required state agency approval (Legal Services NYC, May 1, 2019). The landlord withdrew the plan in November 2019 (Gothamist, November 21, 2019). That outcome depended on New York's rent-stabilization rules and may not transfer to Sami's building.

The ABA's model rules require a basis in law and fact before a lawyer brings a claim, and they call for learning the facts and the applicable law first (ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct, 1983, as amended). Sami and Caio follow the same order, and they hold their conclusions until the facts arrive.

 **Stop and think.** What does the HUD guidance withdrawal teach about the difference between a rule and guidance about a rule?

Sources

Real source | U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) | No date listed

Fair Housing Act overview

Real source | HUD (YouTube) | January 31, 2014

The Federal Fair Housing Act and Reasonable Accommodations

Real source | U.S. Department of Justice | April 30, 2026

Justice Department Settles Disability Discrimination Case Against Property Management Company for \$750,000

Real source | Urban Institute | July 2, 2015

Restricted Options: evidence on housing discrimination against people with disabilities

Real source | National Association of Realtors (Washington Report) | October 7, 2025

HUD Withdraws Fair Housing Guidance Documents

Real source | Legal Services NYC | May 1, 2019

Brooklyn tenants file legal opposition to landlord's application to install facial recognition entry system in building

Real source | Gothamist | November 21, 2019

Brooklyn Landlord Does An About Face On Facial Recognition Plan

Real source | American Bar Association (ABA), Center for Professional Responsibility | No date listed

ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document, then fill in both boxes under it. About 8 minutes.

Evidence A | Posted notice

Unsigned notice by the common-room door, found Monday morning

NOTICE TO ALL RESIDENTS. Effective immediately, the rear door will be locked at 8:00 p.m. nightly. The common room is for resident social use only. NO BUSINESS USE.

Look closely: Which features give the notice an official look? What is missing?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence B | House rules (excerpt)

Last year’s house rules, given out at lease signing

“Residents may reserve the common room for gatherings, classes and resident-run workshops. Reservations are made through the building office.”

Look closely: What did last year’s rules allow in the common room?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | Entrance plan

Building entrance plan from the lobby directory

Front entrance: four steps, no ramp. Rear door: step-free, opens to the elevator hallway. Side door: service use only.

Look closely: Which entrance is step-free? What happens to it after 8 p.m.?

What it shows

What it leaves out

What is still missing from the evidence?

Notes

Key idea: authority

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics, then answer the question in the box. About 10 minutes.

A building rule should name who made it, give a date and list a contact. This notice has none of them.

Authority is the power a person or group has to make or change a particular rule or decision. Bold type and capital letters do not show who has that power. An unsigned notice is not automatically invalid, either. Sami has to find out who issued it and which document it claims to change.

A landlord's policy and the law are different sources of rules. The Fair Housing Act is a federal law. HUD, the federal housing department, says it bars housing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status or disability. It covers most housing, with some exceptions. Under the Act, a person with a disability can ask a building for a **reasonable accommodation**. A reasonable accommodation is a change to a rule or practice that gives a person with a disability equal use of a place. For Sami, that could be a key fob for the rear door.

Sami cannot yet say the notice breaks the law. She does not know who wrote it, whether it replaces the house rules or how the building handles access requests. Whether a building grants an accommodation also depends on the facts. **Documentation** helps her keep those facts straight. Documentation is a record, such as a photo, a note or an email, that shows what was said or done and when. Her photo of the notice, with the date and place she found it, is documentation.

Professional standards

Adapted from a real source | American Bar Association (ABA), Center for Professional Responsibility

ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct: Rule 3.1 Meritorious Claims and Contentions

Summary: Summary, not a quotation: a lawyer may not bring or defend a proceeding, or argue an issue in it, without a basis in law and fact that is not frivolous. The ABA comment says lawyers must first learn the facts and the applicable law.

In plain words: Before lawyers bring a claim, they must have facts and law that support it.

Question: Before claiming a Fair Housing Act violation, what should Sami learn about the notice's author and the building's access process?

Professional standards, continued

Your answer

Sami first needs ____, because ____.

In the news



Real source | Gothamist | November 21, 2019

Brooklyn Landlord Does An About Face On Facial Recognition Plan

A throwback about a door rule: the landlord needed state permission to change how tenants got in, and tenants used that process to object.



Real source | HUD (YouTube) | January 31, 2014

The Federal Fair Housing Act and Reasonable Accommodations

HUD explains how a person with a disability can ask for an exception to a building rule.

Notes

Sort the evidence

On your own Fill in each box of the map: who decides, which rules apply, who is affected and where to ask. About 8 minutes.

Map who made this rule, which rules it has to fit, who it affects and where residents can take a question. Which box is still empty?

Lock the rear door at 8 p.m. and ban business use of the common room

Who decides

Unknown issuer: the owner, the manager or someone else?

Under which rule

Last year's house rules allowed resident-run workshops

Fair Housing Act: disability is a protected characteristic

Who lives with it

Sami and other residents who need the only step-free entrance

Your way in

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is _____. I would ask _____.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose what Sami should do first and explain why, then fix the two marked lines. About 6 minutes.

The notice says the rear door, the building's only step-free entrance, locks at 8 p.m. It also bans "business use" of the common room. It has no name, no date and no contact. What should Sami do first?

- ☐ **A** Ignore it until someone signs it, since an unsigned notice may not be official.
- ☐ **B** Photograph it, compare it with last year's house rules and ask the manager who issued it and how residents get in after 8.
- ☐ **C** Post online that the building is breaking disability law.

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student's first draft

Hi, I saw the notice about the common room and rear door. **1** This is illegal and discriminatory against disabled people like me. You can't just make rules like this without asking. Nobody signed it and nobody told us it was coming, so I don't even know if it's real. I'm going to keep using the room for my workshop because the old rules said I could. A lot of neighbors are upset too. **2** Please take the notice down. Sami, 3B

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

This is a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The paper has rounded corners and a dark blue border. There are ten horizontal lines spaced evenly across the page.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

College

Your task

On your own Read the steps and fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 15 minutes.

Design a notice template that a building office could use for any rule change. Rewrite the rear-door notice with it, and write a short memo to the building office that explains each element.

Use: Case documents: the unsigned notice, last year's house rules, the entrance plan and Sami's and Caio's statements. Real sources: HUD's Fair Housing Act overview and HUD's video on reasonable accommodations (January 31, 2014).

You'll make: Notice template, a rewritten notice of 60–120 words and a memo of about 150 words

Time: 75 minutes

- 1 List the elements every building notice should have, using the checklist on the task page.
- 2 Build a template with a line for each element.
- 3 Rewrite the rear-door notice with your template in 60 to 120 words.
- 4 Add a line that tells residents who need the step-free rear door whom to contact.
- 5 Write a memo of about 150 words that explains each element to the building office.
- 6 Check that no real resident's name, unit or situation appears.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Template elements

What changed from last year's house rules

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

On your own Write your first draft in the boxes, using your planner from the page before. About 30 minutes.

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Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions, mark your level in each rubric row and write one change you made. About 8 minutes.

Does your template require an issuer, a date and a contact?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does your rewritten notice say what changed from last year's house rules?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does it tell residents who need the step-free rear door whom to contact?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does your memo keep legal points as questions, with no real resident's details?	☐ Yes ☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ No specifics from the notice.	☐ Mentions the notice generally.	☐ Quotes the notice and older rule.	☐ Quotes both and names what is still unknown.
Reasoning	☐ Declares a legal violation.	☐ Complains without a clear need.	☐ Connects the rule to a concrete effect.	☐ Separates the communication problem from the legal question.
Audience & purpose	☐ Hostile or vague.	☐ Polite but no request.	☐ Specific request the manager can act on.	☐ Specific request plus questions that clarify authority.
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Tone edits only.	☐ Replaces the conclusion with a question and request.	☐ Explains how each change makes a yes more likely.

One change I made after feedback

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Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question, then complete each sentence frame. About 10 minutes.

- 1** Which missing fact would most change how you see the notice?

- 2** The notice bans “business use” without saying what that means. What would you need to know to decide whether Sami’s workshop counts?

- 3** A building may want a door locked at night. How could it keep that door secure and still let Sami in?

My take

My claim: ____.

The best evidence is ____, because ____.

Someone who disagrees might say ____.

The limit of the evidence is ____.

I would change my mind if ____.

Notes

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Talk about this case at home

Case 16: Who wrote the new building rule?

In this case, an unsigned notice in an apartment building says the only step-free door will lock at 8 p.m. Your student compared the notice with last year's building rules and practiced asking who made the new rule.

Questions to talk about

- 1 What should a clear building or school notice include?
- 2 Whom can people ask when a posted rule is unclear?
- 3 Why might someone keep a photo of a notice with the date?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.



See the case online.