

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 7 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 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.

Reading passage

The notice with no name

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 5 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 new sign by the door

On Monday morning, a new notice appears beside the common-room door in Sami's apartment building. In bold capital letters, 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." At the bottom: "NO BUSINESS USE."

The notice has no name, no date and no contact. That matters to Sami. She lives in apartment 3B and uses a manual wheelchair. The rear door 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.

Before anyone starts arguing, Sami takes a photo of the notice. She writes down when and where she found it. Caio brings last year's house rules to compare.

Your role is to help Sami keep a clear record of what the notice says and when it appeared.

 **Stop and think.** Why does Sami take a photo before anyone argues about the notice?

Who made this rule?

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. As Caio says, somebody made it look official. He still does not know who.

Who made this rule?, continued

In Case 4, you learned that a **decision-maker** is the person or group with the power to make a particular choice. Sami needs to find out who the decision-maker is here. In Case 1, you learned to find the original source. Last year’s house rules say residents may reserve the common room for “gatherings, classes and resident-run workshops.” The new notice does not say whether it replaces those rules. It also never says what “business use” means.

In Case 10, you learned that a **barrier** is something that blocks or limits a person from taking part. A locked rear door would be a barrier for Sami after 8 p.m. **Documentation** is a record, such as a photo, a note or an email, that shows what was said or done and when. Sami’s photo and note are documentation.

Sami keeps two questions apart. Who has the authority behind this notice? And how does she get in after 8? 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, a key fob for the rear door could work. Neither Sami nor Caio calls the notice illegal. They do not know enough yet.

 **Stop and think.** What is missing from the notice that a real building rule should include?

Real tenants, real doors

In 2018 and 2019, tenants in a Brooklyn apartment complex learned their landlord wanted to install a face-scanning entry system. Because the change needed a state agency’s permission, the tenants had a place to object. In November 2019, the landlord dropped the plan (Gothamist, November 21, 2019).

 **Stop and think.** What two questions does Sami keep separate, and why?

Sources

Real source | Gothamist | November 21, 2019

Brooklyn Landlord Does An About Face On Facial Recognition Plan

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document, then fill in both boxes under it. About 10 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

One question I still have

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

One question I still have

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

One question I still have

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 8 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

Before Sami says the notice breaks the law, she needs to know ____.

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 8 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.

Rewrite phrase 2

[illegible]

Grades 6—8

Your task

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

Rewrite the building notice so every resident knows who wrote it, what changed, when and who to ask.

Use: The notice and a short excerpt from the older house rules.

You'll make: Rewritten notice, 60—90 words

Time: 45 minutes

- 1 List what the notice in Evidence A leaves out.
- 2 Compare it with last year's rules in Evidence B and write what changed.
- 3 Find the step-free door on the entrance plan in Evidence C.
- 4 Rewrite the notice in 60 to 90 words in the Your draft box.
- 5 Add one line that tells residents who need the step-free door how to get in after 8 p.m.
- 6 Leave a blank for the name of whoever issued the notice.

Show it your way

Write it: Write the 60—90 word notice with the checklist, including one line about getting in after 8 p.m.

Say it: Read your rewritten notice aloud to a partner who plays a resident using the step-free door; answer the one question they ask.

Show it: Redesign the notice as a poster with five labeled boxes: who, what changed, when, who it affects, who to ask.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Your task, continued

What the notice leaves out

What changed from last year

The step-free door

Your draft

Notice from ____.

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 6 minutes.

Does your notice have a space for who issued it and the date?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does it say what changed and when?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does it give a contact?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does it tell residents who need the step-free door how to get in after 8 p.m.?	☐ 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

Notes

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?

My take

I think Sami should ___ because ___.

The evidence that changed my first guess is ___.

One question I still have is ___.

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.