Tips on getting along with your roommates:

Developing a Mutual Understanding
Begin by establishing a pattern of open communication and cooperation with your roommate(s). Take time to share your reactions to some of the following sentence leads. This process will help you understand each other more fully and to pinpoint potential areas for negotiation and compromise.

Background:
- The family and community environment I come from is....
- What I miss most and least about home is....
- I came to Carnegie Mellon because....
- This year, I’m most looking forward to....
- This year, I am worried about...

Lifestyle
- I like to spend money on...
- I like to sleep at these times:
- I need approximately _____ hours of sleep each night.
- The grades I hope to earn this semester are....
- My typical approach to studying is....
- I think drinking and drug use are...
- Some things I feel strongly about are....
- For me, making friends is....

Emotions
- My parents and friends describe me as....
- What I do when I'm: restless is... happy is... sad is.... bored is... tired is... sick is.... stressed is... angry is....
- What I want others to do when I’m (each of the above) is....
- Something that is likely to annoy me is....

Summary
- Something I find interesting about you is....
- I believe we may be similar in...
- I believe we may be different in...
- We may have to negotiate or compromise on...

Negotiating A Compromise
Once you and your roommate(s) have pinpointed aspects of sharing a living space where negotiation is needed, use this outline to help structure a written agreement between you. Putting agreements and understandings in writing helps to clarify issues and provides a point of reference if future conflicts arise. If you are having difficulty determining where negotiation is needed, then take another look at the Developing a Mutual Understanding or talk with your Resident Assistant, Community Advisor, or Coordinator of Student Life.

Further suggestions for approaching a negotiation are included in the section titled Managing Conflict.

• Study time in the room/apartment: When will it be? What days? What hours? Will the stereo or TV be on or off? Volume?
• Guests: When can there be guests? How long can they stay?
• Use of personal property: What can be shared? What can’t be shared? Must permission be given?
• Telephone: Where should messages be written? What’s the preferred policy for answering call waiting?
• Cleanliness: How often will the room/apartment be cleaned? Who will do it? What are your definitions of clean and messy?
• Privacy: How much privacy is needed? How often? How long?
• Space: How much space is needed? Where will things be stored?
• Social events: How frequent? What time? Who will clean up?
• Security: When will the door be locked? When will it be left open?

If you attempt to negotiate a roommate conflict and the situation does not improve, contact your Resident Assistant, Community Advisor, or Coordinator of Student Life for help. It is better to get a trained, impartial third party involved than to put yourself in a situation in which you are uncomfortable. If you do find yourself having recurring difficulties with your roommate(s), you might also want to read the suggestions under Managing Conflict.

Managing Conflict
If you do find yourself involved in a roommate conflict, here are some tips to help you address the situation:

• Talk straight. Level with each other. Ex: “When you do X in situation Y, I feel Z.” Be honest about your needs, thoughts, and feelings.
• Validate other’s positions. Try to understand others’ points of view even when they differ from your own. Ex: “I can understand how you might feel that way. Your reaction makes sense.”

• Negotiate. Attack problems, not each other. Come to an agreement on what the conflict is and on what a solution may be. Make a plan of action that will help you to achieve the solution. Set a future date to evaluate the situation.

• Use “I” statements to own and express your thoughts/feelings. Ex: “I feel left out” sounds very different from “You never spend any time with me.”
When possible, state issues positively. Instead of detailing why you can’t do what someone asks of you, state what you’re willing to do. Ex: “No, I can’t clean up the kitchen right now, but I will do it by noon tomorrow.”

• Try not to involve your neighbors or mutual friends in your conflict. This can aggravate the conflict and complicate the situation.

• When an objective third party is needed, call your Resident Assistant, Community Advisor or Coordinator of Student Life. Contacting the staff early can prevent the conflict from growing.

* These exercises are adapted from the brochure “Tips for Getting Along with Roommates” produced by the Counseling Center at the University of Virginia.