

Breaker Test



A simple, no-cost option to review your home's electrical usage is to complete a breaker test. A breaker test involves going circuit by circuit on your breaker panel to discover which circuits are using the most energy, which can lead to finding the largest energy users in your home. High-wattage appliances and equipment such as ovens, air conditioners, water heaters, dryers, and electric heating are good candidates for the breaker test, while smaller appliances should be measured using Efficiency Smart's free meter loan service. The breaker test typically takes about an hour from start to finish.

Step 1. Prep

Before you start:

1. Find the location of your electric meter and breaker box
2. Determine if you have a mechanical or digital meter (mechanical meters have a rotating disk with a black mark, and digital meters have squares or upside-down triangles in the lower righthand corner of the display)
3. Get the following items ready:
 - Two people—one to watch the electric meter and the other to switch the breakers on/off
 - Two cell phones to communicate with during the process
 - A watch or timer
 - Paper and pen to write down the results

Step 2. Turn off the breakers

As a general test, have one person turn off all breakers. The person by the meter should verify that the electric meter is no longer cycling after a few minutes. If you have a mechanical meter, this means that the rotating disk should come to a complete stop. If you have a digital meter, the shapes will not move and stay frozen.

Note: If your meter is still moving after you have turned off the main breaker, contact your electric utility.

Step 3. Test each circuit

Turn the first breaker back on. Have the person by the meter count how many rotations the mechanical disk makes, or how often the symbols rotate for a digital meter, in a two minute span. After the time is up, turn off the breaker circuit and move on to the next one. Repeat this process for each breaker.

Step 4. Review and investigate

After going through each circuit, you can begin to review which items consume the most energy. The circuits that have the highest number of rotations indicate where your largest energy users are plugged in or located.

Switch off all the breakers and unplug the electric devices you have plugged into the circuit you want to investigate. Then, turn on the breaker for just the circuit you are reviewing. Plug in one device at a time on the circuit and have the person by the meter review how often each device causes the disk to rotate or the icons to cycle through in a two-minute span. This will help determine what item is using the most electricity.

These results are a good indicator of what the largest energy users are in your home. For further guidance, contact a customer support specialist at (877) 889-3777 to discuss ways to reduce your energy use.