



CREDIT

Financial Toolbox



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1. Using Credit Wisely

Credit Myths and Realities

- **Myth:** As long as I send any amount of money as payment to my credit card company, even if it's less than the minimum payment they're asking for, they won't consider me delinquent and can't pursue legal options.
 - **Reality:** You can be slapped immediately with a late fee, which in averages about \$35. Furthermore, until you pay the minimum amount due plus all fees, you will continue to be considered delinquent in your payments, and you will continue to be slapped with a similar \$35 late fee every month. To top things off, if those late fees push you over your credit limit, you will be slapped with an "over limit" fee (also averaging about \$35) until you bring your balance back under your limit.
 - **Tip:** Pay at least the minimum requested every month. Ideally, pay off your credit card balance every month, but even when money is tight, send more than the minimum payment due.

- **Myth:** My credit score determines how much money I can borrow.
 - **Reality:** Your credit score is an indication of how much of a risk you, as a borrower, are to the lender. Based on your previous behavior, the score tells the lender how "likely" you are to make your payments in the future. The amount a person can borrow is a decision the individual lender's decision.
 - **Tip:** How much you borrow should never be left up to a scoring model or even to the lender. When faced with the decision to borrow money, know your budget and what you can afford. Then stick to it.

- **Myth:** The higher your income, the higher your credit score.
 - **Reality:** Income is NOT directly or indirectly factored into a credit score. If the person uses credit wisely, regardless of their income, they can have a high credit score.
 - **Tip:** The two most influential factors in your credit score is your history of on-time payments and your balance-to-credit limit ratio. In other words, making at least your minimum payment on time and paying down your debt have the greatest positive impact on your credit score.

- **Myth:** It's not fair that those who have lower credit scores have to pay the highest interest rates. They're the one's who can afford it the least.
 - **Reality:** Simply put, credit scores have nothing to do with income. They take into account the amount of credit an individual uses and how responsibly that individual uses that credit. Income figures are not reported nor accounted for in the score.
 - **Tip:** Apply for and use only the amount of credit you require and can handle responsibly, regardless of your income level.

- **Myth:** If I bombard the credit bureau with disputes (or hire someone to do it for me), I can get negative information, even though it's accurate, removed from my credit report.
 - **Reality:** Companies that offer to eliminate accurate negative information from your credit report, usually for an upfront fee, are offering an illegal service. Don't give them your time or your money.
 - **Tip:** Get a free copy of your credit report annually from www.AnnualCreditReport.com and check it for accuracy. Dispute any INACCURATE information through the credit bureau directly. Otherwise, patience and good repayment habits are the best credit fixes.

- **Myth:** I have 30 days to pay off any credit card transaction without being charged interest.
 - **Reality:** As a consumer, you only have until the due date on your statement to pay off the entire balance in order to avoid interest charges on regular purchases. However, there is no grace period whatsoever for cash advances or credit card convenience

- checks. These transactions incur interest immediately and usually at a much higher rate than regular purchases.
- **Tip:** Avoid cash advances and using the convenience checks often included with credit card statements. Pay off the entire balance every month.
- **Myth:** You need a perfect or near-perfect credit score to get the best terms on loans.
- **Reality:** To get the best loan terms, you need excellent credit. However, what one lender considers excellent credit, another might consider mediocre. Still, using the FICO scoring model of 300 to 850 (the higher the score the better), excellent credit would generally begin somewhere around 720 to 750. That means that someone with a 750 credit score will usually qualify for the same best promotional credit offers as someone with an 800.
 - **Tip:** Unless you're preparing to make a large purchase on credit in the next one to two years (such as a car or a home), you should worry less about your credit score and more about the accuracy of the information on your credit report.
- **Myth:** Fixed APRs on credit cards are best because the creditor can not raise them.
- **Reality:** Creditors are only required to give you a 15-day notification prior to transferring your fixed rate to a variable rate or changing your rate all together.
 - **Tip:** By paying off your entire credit card balance every month to take advantage of the grace period, your card's interest rate becomes all but irrelevant.
- **Myth:** If I get my credit card payment in the mail by the due date, my payment won't be considered late.
- **Reality:** A credit card company may not report you as late to the credit bureaus, but they may, and often do, charge a late fee if your payment is posted in their system (interestingly not "arrived" in their mail) as little as one minute after it's due. Some card companies specify as specific hour of the day when the payment must be received and posted.
 - **Tip:** Make your payments a few days ahead of time through a secured web site where you get a confirmation number. If using an Internet banking service, keep in mind that they may take as much as 5 business days to process and send your payment. If you send your payment by mail, do so well in advance, and consider priority mail with a tracking service. Keep all records of correspondence.
- **Myth:** If a divorce decree specifies which spouse is responsible for which credit accounts, the credit card companies cannot hold the "non responsible" spouse liable for the balance.
- **Reality:** Credit card companies are not participating parties in the divorce decree and therefore not bound by its conditions. Only the most recent account agreement (usually signed upon opening the card) is legally binding to the credit card company.
 - **Tip:** Notify the credit card company of the developments, and consider closing such accounts until after the divorce is finalized. Consider placing a "freeze" on your credit through a credit bureau to avoid any potentially unauthorized accounts being opened in your name.
- **Myth:** I hear that I need to carry a balance every month on my credit card to have the best credit score.
- **Reality:** This myth may originate from the fact that your credit card balance plays a role in your credit score. However, those who propagate this myth say that it shows creditors that you can "handle" credit. Nowhere do credit scoring companies suggest that carrying a balance can improve your score, whereas the opposite is more likely to be true. Besides, creditors report to the credit bureaus a "snapshot" of your account once every one to three months, so even if you pay off in full every month, there is likely to be a balance reported on the account if you've used it at all.
 - **Tip:** It may seem obvious, but paying off your credit cards in full every month is the best way to demonstrate that you're responsible with credit. Many experts suggest that, even

when paying off your balance in full every month, you should never charge more than 30-50% of your credit limit.

- **Myth:** Checking my credit report hurts my credit score.
 - **Reality:** Checking your own credit, whether directly through one of the credit bureaus or through www.AnnualCreditReport.com has NO effect on your credit score. Such “review” inquiries of your credit are not taken into account when calculating a score. Only “active” inquiries (where you are formally requesting or applying for a line of credit or a loan) have any influence on your credit score. Even active inquiries, though, have fairly minimal effects, especially when they occur just once a year or so.
 - **Tip:** Whenever you’re declined credit, ask for a copy of your credit report (you’re entitled to it). Also, review your credit report from each of the three main credit bureaus annually through www.AnnualCreditReport.com. It’s free with no strings attached.
- **Myth:** Closing credit card accounts (in good standing or bad) can help my credit.
 - **Reality:** Closing an account does affect your credit score, though often negatively. Regardless of your reasons, the information about this account remains on your credit report for seven years. Closing an account, especially if it’s an old account, can impact the portion of your score that looks at how long you’ve had credit (generally the longer the better). Also, closing an account may reduce your overall credit limit, which impacts your balance-to-limit ratio – the second most influential factor in your score.
 - **Tip:** Only close accounts if you feel tempted to overuse them.
- **Myth:** Going to see a credit counselor will hurt my credit score.
 - **Reality:** Based on old information, this myth continues strong. In 1998, the FICO scoring model dropped credit counseling participation as an influencing factor. While participation in a credit counselor’s Debt Management Program would hopefully keep you from being able to open further credit card accounts while paying off your debt, there is no permanent negative notation on your credit. All lenders (mortgage, auto, etc.) view such programs differently, but the trend is to see bona fide credit counseling as a step in the positive direction.
 - **Tip:** When you feel your finances are slipping out of control, the sooner you talk to a nonprofit credit counselor, the better. They may simply provide you with educational programs to help you pay down your debt on your own. Otherwise, their Debt Management Program (a monthly consolidated payment with generally better terms on your accounts) may help you avoid settlements or even bankruptcy, both of which have long term (and possibly even permanent) negative impact on your financial life.
- **Myth:** We’re experiencing an epidemic in this country of poor credit.
 - **Reality:** According to data from the leading credit scoring company (FICO), about half of all credit scores are in the 725-850 range. This means that about half of those with a credit score have excellent credit. However, looking at it the other way, that also means that HALF of us have less than excellent credit and are likely paying more for our loans than we would if we had excellent credit. So while it may not be an “epidemic,” it certainly is concerning.
 - **Tip:** Share your knowledge of credit and credit scores with the next generation (children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, neighbors) so they can avoid the pitfalls of poor credit.
- **Myth:** Credit is too complicated to figure out.
 - **Reality:** In its simplicity, your credit is an indication of how you’ve honored your financial obligations in the past seven to ten years.
 - **Tip:** Anyone wanting to understand the specifics of their credit can take advantage of the educational services (classes, counseling, and materials) provided by a nonprofit credit counselor. There are also some great, free online resources (see the end of this booklet).

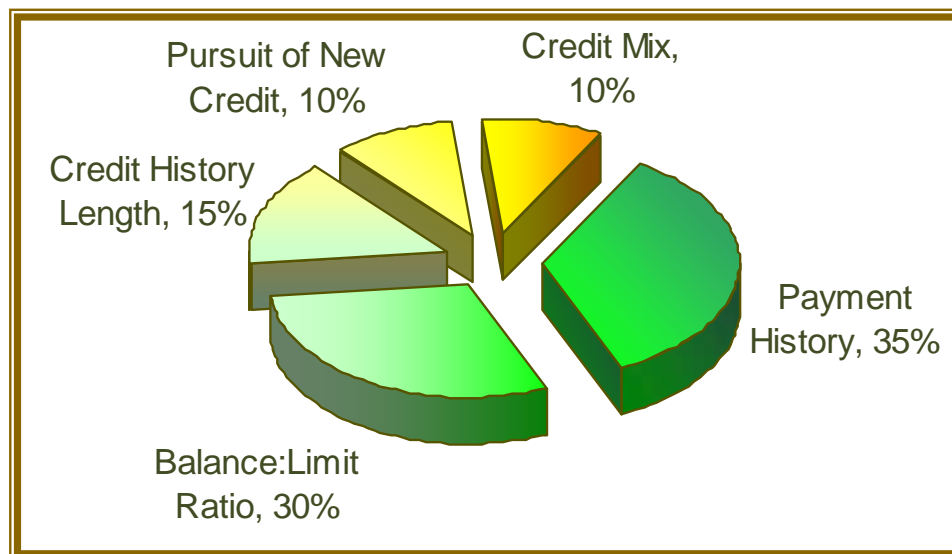
Why Should I Care about My Credit?

Credit (an agreement to repay a loan over time) is pervasive in our society. What used to be the exclusive privilege of the wealthy has only in the past half century or so become available to the masses. From buying a home or car to purchasing a burger, shake and fries, credit – whether in the form of a loan and a credit card – has become a familiar sight just about everywhere anything of value exchanges hands.

As credit's popularity increases, so too do the purposes for which businesses use an individual's personal credit history as a tool in making business choices. Decision-makers that are influenced to one degree or another by how an individual has used and managed their credit accounts include the following:

1. Mortgage lenders: An individual's credit history will play a deciding factor in whether the individual qualifies for a loan, what the terms will be, and whether the individual qualifies for advantageous programs.
2. Automobile loan lenders: An individual's credit history will play a deciding factor in whether the individual qualifies for a loan as well as what the terms will be.
3. Landlords: An individual's credit history may play a deciding factor in whether landlord approves the individual's request for occupancy.
4. Employers: An individual's credit history may play a deciding factor in whether the individual gets a job offer, even if their resume is impeccable and their interviews go flawlessly.
5. Insurance: An individual's credit history can play a large roll in determining the monthly premium they pay for car insurance and/or home owners insurance. An individual with very poor credit may be denied life insurance all together.
6. Utilities and Cell Phones: An individual's credit history can play a large roll in determining whether the individual can qualify for an account as well as the amount of "security deposit" the company requires.

Components of Your Credit Score



Top 10 Tips to Strengthening Your Credit Score

The *Guiding Principle* behind each of the following tips is to manage and use your credit wisely: pay your debts according to the terms you have signed and avoid excessive debt.

- Tip #10: Check your credit report at least annually for mistakes and inaccuracies. Go to www.AnnualCreditReport.com to print or download your free report for each of the three national credit reporting agencies. If you want your credit score as well, you will be required to pay for it. Checking your own credit report in this way will not harm your credit.
- Tip #9: Live within an established budget and replace poor spending habits with disciplined spending. Balance your checkbook regularly to avoid bouncing checks.
- Tip #8: Know your credit limit and stay away from it. “Maxing out” your credit cards can hurt your credit score.
- Tip #7: Stay in contact with the creditor when troubles arise with an account. Work in good faith to pay as agreed, or consider arranging a modified payment plan. Accounts in collections or charged off will negatively affect your score for at least 7 years. When you struggle making even minimum payments, contact a reputable credit counseling organization such as Debt Reduction Services.
- Tip #6: Avoid applying for a lot of new credit accounts within a short period, particularly if you have little or no credit history. See next tip.
- Tip #5: Don't be afraid of credit counseling. In 1998, FICO dropped credit counseling as a factor influencing the credit scoring model, in part because we've learned that individuals can actually become less of a credit risk when they receive bona fide credit counseling (Michael Staten. Georgetown University. March 2002).
- Tip #4: Don't close accounts in good standing as a “quick fix.” Information from any account, whether closed or open, remains on your credit report for 7 years.
- Tip #3: Pay down the total balances owed on your credit accounts. Don't just transfer money from one card to another. Make it a goal to avoid purchasing anything on a credit card you won't pay off with the next credit card statement.
- Tip #2: Get current on your credit accounts. If you've missed or been late on payments, find a way to get caught up. It will take 6 months of on-time payments, but negative effects of late or missed payments decrease over time.
- Tip #1: Pay all of your bills on time and in full every month. If you have secure access to the Internet, consider paying your bills online to avoid mail delivery delays.

Disclaimer: Score modeling may vary from lender to lender. Because of the complicated nature of the statistical models and abundance of information on credit reports, these tips cannot be considered guarantees to improving your score.

Credit: Definitions of Basics Terms & Concepts

- APR: Annual Percentage Rate. Total costs of a loan on an annual basis, including *interest* charges, annual fees, *points*, and other finance charges.
- Asset: Anything of monetary, commercial or exchange value that is owned by a person or entity.
- Balance Transfers: The movement of the balance of one *credit card* account to another credit card account. *Debtor* should be aware of processing time, late fees if former account is not paid on time, alternative interest rates and terms if *debtor* does not qualify for those advertised, requirements to maintain advertised rates, and any transfer fees.
- Card (ATM): A card used in an ATM (Automated Teller Machine) for cash withdrawals, funds transfers, account inquiries, and other banking services.
- Card (Credit): A credit card allows you to make partial payments for purchases, but charges *interest* on the amount owed. You can also pay your balance off in full to avoid *interest* payments. Banks and other card issuers set *interest* rates and fees.
- Card (Charge): A card which requires that the balance be paid in full each month.
- Card (Debit): A card whose funds are withdrawn directly from the cardholder's checking account.
- Card (Gas or Oil): A *credit card* used at a specific gas station or chain of stations. E.g. Chevron.
- Card (Retail): A *credit card* used at a specific retail store or chain of stores. E.g. Sears.
- Cash Advance: A cash withdrawal from a *credit card* account. Such advances are NOT given a *grace period*. Instead, *interest* begins accruing the day the advance is made.
- Credit Report: The accumulation of an individual's *credit*-related information, including their credit history (account opening date, payment history, limit, balance, type of account, etc), public record information, and credit inquiries. Accounts remain on report for 7 years; Inquires for 2 years; Most bankruptcies for 10 years. Also called credit record, credit history or credit file.
- Credit Score: A statistical model for determining an individual's *credit* worthiness. The highest possible score using the most common model (FICO) is 850. Generally, 35% of score is based on payment history, 30% on *Debt*-to-Income ratio, 15% on Length of *Credit History*, 10% on Credit Mix, 10% on New Credit Applications.
- Credit: An individual's reputation for meeting their financial obligations, particularly with regards to loans, credit cards, and other lines of credit.
- Creditor: Individual or entity that lends money to another individual or entity.
- Debt (Secured): *Debt* that identifies specific assets that can be taken over by the *creditor* in case of default by the *debtor*. E.g. car loans, Mortgages, Title Loans.
- Debt (Unsecured): *Debt* that does not identify specific assets that can be taken over by the *creditor* in case of default by the *debtor*.
- Debtor: Individual or entity that borrows money from another individual or entity.
- Grace Period: The period of time, generally 20-25 days, from the billing date of the previous *credit card* bill to the due date of current bill, when payment can be made in full without being charged *interest*. Some cards do not offer a grace period. Others only have a grace period if there was no outstanding balance on the account at the start of the billing cycle. Generally, there is no grace period for *cash advances*.
- Interest: A fee (usually calculated as a percentage of the balance) charged by a *creditor* for the privilege of borrowing money on *credit*.
- OAC: On Approved Credit. Most premium offers (best rates) specifying "OAC" require a superb *credit score* to qualify.
- Points: Lender fees based on the loan amount, above and beyond the regular *interest* payments. Each point equals one percent of the loan amount and is paid at the beginning of the loan.
- Principal: The balance of a loan currently owed to the creditor.

Credit Cards, Interest, and Money: Did You Know...?

1. The average APR in 2008 for standard credit cards is over 13%. APRs for college student cards average 3 to 4 points higher.
2. The average APR for all credit card holders is over 17%.
3. Roughly 1 in 3 credit card holders makes only the minimum monthly payment and carries a balance from month to month.
4. Roughly 1 in 3 credit card holders makes more the monthly minimum payment but still carries a balance from month to month.
5. Roughly 1 in 3 credit card holders pays off their entire credit card balance every month.
6. Over half of Americans have at least one credit card whose balance they do not pay in full every month.
7. The average American household has over \$9,500 in credit card debt. For households carrying a balance from monthly to month, with an average APR of 16%, they will pay \$1,500 per year just in interest charges to their credit card companies. Even at 10% APR, they will pay nearly \$1,000 in interest!
8. The average undergraduate college student has \$3,000 in credit card debt and an additional \$20,000 in student loan debt when he or she graduates.
9. The average credit card debt as a percentage of household income is 8.0%.
10. Four out of ten Americans (40%) admit to living beyond their means. (US Treasury)
11. Credit card payments are applied toward the lowest interest-bearing portion of credit card balances first, meaning high-interest portions such as cash advances are last to be paid off and generate the highest interest charges for the card holder.

7 Tips for Wise Usage of Credit, Credit Cards and Your Money

1. Make all payments on time. Don't wait until the last minute to send a payment.
2. Pay off the entire balance every month. You'll generally never be charged interest this way.
3. Avoid credit cards that charge an annual fee and excessive penalty fees.
4. Build an emergency savings fund you can use to pay off your credit card bill in case you need to make a large purchase on credit (such as car repairs or an unexpected medical or dental expense) or you lose your income. Most financial planners suggest putting 10-15% of your net income away until you have a minimum of three-months of expenses available to you when you need it, though six is not uncommon.
5. Never make a purchase on credit you do not plan to pay off at the end of the month.
6. Cars and trucks wear out. Plan now to buy your next vehicle by depositing \$200 to \$300 per month into a separate interest earning account. This will minimize (or hopefully eliminate) your need to borrow money to buy your next car. Consider buying a "recently-new" car, still under warranty, instead of a brand new vehicle.
7. Avoid high-interest and high-fee payday loans and title loan services.

2. Financial Danger Zone

Easy Credit, Lasting Pain

How Payday, Title, Pawn, and Other Expensive Loans Work

When we regularly spend more than we earn, we go deeper and deeper into debt. As consumers, we often look for “quick-fix” solutions to our debt and for ways to continue surviving from paycheck to paycheck. Often, however, what starts out as a seemingly innocent idea quickly deteriorates into severe financial problems. Following are examples of such “quick-fix” solutions

Payday Loans

Although illegal in some states, payday loan and check cashing companies are popular options for obtaining small loans across most of the United States. These businesses have surfaced in strip malls, shopping centers and even gas stations. They come, however, with a hefty price because of the fees charged. The annualized interest rates of these loans can range from 340% to over 1000%, depending upon the company you choose, how much cash you want to borrow, and how long you take to repay the loan. Loans are repaid with one lump sum at the end of the term. Payday lenders often take the payment directly and automatically out of the borrower’s checking account. Furthermore, some reports indicate that the average first-time payday loan borrower will have taken out EIGHT payday loans within a year!

Title Loans

These short-term (often 30-day) loans are typically tied to a vehicle that, if the loan is not repaid as agreed, can be repossessed and sold. Typical interest rates range from 100% to 200% or more. Loans generally do not exceed 50% of the value of the vehicle and are repaid with one lump sum at the end of the term. Otherwise, the lender (who usually collects a key to the car at the front end of the loan) may repossess the vehicle. Borrowers need to be aware of additional “hidden” fees that some lenders try to charge. In states where title loans are explicitly illegal, they may still exist under names like, “Sales and Leasebacks” or “Car Pawns.”

Rent-to-Own

Establishments that offer furniture, appliances, and A/V equipment on a rent-to-own basis often end up charging total payments that work out to be 100% to 700% of the actual retail cost. That means that if the consumer were to be patient for one year, putting those same payments in their savings, they could purchase two to seven equivalent items plus have earned some interest in the bank. Consumers should also keep in mind that the payments advertised by these establishments are usually weekly payments, not the typical monthly payment of other loans. Moreover, if just one weekly payment is missed, the store may take back the item and the consumer will lose the value of all previously-made payments.

Tax Refund Anticipation Loan

Some tax filing businesses will offer what is called a “Tax RAL,” (Refund Anticipation Loan). They offer their customers the opportunity to walk out that same day with 50% of their refund as a loan, with the remaining balance available the very next day.

Unfortunately, the remaining balance does not equal 50% of the anticipated refund.

Instead, the business charges a hefty fee that can equal an annualized interest rate of 40% all the way to 700%! Tax payers should instead consider the value of being patient and having their refunds deposited directly into their checking accounts within two weeks.

Pawn Loans

Getting a loan through a pawn shop will usually mean that you're paying an annualized interest rate of around 100%. These loans are typically for a short period, often just 30 days. Loans of around \$70-100 are usually made on household items, though they can be for as little as \$20 or as much as several thousand dollars, depending upon what is being pawned.

It is often the case that once an individual begins depending upon such short term and expense loans, they become stuck in a vicious financial downward spiral. Unable to pay the original loan amount and the fee when they are due, the individual may unwisely find another similar loan elsewhere to borrow even more money in order to repay the original loan. In a matter of just a few months, the fees alone can be equal to or greater than the original amount of money borrowed.

While these loans are already difficult to justify, they too often result from poor money management or from poor judgment in frivolous expenses such as frequent dining out, expensive entertainment, and new consumer goods.

Scams and Rip-Offs

“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”

If more consumers made this their mantra when faced with financial decisions, there would be very few successful scams and rip-off in this world. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Thanks to the Internet and quick and easy banking options, fraud and scams have been increasing exponentially around the globe in recent years.

Here is a list of various types of scammers, with descriptions of what they attempt to do, as well as a few basics suggestions to help you avoid becoming their latest victim:

- **Pickpockets** take your wallet or purse, not just for the money it may contain but to use credit cards and to steal your identity.
Tip: Minimize the credit cards and ID cards you carry on your person. NEVER keep your social security card in your purse or wallet.
- **Dumpster Divers** rummage through outdoor trash bins to collect account numbers from bank and credit card statements, as well as any other personally identifying information they could use to open new accounts.
Tip: A good paper shredder is your best friend.
- **Shoulder Surfers** spy on you at ATM machines and cashier stands to steal the PIN to your debit, ATM, or credit card.
Tip: Make sure others are not standing too close to you when you enter your PIN. Consider covering the keypad with your free hand. Never leave receipts in the machine or in the trash.
- **Skimmers** use hand-held card readers to steal credit card data at stores, shops or restaurants.
Tip: Keep an eye on your card and on the cashier or server. Paying with cash is one sure way to avoid your credit card information being stolen.
- **Phishing Freaks** call or send emails using some pretext to ask for your account information. Whether it's to “confirm” your account information or to “notify you” that you've been approved for a credit limit increase, these scammers are good at getting us to divulge vital financial and identifying information.
Tip: NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER give information about your credit card, bank account, social security, driver's license or any other such records to someone who contacts you. Even if they already know your credit card number, that doesn't mean they are actually from your credit card company. Always ask for their name and offer to call them back through the company's customer service department.
- **Hackers** get your information by monitoring your transactions with unsecured sites on the Internet.
Tip: Make sure that any site asking for credit card or bank account information is secured. There are two ways of knowing that you are on a secured site. First, if the site's URL (the address usually found at the top of your browser) starts with https (and not just http), then the “s” indicates it's a secure page. Otherwise, look for a small “lock” icon at the bottom of your browser, next to the Internet icon of the world. The icon looks like a pad lock or key lock. If both the secure URL and the secure icon are missing, do not submit any financial or personal information to the web site.

- **Flaggers** steal your mail, looking for bank and credit card checks, statements and even credit card offers to use. They can “wash” your ink form outgoing checks and then rewrite their own information to cash in. They can also use card offers to open of accounts with your personal information but at another address.
Tip: NEVER put checks in your mailbox unless it can be locked. Putting the red flag up can literally an indication to these scammers to take what’s in your mailbox. If you don’t have a locking mailbox, drop your outgoing mail in a US Postal Service blue mailbox. Or, better yet, make your payments online directly with the creditor (just read the Hackers paragraph above first).
- **Directors** complete and submit a change-of-address form with the US Postal Service to redirect your mail or their bills.
Tip: If you notice that bills are missing, check with your creditor to verify the address. Notify your local post office if you suspect that your mail has been fraudulently redirected.
- **Posers** introduce themselves to you (at the door, online or otherwise) as your landlord or someone else who has lawful right to certain information or even to enter your home.
Tip: If you don’t know them, don’t let them in, especially if their visit is unexpected. You should certainly never give personal or financial information to someone knocking at your door or chatting with you online. Call their main office to confirm what they are saying. If you’re still uncertain, ask them to set an appointment and take the time to investigate their claims.
- **Insiders** buy information from an inside source or get it from your personnel records at work.
Tip: While you can’t do much about preventing many types of insiders, you can minimize the possibility of being one of their victims. Many “insiders” turn out to be neighbors or even family members. Don’t leave financial information in places where visitors or family members may easily find it. There is a disturbing and growing trend of both parents and adolescent or young adult children using the personal information of family members to open credit cards and other accounts for their own personal use.

UNIVERSAL ANTI-FRAUD TIP:

Check your credit report regularly by visiting www.AnnualCreditReport.com every four months or so to get a free, no-strings-attached credit report from one of the three main nationwide credit bureaus. Dispute directly with the credit bureau any item that you don’t recognize or that may be in error.

If you become a victim of identity theft, see the Federal Trade Commission’s site on fighting back at www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft.

4. Resources

Internet Resources

- ABA Education Foundation: www.aba.com/ABAEF
- American Savings Education Council: www.ChooseToSave.org
- Bankrate: www.BankRate.com
- Bankruptcy Basics (US Bankruptcy Court): www.uscourts.gov/bankruptcycourts/bankruptcybasics.html
- Better Business Bureau (Scam & Fraud under “Alerts”): www.bbb.org
- Choice Nerd: www.ChoiceNerd.com
- Citi Financial Education: <http://curriculum.FinancialEducation.citigroup.com>
- CNN Money: <http://money.cnn.com/pf>
- Community Action Partnership: www.ManagingMyMoney.com
- Consumer Jungle: www.ConsumerJungle.org
- Credit Abuse Resistance Education (US Bankruptcy Courts): www.careprogram.us
- Credit Bureaus
 - Equifax: www.Equifax.com
 - Experian: www.Experian.com
 - TransUnion: www.TransUnion.com
- Credit Union Personal Finance Tips: www.creditunion.coop
- Debt Reduction Services Inc:
 - Blog: www.debtreductionservices.com/blog
 - Facebook: www.facebook.com/DebtReductionServices
 - Twitter: http://twitter.com/debt_helpers
 - YouTube: www.youtube.com/debtredemptionvideos
 - Web: www.DebtReductionServices.org
 - Tel: (877) 688-3328
- Gamblers Anonymous: www.gamblersanonymous.org
- Emergency Financial First Aid Kit: www.OperationHope.org/effak
- Federal Reserve Education: www.FederalReserveEducation.org
- Federal Trade Commission: www.ftc.gov/bcp/menus/consumer/credit.shtm
- Financial Football: www.WhatsMyScore.org/games/ff
- Financial Fundamentals (JP Morgan Chase): <http://bit.ly/avo9XR>
- Financial Life Planning Center (Key Bank): www.key.com/html/savings-resources-planning.html
- Financial Soccer: www.financialsoccer.com
- Financial Tools Center (Bank of America): <http://learn.bankofamerica.com>
- Freddie Mac: www.freddiemac.com/corporate/buyown/english/preparing/right_for_you
- Free Annual Credit Report: www.AnnualCreditReport.com
 - Tel: (877) 322-8228
- Hands On Banking/El future en tus manos: www.HandsOnBanking.org

Internet Resources

- HIP Pocket Change: www.USMint.gov/kids
- HUD's Hope for Homeowners: www.hud.gov/hopeforhomeowners
- Investing for Students: www.InvestingForStudents.org
- Jump\$start Coalition: www.JumpStart.org
- Kiplinger: www.kiplinger.com/money
- Liz Pulliam Weston: <http://asklizweston.com>
- Military Financial Education: www.pioneerservices.com/PioneerServices/finEducation.do
- Mind Your Money: <http://bit.ly/c1pztI>
- Money Savvy Generation: www.msge.com
- Money Smart (FDIC): www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart
- Money\$marks for Girl Scouts: www.girlscouts.org/moneysmarks
- MoneyTrack PBS: www.MoneyTrack.org
- Motley Fool: Educate, Amuse, Enrich[®]: www.fool.com
- MSN Money Central: <http://moneycentral.msn.com/personal-finance>
- Council for Economic Education: www.councilforeconed.org
- National Endowment for Financial Education: www.nefe.org
- National Financial Education Center
 - Blog: day2daymoney.wordpress.com
 - Twitter: twitter.com/MoneyDay2Day
 - Web: www.NationalFinancialEducationCenter.org
 - Tel: (877) 688-3328
- Native Financial Education Coalition: www.nfec.info
- Northwest Education Loan Association (College & Loans): www.nela.net
- Oprah's Debt Diet: www.oprah.com/subtopic/money/debt
- Planet Orange: www.orangekids.com
- Practical Money Skills for Life: www.PracticalMoneySkills.com
- Social Security Retirement Benefits Estimator: www.socialsecurity.gov/estimator
- The Mint: www.TheMint.org
- US Financial Literacy and Education Commission: <http://MyMoney.gov>
- What's My Score: www.WhatsMyScore.org
- Yahoo! Finance: <http://finance.yahoo.com/personal-finance>
- Your Financial Organizer: www.tiaa-cref.org/pubs/html/financial_organizer

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