

# Credit Reports & Credit Scores



## Why is it so important to have a good credit history and a good credit score?

Today's economy runs on credit. If you want to get a mortgage loan for a house, or a student loan to pay for college, or if you just want to get a credit card, a company is extending credit to you.

Your creditworthiness is defined by your three-digit credit score, also known as a FICO score, and is the key to your financial life. Good credit can be the make-or-break detail that determines whether you'll get a mortgage, car loan or student loan. Bad credit, on the other hand, will make it more difficult for you to get a line of credit (loan or credit card), and can also affect your car insurance premium rates.

Your credit information can also be a factor in whether or not you can rent an apartment or house, how much you pay for car insurance, or whether or not you get a job. Landlords, insurers and employers frequently use credit information to see if the people they are dealing with are reliable and responsible.

Bad credit can suggest you're a risky bet. While defects on your credit report may only show the details of how you deal with debt, this information can also reveal characteristics from other life situations, such as you may be just as irresponsible driving a car, taking care of an apartment or showing up for a job

The importance of maintaining good credit can signify that your financial situation - and the rest of your life - is on the right track.

Below are some additional {legitimate} resources that you may find helpful:

### The Three Credit Reporting Agencies:

[www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com)

[www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)

[www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)

### A Free Credit Report may be obtained at:

[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) (this site will not give you your FICO score)

**To obtain your FICO score:**

[www.myfico.com](http://www.myfico.com)

## **Fixing defects on your Credit Report (Per the Federal Trade Commission)**

If your credit history has been adversely affected by bankruptcy, short sale or foreclosure, or debts that have gone to collection, please know there is a way to fix it, and with a positive attitude and a good financial plan, your creditworthiness can be restored, as well as your credit score.

Is there information on your credit report that's correct — just not so good? No one promising to repair your credit can legally remove information if it's both accurate and current. Sometimes companies will say they can help, but many are scams. Still, there are ways to fix mistakes and improve your credit. Here's what you need to know about fixing your credit.

### **Your Credit History**

#### **What makes my credit good or bad?**

Whether you have good or bad credit is based on your credit history. Find out what your credit history looks like by checking your credit report. Your credit report has information about whether you pay your bills on time, what loans and credit cards you have (and the amounts you owe), and whether you've filed for bankruptcy.

The more positive information you have in your credit report, like on-time payments and low credit card balances, the better your credit will be.

#### **What happens if there's negative information in my credit report?**

Credit bureaus sell the information in your report to businesses that use it to decide whether to loan you money, give you credit, offer you insurance, or rent or sell you a home. Some employers use credit reports to decide whether to hire you. Whether you have a good or bad credit history also affects how much you'll have to pay to borrow money. If there's a lot of negative information in your report, you might have to pay more in interest.

#### **Can I get negative information removed from my credit report if it's true?**

Usually not. Companies that promise to repair your credit can't remove true information. But negative information does go away over time.

Most negative information will stay on your report for seven years, and bankruptcy information will stay on for 10 years. And in some cases — like when you're being considered for a job paying more than \$75,000 a year, or you're trying to get a loan or insurance valued at more than \$150,000 — a credit bureau may include older negative information on your report that wouldn't show up otherwise.

## **Your Free Credit Reports**

### **How do I know what's in my credit report?**

All three nationwide credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion) have permanently extended a program that lets everyone in the U.S. check their credit report from each once a week for free at [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com).

In addition, each nationwide credit bureau is required to give you a free copy of your credit report once every 12 months if you ask for it at [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com), or by calling 1-877-322-8228. Otherwise, a credit bureau may charge you a reasonable amount for another copy of your report within a 12-month period.

While you're able to get all three bureaus' reports at once, you might think about spreading them out. Some financial advisors say staggering your requests can help you keep an eye on whether the information in your reports is accurate and complete. But since each credit bureau gets its information from different sources, the information in one credit bureau's report might not be completely the same as information in your other credit reports from the other two credit bureaus.

Also, through 2026, everyone in the U.S. can get six free credit reports per year by visiting the Equifax website or by calling 1-866-349-5191. That's in addition to the one free Equifax report (plus your Experian and TransUnion reports) you get at [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com).

You're also able to get another free report each year if

- You're unemployed and plan to look for a job within 60 days.
- You're on public assistance (like welfare).
- Your report is inaccurate because of fraud, including identity theft.
- If you think someone might be using your personal information to open accounts, file taxes, or buy things, go to [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov) to report it and get a personalized recovery plan.

### **What happens if a company takes a negative action against me because of something in my credit report?**

Be sure to check your reports before you apply for credit, a loan, insurance, or a job. If you find mistakes in your credit report, contact the credit bureaus and the business that supplied the information about you to get the mistakes removed.

When a company takes "adverse action" against you, like turning you down for credit or a job, because of something in your credit report, you're entitled to another free credit report. To get it, ask for it within 60 days of getting notified about the action. The company must send you a notice that includes the name, address, and phone number of the credit bureau that gave the company your credit report, so you'll know which credit bureau to ask.

## **What if I see a mistake on my credit report?**

Dispute it. Disputing mistakes or outdated things on your credit report is free. Both the credit bureau and the business that supplied the information about you to a credit bureau are responsible for correcting inaccurate or incomplete information in your report. If possible, wait until the mistake is removed and the information in your report is accurate, complete, and up to date before you apply for a loan for a big purchase like a house or car, buy insurance, or apply for a job.

## **How do I dispute mistakes on my credit report?**

Write letters to the credit bureau and the business that reported the information about you. Use these sample letters for credit bureaus and businesses to help write your own. Read [Disputing Errors on Your Credit Report](#) for more.

## **Is there anything else to do to improve my credit?**

It takes time, but you'll be able to improve your credit by

- paying your bills by the due date
- paying off debt — especially on your credit cards
- not taking on new debt
- Paying bills on time and having low balances can help you build a solid credit history.

## **What if I'm in debt and need help?**

If you're in debt and need help, a reputable credit counseling organization might be able to help. Good credit counselors spend time discussing your entire financial situation with you before coming up with a personalized plan to solve your money problems. They won't promise to fix all your problems or ask you to pay a lot of money before doing anything.

There may be non-profit credit counseling programs offered through:

- credit unions
- universities
- military personal financial managers
- Cooperative Extension Service branches

## **Credit Repair**

### **What's a credit repair company?**

People hire credit repair companies to help them investigate mistakes on their credit reports. But credit repair companies can't remove negative information that's accurate and current from your credit report.

## **Is using a credit repair company a good idea?**

Anything a credit repair company can do legally, you'll be able to do for yourself for little or no cost. The best way to improve your credit is to show over time that you pay your debts on time.

## **Are there rules for credit repair companies?**

It's illegal for credit repair companies to lie about what they can do for you, or charge you before they help you. Credit repair companies must also explain your legal rights in a written contract that details:

- the services they'll perform
- your three-day right to cancel without any charge (and give you a written cancellation form)
- how long it will take to get results
- the total cost you'll pay
- any results they guarantee
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## **How do I know if I'm dealing with a credit repair scam?**

Here's how to know if you're dealing with a scammy credit repair company:

- Scammers insist you pay them before they help you.
- Scammers tell you not to contact the credit bureaus directly.
- Scammers tell you to dispute information in your credit report you know is accurate.
- Scammers tell you to lie on your applications for credit or a loan.
- Scammers tell you to file a false identity theft report.
- Scammers don't explain your legal rights when they tell you what they can do for you.

These are not just bad ideas, they're also scams — and they'll hurt your credit if you buy into the scam. If a company promises to create a new credit identity or hide your bad credit history or bankruptcy, that's also a scam. These companies often use stolen Social Security numbers, or they get people to apply for Employer Identifications Numbers (EINs) from the IRS under false pretenses. They do that to create new credit reports. If you use a number other than your own to apply for credit, you won't get it. And you could face fines or prison.

## **What To Do if You Paid a Scammer**

Scammers often ask you to pay in ways that make it tough to get your money back — like using cryptocurrency, wiring money through a company like MoneyGram or Western Union, or putting money on a gift card and then giving them the number on the back. No matter how you paid a scammer, the sooner you act, the better. Learn more about how to try to get your money back

## **Report Credit Repair Scams**

If you have a problem with a credit repair company, or if you see a scam, fraud, or bad business practice, report it to:

- the FTC at <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov/>
- your state attorney general
- your state's consumer protection office
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This information is current as of October 2025, please visit <https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/fixing-your-credit-faqs> for current information.