

Tool 1:

Getting your credit reports and scores

Getting your reports

Getting your credit report is the first step to improving your credit. It is important to think about credit, because a good credit history can help you:

- Get and keep a job
- Get and keep a security clearance for a job, including a military position
- Get an apartment
- Get insurance coverage
- Get lower deposits on utilities and better terms on cell phone purchase plans
- Get a credit card
- Get loan from a bank or credit union including a loan for a house (a mortgage)
- Get a better credit score—all of the information used to calculate your score comes from credit reports

If any of these things are important to you, improving your credit report can help you get them.

Start with your free annual report

You can get a free copy of your report from each of three biggest nationwide credit reporting companies and many other credit reporting companies every 12 months.

Some states and territories allow for an additional free report each year: Colorado, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Vermont and Puerto Rico.

You can get an additional free report if you:

- Are unemployed and plan to look for employment in the next 60 days
- Are receiving public assistance
- Have been the victim of fraud including identity theft
- Have had adverse action taken (you have been denied credit, employment, insurance, etc.) because of information in your credit report. In this case, you have 60 days to request your report.

To order through the website, visit <https://www.annualcreditreport.com>. You will complete a form with basic information (your name, Social Security number, address, etc.). You will select the report(s) you want—Equifax, Experian, and/or TransUnion.

Then for each report, you will be asked a series of security questions such as: former addresses, amount of a loan you have, phone numbers that have belonged to you, counties you may have lived in, etc. Note that each credit reporting company has a slightly different process to “authenticate” you, or make sure you are you who say you are. If you are unable to answer these questions, you may want to try requesting your report from a different company. You may find that you will have to use another method.

Once the site has confirmed your identity, you can download and save a PDF version of your report, print the report, or both.


Be sure you do this in a safe and secure location. Avoid doing this on public computers, such as those at a library.

Alternative methods

Order by phone: (877) 322-8228. You will go through a verification process over the phone.

Order by mail: Download the request form from <https://www.annualcreditreport.com>. Print and complete the form. Mail the completed form to:
Annual Credit Report Request Service

P.O. Box 105281
Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

 Track when you have printed or received your credit reports

Source of credit report	Equifax PO Box 740241 Atlanta, GA 30374 www.equifax.com	Experian www.experian.com	TransUnion LLC PO Box 1000 Chester, PA 19016 www.transunion.com
Date report printed or received			

Beware of imposter websites offering free credit reports. Some companies offer free credit reports, but you may have to buy another product or service to get it. DO NOT use a search engine (Google or Yahoo, for example) to find the annual credit report site. Go directly to: <https://www.annualcreditreport.com> or go through <http://www.consumerfinance.gov>.

If you are under 18, you should not have a credit report unless:

- You are an authorized user or joint owner on an account
- You are an emancipated minor
- Your state law allows you to enter contracts below the age of 18, and you have done so
- You have student loans
- You have been the victim of identity theft and credit or financial fraud

Currently, only Experian allows minors (once they reach the age of 14) to obtain their own credit reports. Call (888) 397-3742 to get your file.

With TransUnion, you can send an email to childidtheft@transunion.com to see if a credit file exists. Or you can visit the TransUnion website and complete the Child Identity Theft Inquiry Form. If the minor has a legitimate credit history (he or she is the joint owner of or an authorized user on an account), then a parent or guardian must order the report.

For the Equifax report, call (877) 784-2528. Currently, an adult—the parent or legal guardian—must order the credit report on behalf of the minor.⁶⁷

Getting your credit scores

Unlike your credit report, which you can get at no cost to you, you usually have to pay for your credit score. There are certain instances in which you are entitled to your credit score for free, for example if you are denied a loan on the basis of your credit score. In addition, one of your lenders, such as your credit card company, may participate in a program that provides free FICO scores on statements.⁶⁸

There are many credit scores you can purchase in the marketplace. The type of credit score most used by lenders is a FICO score. Another score also used by lenders is the Vantage Score, which you can purchase through Experian or TransUnion.

Credit scores offered online are approximations of your scores. They are not the actual scores businesses will use to make decisions about you. However, some people find they can be useful for education. You can generally see if your credit scores are moving up or down. But the actual number may not reflect your actual FICO Scores. So this may be confusing.

You cannot know ahead of time whether the scores you purchase will vary moderately or significantly from a score sold to creditors. You should not rely on credit scores you purchase exclusively as a guide to how creditors will view your credit quality. **Knowing what is in your credit report and fixing errors is more important to building your credit than buying a credit score that may not tell you what you need to know before you apply for a loan.**

⁶⁷ See http://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/201405_cfpb_tipsheet_youth-good-credit.pdf.

⁶⁸ See <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/blog/millions-of-consumers-will-now-have-access-to-credit-scores-and-reports-through-nonprofit-counselors/>.

Tracking when you ordered scores

To order your FICO score visit <http://www.myfico.com>

There may be a cost for each score you order. These companies also offer other credit reporting and monitoring services for a fee.

Equifax score:	Date:
Experian score:	Date:
TransUnion score:	Date:

You have the right to get a free credit scores if:

- You apply for a mortgage loan and the lender uses your credit score. The lender must send you a notice telling you this and include your score.
- Your application for credit is turned down and the lender used your credit score. You will get a notice (disclosure) from the provider explaining this with your credit score.
- You get less favorable terms from a lender than the terms available to most people who get credit from that lender, and the lender used your credit score. You will get a notice (disclosure) from the provider explaining this with your credit score.

This tool is included in the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s toolkit. The CFPB has prepared this material as a resource for the public. This material is provided for educational and information purposes only. It is not a replacement for the guidance or advice of an accountant, certified financial advisor, or otherwise qualified professional. The CFPB is not responsible for the advice or actions of the individuals or entities from which you received the CFPB educational materials. The CFPB’s educational efforts are limited to the materials that CFPB has prepared.

This tool may ask you to provide sensitive personal and financial information. The CFPB does not collect any information from you or the organization using this Tool. The CFPB is not responsible and has no control over how others may use the information that you provide to them about your personal or financial situation. The CFPB recommends that you do not include names or account numbers and that users follow their organization’s policies regarding retention, storage, and disposal of documents that contain personal information.