

HOW TO CHECK YOUR CREDIT REPORTS

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Terms you'll encounter:

Account: any charge account, credit card, or loan appearing in a credit file, a.k.a. an "item"

Consumer: an individual credit applicant, such as you

Consumer dispute: file one with **each** credit bureau that has an erroneous entry in your file. It's the best--and fastest--way to correct mistakes.

Consumer statement: the consumer's brief—100-word maximum—explanation about a negative item. When a subscriber "pulls" a consumer's file, the consumer statement appears *with* her or his credit data.

Credit bureau: a credit-reporting agency, such as the ones listed below. Each credit bureau receives information from *selected* stores and lenders. This is why credit reports from different bureaus seldom contain the same information.

Credit file: a.k.a. a credit report, the data a particular credit bureau has on a particular consumer

Credit grantor: a credit card company, lender, *etc.* which grants or extends credit, a.k.a. a subscriber

Negative: something that looks bad, such as "tax lien", "judgment", or "charge off".

Status: a term appearing in your credit report that describes the timeliness of your payments on a particular account **and** tells if it is still owing, such as:

--Open a.k.a. "current"

--Paid Satisfactory

--Was 30 days delinquent, now current

--Assigned to an attorney or collection agency

Why it's smart to check your credit files:

You never know what may appear in your credit file:

- Mary Member discovered that all of her credit was listed under Mary Member, Sr.!
- Gary Glum, *Jr.* learned that some of Gary Glum, *Sr.*'s bad credit was on his report.
- *Dozens* of members have learned that the bill their spouse, partner, or roommate was supposed to pay was paid late, or left unpaid.
- Some divorced members tell us that the court divided the bills between the spouses. Yet, one failed to keep the agreement. Note: *judges cannot nullify or supersede a loan agreement; lenders still have the right to collect from both parties who signed the loan contract.*
- Annie Applicant's credit is good. Alas, her file contains some of Anne Applicant's bad debts.
- Lorna Lessee's social security # is 123-45-6789. Jane Jumble's is 723-45-6789. Guess whose handwritten "7s" look like "1s"?
- Pat Prompt paid off the mortgage 6 months ago but it still shows \$100,000 owing.

To protect yourself, check your credit report once every year or two. If you're planning to finance a home or car, check it 1 or 2 months *before* you apply.

How much will it will cost you to check your reports?

According to the Federal Consumer Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), it may be *free* if you:

- are unemployed or will apply for a job w/in 60 days
- are receiving public assistance
- think that you have been the victim of credit fraud
- you have had a request for credit or insurance denied in the past 60 days

According to the federal Fair & Accurate Credit Transactions Act (FACT Act) you'll be entitled to a *free copy of your credit report every year*. **Note:** *free reports will not contain credit scores. To obtain your score—probably different with each bureau—you will have to pay. 1-877-322-8228 or www.annualcreditreport.com*

If you are a California resident, you may be eligible for a *free* report if, within the past 60 days, you've been denied:

- employment
- a government license or government benefit

- an application for rental housing

Even if you have to pay a fee: each bureau offers a pack-age deal to check with all 3. Their prices vary. Check first to see: (1) which one charges the least; (2) if would cost less to obtain all 3 separately, or 1 for free 2 for fees.

Check with All 3 Consumer Credit Bureaus:

Equifax (formerly CBI)	Experian (was TRW)
PO Box 740241	PO Box 2104
Atlanta GA 30374	Allen, TX 75013-2104
Ph. 1 (800) 997-2493	Ph. 1 (888) 397-3742
www.equifax.com	www.experian.com

attn: Consumer Disclosure Center

Trans Union LLC

PO Box 1000
Chester, PA 19022
Ph. 1 (800) 888-4213
www.transunion.com

To stop receiving unsolicited offers of credit from all 3 credit bureaus: Tel. 1 888-5-OPT-OUT [567-8688]

Once you have your credit reports:

Make use of these **services, free** to WSFCU members:

- a “translation” of your credit reports, putting them in plain language
- guidance on how to correct what you can and explain what you can’t
- counseling to help you pay less for your credit.