



THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Columbus School of Law
YOU AND YOUR CREDIT

YOUR LIFE IS IN YOUR CREDIT REPORT:

Your credit report includes information about you. Personal information about where you live, how you pay your bills, whether you've been sued, arrested, or if you have ever filed for bankruptcy. It includes your financial information, such as your payment history, amount of debt, credit history, types of credit, and etc. Consumer Reporting Agencies (CRA's) then use the information in your credit report to each calculate your *Credit Score*. As the information in your credit report changes, your credit scores may change as well.

Credit criteria are established by each agency, and the applicant can appeal to the agency with special circumstances. To understand the assessment of your credit rating, the following are general credit requirements employed by some private loan agencies. These are only guidelines. Actual criteria will vary from agency to agency:

1. You are not delinquent on any federal debt and you have no federal liens.
2. You do not have a previous education loan default unless the loan has been either paid in full or satisfactory progress has been made in repaying the loans as determined by the guarantor.
3. You do not have any bankruptcy, foreclosures, repossessions, suits filed, wages garnished, open charge offs, unpaid tax liens, open collection accounts, paid judgments or open judgments reported.
4. You have no payments 90 days past due with in the past 12 months.
5. You have no more that one payment 60 days past due within the past 12 months.
6. You have no more than two payments 30 days past due with in the past 12 months.
7. You have no more than two accounts currently in past due status.

For more information about credit scores please visit: www.myfico.com/CreditEducation/.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING YOUR REPORT:

Your credit report and credit score can affect all aspects of your life so it is important to make sure your credit report is accurate. Whether you are trying to get a home loan, a car loan, insurance, credit cards, or even a cell phone, a lender will review your credit score and determine how much and what terms (down payment, interest rate, etc.) to offer you. The higher credit score you have, the better your offer will be. Begin by requesting a copy of your Credit Report from the top three nationwide CRA's below. Then review and resolve any inaccuracies.

**Equifax Credit
Information Services Inc.**
PO Box 740241
Atlanta, GA 30374-0241
1-800-685-1111
www.equifax.com

Trans Union LLC
Consumer Disclosure Center
PO Box 1000
Chester, PA 19022
1-800-888-4213
www.tuc.com

Experian
National Consumer Assistance Center
PO Box 9600
Allen, TX 75013
1-800-311-4769
www.experian.com/consumer/index.html

YOUR FREE CREDIT REPORT:

A new amendment to the Fair Credit Reporting Act requires each of the nationwide consumer reporting agencies - Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion - to provide you with a free copy of your credit report, at your request, once every 12 months.

Do not contact the three nationwide consumer reporting companies individually. They are providing the free annual credit reports online at www.annualcreditreport.com. You may also request your credit reports via phone and by mail. Please visit the federal trade commission's website (www.ftc.gov/credit/) for more information.

Please note that although the credit reports are free, your credit scores are not. CRA's are not required to disclose your credit scores for free. A small fee is required for that additional service.

INSTRUCTIONS TO RESOLVE ERRONEOUS INFORMATION:

Contact the lending agency directly with any errors (advisably in writing). Depending on the severity of the error, it may take months to update your credit report. Please make sure to obtain written documentation of any resolved errors. You may also need to contact the consumer reporting agency to clear errors off your report. When writing a letter, remember to include:

1. Full name, including middle initial and generation, such as Jr., Sr., II, etc.
2. Social Security Number
3. Date of Birth
4. Current address with zip code
5. Any previous address(es) including zip codes for the past 2 years (if applicable)
6. Phone number
7. Signature
8. Applicable fee

IDENTITY THEFT/ MISTAKEN IDENTITY:

Identity theft has become more prevalent in the era of computers. Although you can't control whether or not you will become a victim, here are a few tips to minimize your risk of identity theft.

- **PASSWORD PROTECT YOUR ACCOUNTS**, especially your credit card, bank, and phone accounts.
(*a suggestion:* Avoid using easily available information like your mother's maiden name, your birth date, the last four digits of your Social Security number or your phone number, or a series of consecutive numbers)
- **ASK ABOUT INFORMATION SECURITY PROCEDURES** in your workplace, at doctor's offices, and other businesses that collect your personally identifying information. Find out who has access to your personal information and verify that it is handled securely. Ask about the disposal procedures for those records as well. Find out if your information will be shared with anyone else. If so, ask how your information can be kept confidential.
- **DEPOSIT YOUR OUTGOING MAIL IN POST OFFICE COLLECTION BOXES**, rather than in an unsecured mailbox.
- **PROMPTLY REMOVE MAIL FROM YOUR MAILBOX**, especially if your mailbox does not have a lock.
(*a suggestion:* If you're planning to be away from home and can not pick up your mail, call the U.S. Postal Service at 1-800-275-8777 to request a vacation hold. The Postal Service will hold your mail at your local post office until you can pick it up or are home to receive it.)
- **TREAT YOUR MAIL AND TRASH CAREFULLY**. Shred items with your personal information on it. This includes charge receipts, copies of credit applications, insurance forms, physician statements, checks and bank statements, expired charge cards that you're discarding, and credit offers you get in the mail.
- **GIVE YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER ONLY WHEN ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY**. Ask to use other types of identifiers.
(*a suggestion:* If your state uses your Social Security number as your driver's license number, as is true in Washington, DC, ask to substitute another number. Do the same if your health insurance company uses your Social Security number as your policy number.)
- **DON'T GIVE OUT PERSONAL INFORMATION ON THE PHONE, THROUGH THE MAIL, OR ON THE INTERNET** unless you've initiated the contact or are sure you know who you're dealing with. Identity thieves have posed as representatives of banks, internet service providers (ISPs), and even government agencies. Confirm that you are dealing with a legitimate organization. Check an organization's website by typing its URL in the address line, rather than cutting and pasting it. Call customer service using the number listed on your account statement or in the telephone book.
- **BE CAUTIOUS WHEN RESPONDING TO PROMOTIONS**. Identity thieves may create phony promotional offers to get you to give them your personal information.

For more information about protecting yourself, minimizing risk and steps to resolve fraudulent reports, please visit the Federal Trade Commission's website at www.consumer.gov/idtheft/.