

Free credit reports

The Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) is enforced by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and requires each nationwide consumer reporting company to provide you with a free copy of your credit report, at your request, once every 12 months. The FCRA also promotes the accuracy and privacy of information in the files of the nation's consumer reporting companies.

A credit report contains information on where you live, how you pay your bills, and whether you have been sued, arrested, or filed for bankruptcy. Consumer reporting companies sell the information in your report to creditors, insurers, employers, and other businesses that use it to evaluate your applications for credit, insurance, employment, or renting a home. The three nationwide consumer reporting companies are Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion.

Most frequently asked questions and the answers about free credit reports:

Q: How do I order my free reports?

A: There are only three authorized ways to order – on line at www.annualcreditreport.com, by calling 877-322-8228, or by completing the Annual Credit Report Request Form (forms can be printed from www.ftc.gov/credit). Do not contact the companies individually for your free credit report.

You may order your reports from one, two or all three nationwide consumer reporting companies at the same time. The law allows you to order one free copy from each of the nationwide consumer reporting companies every 12 months.

A warning about other websites – Only one website is authorized to fill orders for the free annual credit report you are entitled to under the law – annualcreditreport.com. Other websites claim that they offer “free credit reports,” “free credit scores,” or “free credit monitoring” are not part of the legally mandated free annual credit report program. In some cases, the “free” product comes with strings attached. For example, some sites sign you up for a “free” service that converts to one you have to pay for after a trial period. If you do not cancel during the trial period, you may be agreeing to let the company start charging fees to your credit card.

Some of these websites use terms like “free report” in their names; others have addresses that purposely misspell annualcreditreport.com in hope that you mistype the name of the official site; still others advertise so that they appear first in search engines when a person searches for the official site. Some of these sites direct you to other sites that try to sell you something or collect your personal information.

Annualcreditreport.com and the nationwide consumer reporting companies will not send you an email asking for your personal information. If you get an email, see a pop-up, or get a phone call

from someone claiming to be from annualcreditreport.com or any of the three nationwide credit reporting companies, do not reply or click on any link in the message. It is probably a scam.

Q: What information do I have to provide to get my free report?

A: You will need to provide your name, address, Social Security number, and date of birth. If you have moved in the last two years, you may have to provide your previous address. To maintain the security of your file, each nationwide consumer reporting company may ask you for information that only you would know, like the amount of your monthly mortgage payment. Each company may ask you for different questions because the information each has in your file may come from different sources. Requests for further information will be made by mail and not by email or telephone.

If you get an email or see a pop-up ad claiming it is from www.annualcreditreport.com or any of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies, do not reply or click on any link in the message – it is probably a scam. Forward any email that claims to be from www.annualcreditreport.com or any of three consumer reporting companies to the FTC’s database of deceptive spam at spam@uce.gov.

Q: Why would I want to get a copy of my credit report?

A: You may want to review your credit report:

- to make sure the information is accurate, complete, and up-to-date.
- because the information it contains may affect your applications and/or costs for loans, credit, insurance, employment, or renting a home.
- to help guard against identity theft. Identity theft is when someone uses your personal information – like your name, your Social Security number, or your credit card number – to commit fraud. Identity thieves may use your information to open a new credit card account in your name. When they do not pay the bills the delinquent account is reported on your credit report. Inaccurate information like that could affect your ability to get credit, insurance, or even a job.

Q: How long does it take to get my report after I order it?

A: You should be able to access online requests immediately. When ordered by calling toll-free 1-877-322-8228, your report will be mailed within 15 days. When mailing in the Annual Credit Report Request Form, your report will be mailed to you within 15 days of receipt.

It may take longer to receive your report if the nationwide consumer reporting company requests more information to verify your identity before processing.

There may be times when the nationwide consumer reporting companies receive an extraordinary volume of requests. If that happens, you may be asked to resubmit your request or be told that your report will be mailed sometime after 15 days from your request. The nationwide consumer reporting companies will inform you when delays occur.

Q: Are there any other situations where I might be eligible for a free report?

A: Under federal law, you are entitled to a free report if a company takes adverse action against you, such as denying your application for credit, insurance, or employment, and you ask for your report within 60 days of receiving notice of the action. The notice will give you the name, address, and phone number of the consumer reporting company. You are also entitled to one free report a year if you are unemployed and plan to look for a job within 60 days; if you are on welfare; or if your report is inaccurate because of fraud, including identity theft. Otherwise, a consumer reporting company may charge you for another copy of your report within a 12-month period.

Q: Can I purchase additional credit report copies?

A: Yes, by contacting each reporting company:

Equifax Information Services LLC
PO Box 740241
Atlanta, GA 30374
800-685-1111
www.equifax.com

Experian Info Solutions Inc
PO Box 2002
Allen, TX 75013-0036
888-EXPERIAN
(888-397-3742)
www.experian.com

TransUnion LLC
2 Baldwin Place
PO Box 1000
Chester, PA 19022
800-888-4213
www.transunion.com

Q: Should I order a report from each of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies?

A: It is up to you. Because nationwide consumer reporting companies get their information from different sources, the information in your report from one company may not reflect all, or the same, information in your reports from the other two companies. That is not to say that the information in any of your reports is necessarily inaccurate; it just may be different.

Q: Should I order my reports from all three of the nationwide consumer reporting companies at the same time?

A: You may order one, two, or all three reports at the same time, or you may stagger your requests. It is your choice. Some financial advisors say staggering your requests during a 12-month period may be a good way to keep an eye on the accuracy and completeness of the information in your reports.

Q: What if I find errors – either inaccuracies or incomplete information – in my credit report?

A: Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, both the consumer reporting company and the information provider (that is, the person, company, or organization that provides information about you to a consumer reporting company) are responsible for correcting inaccurate or incomplete information in your report. To take advantage of all your rights under this law, contact the consumer reporting company and the information provider.

1. Tell the consumer reporting company, in writing, what information you think is inaccurate.

Consumer reporting companies must investigate the items in question – usually within 30 days – unless they consider your dispute frivolous. They also must forward all the relevant data you provide about the inaccuracy to the organization that provided the information. After the information provider receives notice of a dispute from the consumer reporting company, it must investigate, review the relevant information, and report the results back to the consumer reporting company. If the information provider finds the disputed information is inaccurate, it must notify all three nationwide consumer reporting companies so they can correct the information in your file.

When the investigation is complete, the consumer reporting company must give you the written results and a free copy of your report if the dispute results in a change. (This free report does not count as your annual free report.) If an item is changed or deleted, the consumer reporting company cannot put the disputed information back in your file unless the information provider verifies that it is accurate and complete. The consumer reporting company also must send you written notice that includes the name, address, and phone number of the information provider.

2. Tell the creditor or other information provider in writing that you dispute an item. Many providers specify an address for disputes. If the provider reports the item to a consumer reporting company, it must include a notice of your dispute. And if you are correct – that is, if the information is found to be inaccurate – the information provider may not report it again.

Q: What can I do if the consumer reporting company or information provider will not correct the information I dispute?

A: If an investigation does not resolve your dispute with the consumer reporting company, you can ask that a statement of the dispute be included in your file and in future reports. You also can ask the consumer reporting company to provide your statement to anyone who received a copy of your report in the recent past. You can expect to pay a fee for this service.

If you tell the information provider that you dispute an item, a notice of your dispute must be included any time the information provider reports the item to a consumer reporting company.

Q: How long can a consumer reporting company report negative information?

A: A consumer reporting company can report most accurate negative information for seven years and bankruptcy information for ten years. There is no time limit on reporting information about criminal convictions; information reported in response to your application for a job that pays more than \$75,000 a year; and information reported because you have applied for more than \$150,000 worth of credit or life insurance. Information about a lawsuit or an unpaid judgment against you can be reported for seven years or until the statute of limitations runs out, whichever is longer.

Q: Who else can get a copy of my credit report?

A: The Fair Credit Reporting Act specifies who can access your credit report. Creditors, insurers, employers, and other businesses that use the information in your report to evaluate your applications for credit, insurance, employment, or renting a home are among those that have a legal right to access your report.

Q: Can my employer get my credit report?

A: An employer can get a copy of your credit report only if you agree. A consumer reporting company cannot provide information about you to your employer, or to a prospective employer, without your written consent.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit or contact the:

**Federal Trade Commission
Bureau of Consumer Protection
Consumer Response Center
600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20580**

WEBSITE: www.ftc.gov

**Toll-free: (877) FTC-HELP
(877) 382-4357**

**Bureau of Consumer Protection
Office of Privacy Protection
2811 Agriculture Drive
PO Box 8911
Madison WI 53708-8911**

E-MAIL: DATCPHotline@wi.gov

WEBSITE: datcp.wi.gov

Toll-free in WI: (800) 422-7128

(608) 224-5163 FAX: (608) 224-4677

TTY: (608) 224-5058

(Information taken from Federal Trade Commission website "Free Credit Reports"
<http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0155-free-credit-reports>)