

## Accessing my Credit File and Correcting my Credit Reports

In order to repair your credit, the first thing you need to find out is “What’s really in my credit report?” The law allows you to ask for an investigation of information in your file that you legitimately dispute as inaccurate or incomplete. You can dispute mistakes for free. Everything a credit repair clinic can do for you legally, you can do for yourself at little or no cost. Here are some steps to take:

- Get a free copy of your credit report
  - Visit: [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)
  - Call: 877-322-8228 or
  - Mail an Annual Credit Report Request Form, available at [ftc.gov/credit](http://ftc.gov/credit) to **Annual Credit Report Request Service, P. O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281**
    - You will need your name, address, social security number, and date of birth. Additionally, you may be asked some security questions.
    - The nationwide credit reporting companies (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion) will give you a free copy of your credit report once every 12 months.
    - For details, see *Your Rights: Credit Reporting* at [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit).
    - You do not need to buy a monthly credit monitoring service to obtain a free credit report.
    - **You should never give your personal information to anyone calling you, or contacting you by email or by way of a pop-up ad under the guise of getting a credit report. Even if the person contacting you says that they are from one of the credit reporting agencies, it could be a scam!**
- If you find incorrect information on your credit report, send, by certified mail, a document to the credit reporting company. Tell the credit reporting company, in writing, what information you think is wrong. Include copies (retain the originals) of documents that prove your position. The letter should:
  - Have your complete name and address,
  - Identify each item in your report that you dispute,
  - State the facts and explain why you dispute the information, and
  - Ask that the wrong information be removed or corrected.
    - You might want to enclose a copy of the report with the items that you are questioning circled.
    - Keep a copy for yourself.
    - For a sample dispute letter, see *Credit Repair: How to Dispute Credit Report Errors* at [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit) under *Credit Reports and Scoring*.
    - If you have been the victim of identity theft, resources are available to help you with that problem at [www.tn.gov/consumer](http://www.tn.gov/consumer).
- What do the credit agencies do? The credit reporting agencies have 30 days to investigate unless they consider your dispute frivolous. They also send your information to the company that provided them with the disputed information so they can respond to your dispute. If this information provider discovers that the information it gave is inaccurate, it must notify all three credit reporting agencies of the correction.
- You get a notice of the results. The credit reporting company must give you the results in writing and give you a free copy of your report if the dispute results in a change. You are also to receive the name, address and phone number of the information provider.

- What about anyone else who got the incorrect information? If you request, the credit reporting agency must send notices of any correction to anyone who received your credit report during the past six months. You can have a copy of a corrected report sent to anyone who received a copy during the past two years for employment purposes.
- What if they refuse to change my credit report? You can ask that a statement of the dispute be included in your file and in future reports. You can also ask that this statement be sent to anyone who received a copy of your report in the recent past. There will be a fee for this service.
- Should I contact the creditor (information provider)? Yes, tell them in writing of your disputed item and include copies (keep your originals) of documents that support your position. They may provide an address for disputes. If you do this, and the provider reports the item to a credit reporting company, they must also include a notice of your dispute.
- For more information, see *How to Dispute Credit Report Errors* at [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit) under *Credit Reports and Scoring*.

**You must be told if information in your credit file has been used against you.** Anyone who uses a credit report or another type of consumer report to deny your application for credit, insurance, or employment – or to take another adverse action against you – must tell you, and must give you the name, address, and phone number of the agency that provided the information.

**You have the right to ask for a credit score.** Credit scores are numerical summaries of your credit-worthiness based on information from credit bureaus. You may request a credit score from consumer reporting agencies that create scores or distribute scores used in residential real property loans; however, you will have to pay for it. In some mortgage transactions, you will receive credit score information for free from the mortgage lender.

### **So what can you do?**

Actually, many things. Negative credit information remains on your credit report for specific lengths of time. Time and your financial discipline are what really can help you repair your credit. If you need support and guidance to develop a livable plan and stick with it, seek the aid of free, legitimate services. Friends and family may be a good source of information and referrals. For more information, see *Knee Deep in Debt* and *Fiscal Fitness: Choosing a Credit Counselor* at [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit) under *In Debt*. Legitimate credit counseling organizations may be of assistance to you if you have trouble sticking to a workable budget or working out a payment plan with your creditors. Many such organizations are nonprofit. Although an organization is “nonprofit” this does not mean its services are free, affordable or even legitimate. If possible, find an organization that offers in-person counseling and check them out. The legitimate services employ counselors who are certified and trained in consumer credit, money, budgeting and debt management.

If your credit report is correct, but you need to improve your credit, the next steps are outlined in *Building Better Credit* at [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit) under *Credit Reports and Scoring*.