

Let's Talk Finances

Fixing Mistakes on Your Credit Report



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If you have been following our credit series over the past few weeks, you have gotten your credit report and learned how to read it. What happens if you see errors? Perhaps you notice an account you don't recognize, an error in the spelling of your name or your address, or maybe even a bankruptcy that doesn't belong on your record. How do you clean these things up?

If you see mistakes in your report, you can contact the credit bureau and the company that provided the information to ask them both to correct their records. Make sure to provide as much detail as possible, plus copies of any supporting paperwork, such as payment records or court documents.

When contacting the credit bureau, the process you use depends on whether or not you've been a victim of identity theft:

- **If the errors are not related to identity theft:** Contact the credit bureau in writing and tell them what information you think is inaccurate. If you choose to notify them by mail, you can find sample dispute letters by searching the FTC website at consumer.ftc.gov. You can also notify the credit bureau online by using the dispute portals provided on the website for each credit bureau. They are then required to investigate your claim and make any necessary updates to your information within 30 days. If they discover their information is inaccurate, they are also required to contact the company that provided the information, as well as notify all three credit bureaus to correct your file.
- **If the errors are due to identity theft:** You can block identity theft-related debts from appearing on your credit report. Visit IdentityTheft.gov to learn how and to get an Identity Theft Report to send to the credit bureaus.

If you're considering paying a credit repair organization to help fix your credit, keep in mind that anything they can do for you, you can do for yourself at little or no cost. Credit repair organizations can NOT legally remove accurate negative information from your credit report. If you choose to hire a credit repair organization, don't do business with one that:

- Insists you pay before it helps you
- Tells you not to contact the credit bureaus directly
- Disputes information in your credit report you believe is accurate