

Gayle Whitworth, Family &amp; Consumer Sciences Agent

FS# 6172FCS

## Errors on Your Credit Report Can Hurt You

Have you checked your credit report lately? If not, you may not be getting the best credit deals, especially if there are errors on the report. In addition, errors on your report may keep you from getting a job and from receiving insurance, either at all or at the best rates. So how do know if there are errors? Check your report.

### Free Copies Available

Consumers may receive one free copy of their credit report from each of the three main credit reporting agencies (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion) every twelve months by going to [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com). This is the website established by the Federal Trade Commission for consumers to go to check their credit report without being sold a service.

Look for errors on your report, and check for signs of fraud all at once.

It is recommended that you stagger the reports throughout the year rather than getting them all at once. For example, obtain your report from Equifax in January, Experian in April, and TransUnion in August. However, if you have never checked your report, you may want to order all three at once the first time, then move to the staggered schedule the next year.

If you are unemployed and plan to search for work within 60 days, or if you have been denied credit, insurance, or employment based on the information in your report, you are eligible for an additional free report. However, you must contact each credit reporting agency individually, and must do so within 60 days of receiving notice of denial.

Equifax – [www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)

Experian – [www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)

Transunion – [www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com)

### Review Your Report Carefully

When you get your credit report, you want to go over each account carefully, checking for any errors or fraudulent activity on the report. Any errors found should be reported to the credit reporting agency.

Write a letter indicating what you believe to be an error, highlight the error on the report you print, and provide copies of supporting documentation as to why there is no error (cancelled check, bank statement, etc.). Send this information via certified mail to the credit reporting agency.

As an alternative, you can dispute errors at all three agencies online or by phone. Be sure to indicate the file number of the report you are looking at.

Once a dispute request is received, the credit reporting agency must respond within 30 days, and must send the information onto the original credit issuing agency. The credit issuing agency must investigate, and if information is proven inaccurate, must then provide their findings to all three credit reporting agencies so that reports can be corrected.

Results of the investigation must be sent to you in writing by the credit reporting agency, including name, address, and phone number of credit issuing agency. In addition, a free copy of the report must be given if the dispute results in a change in the report.

If the final outcome is not in your favor, you may place a 100-word statement in your credit report stating your side of the story. This statement becomes a permanent part of your credit report and will be seen by creditors and others who view your report.

The same process should be done directly with the credit issuing agency. The credit issuing agency must let the credit reporting bureau know of the dispute if they continue to report the disputed item to them. If the information is found to be incorrect, the credit issuing agency must inform the credit reporting agency to update or delete the item.

### **A Word About Credit Scores**

Credit scores are available for free at [www.kreditcarma.com](http://www.kreditcarma.com). The scores received are a Vantage Score, as well as a Transrisk score provided by Transunion. The score rates your credit history on a scale so that all consumers are treated equally.

Be aware, however, that the score you receive is for general information purposes only, and will most likely NOT be the score used by lenders.

The MOST IMPORTANT thing to remember is that your score is generated based upon the information found in your report. So, make sure that the information is accurate, and take steps to correct any inaccuracies.

Also, if there is negative information on your file that is true, take steps to improve it. It takes about 7 years for most negative information to drop off of your report, though the effect of the negative information diminishes in time, at differing rates.

The most important thing you can do to raise your score is to PAY YOUR BILLS ON TIME.

With a little bit of work and checking, better rates and products can be yours when applying for credit. Take some time to review your credit report, checking for inaccuracies and taking the necessary actions to correct them.

For more information about credit reports, contact Gayle Whitworth, FCS Extension Agent with the UF/IFAS Extension office, Brevard County.