

CREDIT REPAIR

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as they report different information. Get your credit reports at: www.annualcreditreport.com.

- Spot possible errors. 20% of Americans have errors on their credit reports, including errors from identity theft. Learn more about possible errors at www.creditkarma.com/article/dispute-credit-report-errors.
- Write letters to the credit reporting companies disputing the errors. In the case of identity theft, provide a copy of the police report. Get sample letters at: www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0151-disputing-errors-credit-reports.
- The credit reporting company is required by law to investigate all errors, fix issues, and get back to you within 45 days of receiving your letter.
- Are you dissatisfied with the result of your dispute?
 - Try contacting the original loan provider, or source of information about the negative item.
 - You have the right to add a note in your report explaining any issues—this will likely not change your credit score, however.
 - If you feel that your dispute was mishandled, you can file a complaint with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau at www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint or (855) 411-2372.

A WARNING

- MVLS recommends you avoid all for-profit credit repair companies.
 - They can't actually do anything you can't do yourself, including challenging negative items.
 - Do **not** pay credit repair companies upfront. Legally, they can't make you, and if they try it means they're not legitimate.
 - Many credit repair companies misrepresent their services.
 - See <http://consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/how-avoid-credit-repair-service-scams/> for more information.

BUILDING POSITIVE CREDIT

- **Establish credit in your own name.** If you have no credit history or very little credit history, the following methods will help you build positive credit as long as you pay completely and on time.
- Secured credit cards: You pay a deposit up-front, so these are easier to qualify for. Only make small purchases, and stay far away from the limit (use 20% or less of available credit). Visit your local bank or credit union, or visit <https://www.nerdwallet.com/best/credit-cards/bad-credit>
- Credit-builder loans: These are not widely advertised, and are generally offered by credit unions and community banks. This can be a good method if you don't have a way to pay a deposit on a secured credit card.
- **Pay your bills on time and in full.** For free or low-cost financial planning help, visit Guidewell Financial Solutions at www.guidewellfs.org.
- **Wait.** Repairing damaged credit is a time consuming process. Unless you had incorrect items on your report, there are no quick fixes. Late payments will drop off your credit report after 7 years, and bankruptcies will drop off after 10 years.