

Credit Guide





How Credit **REPORTING WORKS**

THE CREDIT REPORTING SYSTEM

The credit reporting system is comprised of 3 elements: consumers, credit bureaus, and finance companies.

CONSUMER: A person or entity (corporation) who purchases goods and/or services for personal or business purposes.

CREDIT BUREAU: Every 30 days or so, lenders and creditors report information about your credit cards, loan accounts and credit inquiries electronically, through TransUnion, Equifax, and Experian.

These 3 credit bureaus collect and store your credit information in your profile for future reference. In the future, others may review your profile in order to assess and determine your risk level.



How Credit **REPORTING WORKS**

CREDIT BUREAUS

A personal credit score can range anywhere between 300 and 850. Generally speaking, a credit score of 700 or above is considered good, while a score of 800 or above is considered excellent. In reality, the vast majority of credit scores fall between 600 and 750.

Higher scores reflect better credit decisions and can make a creditor more confident that you will repay your future debts as agreed.

In practice, a variety of businesses, such as auto loan lenders, banks, credit card companies and insurance agencies use your credit data from the credit bureaus to determine your risk level.

Once they get a sense of how risky it is to lend you money, they will proceed to determine the rates you'll have to pay, as well as other terms and conditions of the loan they're willing to extend you.

How Credit **REPORTING WORKS**

FINANCE COMPANIES

FINANCE COMPANY: A specialized financial institution that supplies money, credit for the purchase of services or consumer goods. For instance, a finance company may offer or grant short-term loans directly to consumers.

Finance companies are commonly referred to as “lenders of last resort.”

The rates and terms offered by finance companies are not as favorable as those offered by banks or credit unions. This typically translates into higher-risk consumers depending on these institutions for their credit needs.

Having a finance company account show up as one of the providers of loans on your credit report could cost you significant points and lower your credit worthiness.

How Credit **REPORTING WORKS**

CREDIT REPORTING MECHANISM

CREDIT SCORE REVIEW: Lenders study your credit scores to reach decisions about whether or not to offer you credit.

CREDIT REPORTING AGENCIES: When a creditor/lender checks your credit, they're most likely do so with a major Credit Reporting Agency: TransUnion, Equifax and/or Experian.

These three agencies compile credit information on you and more than 200 million Americans, and the data they have in your credit file is used to calculate your credit scores.

Your credit scores are determined by five major factors:

- Payment History
- Debt Usage
- Age of Credit Accounts
- Types of Accounts
- Number of Inquiries



Payment HISTORY

- Your payment history is a record of on-time, late and missed payments on past and current credit accounts. These accounts can include credit cards, lines of credit, personal loans and mortgages. Your payment history indicates to a potential lender the likelihood of you successfully repaying your debt — or going into default.
- It also factors into a significant percentage of your credit score. Though exactly how much it contributes isn't clear — scoring models like to keep their algorithms close to the vest. FICO®, however, claims that 35% of your FICO® Score comes from the behaviors revealed by your payment history.
- Payments made far after their due dates ultimately weigh more heavily on your score. This is because negative scores tend to increase the longer it takes you to repay your obligations.
- However, a payment history that's free of late payments doesn't guarantee a high score. Neither will a handful of late payments dramatically decrease your score if the rest of your financial history is stellar.
- Credit bureaus consider several factors in computing your credit score, often using a proprietary algorithm.

Debt USAGE

EFFECT ON YOUR CREDIT SCORE

Credit cards provide the opportunity to build a credit record and receive a credit score.

When you use your credit and your credit cards responsibly, you may have access to additional funds in an emergency. You will also be able to finance large purchases that might take a few months to pay off. You can earn points or cashback rewards on your monthly spending, and in some cases, you will have access to services such as roadside assistance, travel plan assistance, and concierge help while traveling.

If you have a high credit utilization on your cards, you may find yourself with a lower FICO® score on your credit report. This will potentially mean higher interest rate on your cards, especially if you make any payments after their due date. Credit utilization has a decisive influence on your credit score, so you should know what it is and how you can manage it in order to attain the best credit rating and all the benefits which come with it. Credit utilization is the ratio of your outstanding credit card balances to your credit card limits. It measures the amount of credit limit you are using. For example, if your balance is \$300 and your credit limit is \$1,000, then your credit utilization for that credit card is 30%.

1. AGE OF CREDIT ACCOUNTS

"Length of credit history" category of FICO® makes up some 15 percent of your credit score: Average age of accounts equals the number of total months of all of the accounts on your credit report from the open dates to the present, divided by the number of accounts. While 15 percent of your score doesn't sound like much, especially when compared to the "payment history" and "amounts owed," a longer credit history could help improve your credit score.

2. TYPES OF ACCOUNTS


REVOLVING ACCOUNTS: Revolving accounts are those that have a different payment each month depending on your current balance. These are accounts that you are not required to pay in full each month. You have the option to "revolve" some or all of the balance to the following month. Lenders charge you interest on the amount you revolve and this is how they make money. Some examples of revolving accounts are:

- **CREDIT CARDS ISSUED BY A BANK OR A CREDIT UNION.** These are accounts backed by a major payment network. These accounts are extremely common because almost all banks and credit unions are able to issue them to their customers.
- **CREDIT CARDS ISSUED BY A RETAIL STORE:** These are accounts that are issued by the stores where you like to shop. Some examples are Macy's Credit Card, Target RedCard, Pep Boys Credit Card or a Dillard's Card. There are hundreds of other examples. Most of us have several of these types of cards, too.

- **CREDIT CARDS ISSUED BY AN OIL COMPANY:** These are accounts that are issued by a petroleum company. Some examples are Techron (Texaco and Chevron) Advantage Card, Exxon-Mobil Smart Card, Shell Card and BP Credit Card.
- **HOME EQUITY LINES OF CREDIT:** Also known as a HELOC, these are loans that allow you to tap into the equity of your home. These loans are generally easy to obtain from most reputable banks and credit unions. These accounts are very common in part because the interest is tax-deductible in most cases. Check with your tax adviser to see if your account qualifies for a tax deduction.
- ***INSTALLMENT ACCOUNTS:*** Accounts with a fixed payment for a fixed period of time. As with revolving accounts, you are not required to pay them in full each month. You are allowed to make a payment which will be the same every month until the loan is paid in full. Lenders charge you an annual percentage rate (also known as an APR) and this is how they make money. Some examples of installment accounts include:
 - **AUTO LOANS:** Auto loans are issued by a bank, a credit union or by a company that specializes in automobile lending.
 - **MORTGAGE LOANS:** Mortgage loans are issued by a bank, a credit union or a company that specializes in mortgage lending.
 - **STUDENT LOANS:** These loans are used to pay for academic expenses such as tuition, room and board.

- **HOME EQUITY LOANS:** A home equity loan is a fixed amount of money that you borrow. Once you take that loan out, your payment is fixed for the duration of the payback period. A home equity line of credit, conversely, gives you the flexibility of taking out some of or the entire approved amount.
- **SIGNATURE LOANS:** Signature loans are just what they sound like. You walk into a bank or credit union and tell them you want to borrow some money and sign a guarantee to pay it back.
- **CREDIT BUILDER LOANS:** Credit builder loans are offered by some financial institutions. You put some money down in a savings account, and pay yourself back. Once it's paid back, you gain access to the savings that you put in.

OPEN ACCOUNTS (10+): Open accounts are probably the least common of the three account types we'll profile. Also referred to as "open credit," these are a hybrid of installment and revolving credit. The payment is not the same each month and it's usually due in full at the end of each billing cycle. The consumer satisfies financial responsibility for the account when the bill is paid in full each month. This cycle can go on as long as the consumer has an account with the service provider.




An account with a utility company is one example of open credit. A customer with an account for gas or electric service. Doesn't know what their payment will be each month. As you can imagine, electric bills can vary a lot from month to month depending upon the seasons and air conditioner/heater usage, and the customer is responsible for making this varying payment each month.

Most utilities, cellular service, and some gas station cards are other examples of open credit. But perhaps the most widely known example of an open account is a charge card. Charge cards look and act like credit cards, but with one key difference: You're expected to pay that balance off in full by the end of the month.


3. NUMBER OF INQUIRIES (2-3)

Credit inquiries are requests by a "legitimate business" to check your credit. As far as your FICO® score is concerned, credit inquiries are classified as either "hard inquiries" or "soft inquiries" - only hard inquiries have an effect on your FICO® score. Soft inquiries are all credit inquiries where your credit is NOT being reviewed by a prospective lender. These include inquiries where you're checking your own credit (such as checking your score in myFICO), credit checks made by businesses to offer you goods or services (such as promotional offers by credit card companies), or inquiries made by businesses with whom you already have a credit account.



HARD INQUIRIES are credit inquiries where a potential lender is reviewing your credit because you've applied for credit with them. These include credit checks when you've applied for an auto loan, mortgage or credit card. Each of these types of credit checks count as a single credit inquiry. One exception occurs when you are "rate shopping". That's a smart thing to do, and your FICO® score considers all inquiries within a 45-day period for a mortgage, an auto loan or a student loan as a single credit inquiry. This same guideline also applies to a search for a rental property such as an apartment. These inquiries are usually recorded by the credit bureau as a type of real estate-related inquiry, so the FICO® score will treat them the same way. You can avoid lowering your FICO® score by doing your apartment hunting within a short period.

Inquiries may or may not affect your FICO® score. A FICO® score takes into account only voluntary inquiries that result from your application for credit. The information about inquiries that can be factored into your FICO® score includes: Number of recently opened accounts, and proportion of accounts that are recently opened, by type of account.



TIME SINCE CREDIT INQUIRY: A FICO® score does not take into account any involuntary inquiries made by businesses with whom you did not apply for credit, inquiries from employers, or your own requests to see your credit report. For many people, one additional credit inquiry (voluntary and initiated by an application for credit) may not affect their FICO® score at all. For others, one additional credit inquiry could take less than 5 points off their FICO® score. Inquiries can have a greater impact, however, if you have few accounts or a short credit history.

Large numbers of inquiries also mean greater risk: people with six inquiries or more on their credit reports are eight times more likely to declare bankruptcy than people with no inquiries on their reports.

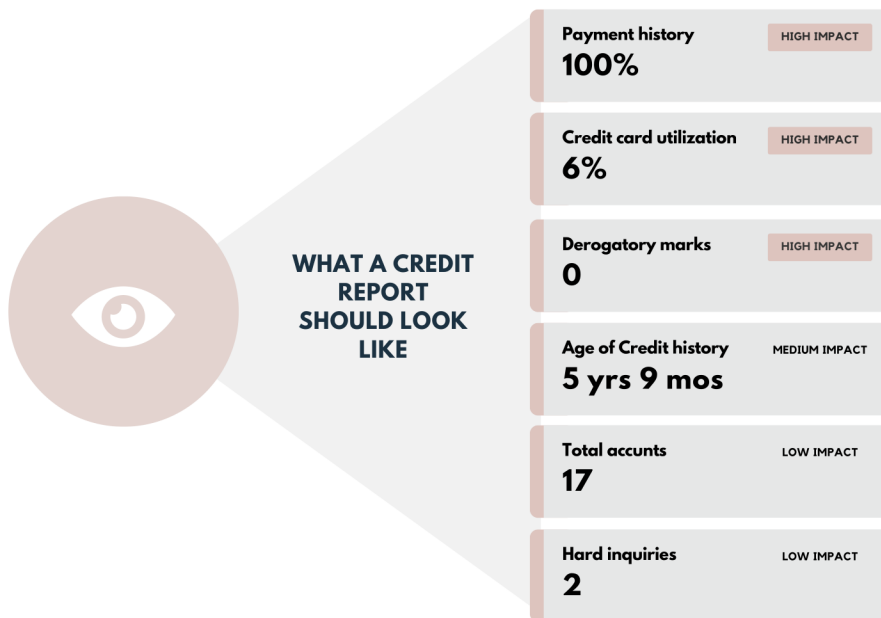
The best way to have healthy credit is to remain responsible about the credit cards or loans you have. Making your loan payments on time each month and maintaining a good credit utilization ratio (the amount of debt you have in relation to your overall credit limit) can help you get those good sought-after scores.

Using credit irresponsibly by making late payments and maxing out credit limits can have damaging effects on your credit.

The Truth

1 in 5 people find errors in their credit report. Credit report mistakes can lead to disqualification for mortgages and car loans, as well as increased insurance premiums and interest rates. In some cases, those mistakes can even prevent you from getting a job. 78% of consumers who disputed credit report errors were successful in removing them. Now let's dive into the process of how to improve your credit score.

WHAT A GOOD CREDIT REPORT SHOULD LOOK LIKE



Understanding **YOUR CREDIT REPORT**

PREPARE FIRST

TO START, ATTEND TO THE FOLLOWING:

- Prepare your Credit Reports. We will refer to this stage as "The Staging Process"
- Remove any misspelled names or additional names that do not apply
- Remove any old, out-of-date home addresses
- Make it a point to always call the Credit Bureaus to have any personal items removed for your credit report:
 - Equifax – 1-888-548-7878
 - Experian – 1-855-414-6048
 - TransUnion – 1-800-916-8800
- Prior to filing a dispute, take no more than 30 days to prepare your report.

Understanding **YOUR CREDIT REPORT**

THE DISPUTE PROCESS

COMMENCE THE DISPUTE:

- Opt out of Secondary Credit Reporting Companies and request they remove their services and suppress their reporting so they do not report to companies on your behalf. The last thing you'd want is to have these companies reporting information behind the scenes while you are disputing any negative accounts. If you have negative accounts, you will not want TransUnion, Equifax or Experian to have the information to verify any negative accounts.
- To opt out, you may want to use the following resources/agencies:

Disputing YOUR CREDIT

OPTING OUT

COMMENCE THE DISPUTE:

- LexisNexis – the main reporting agency that holds information about bankruptcies, judgments, and tax liens. To opt out, visit LexisNexis online:
 - <https://optout.lexisnexis.com/>
 - privacy.information.mgr@lexisnexis.com
 - 866-490-1920
- Innovis – online opt-out choice for this consumer credit reporting agency:
 - <https://www.innovis.com/>
 - 800-540-2505
- CoreLogic – online opt-out choice
 - <https://credcofreeze.corelogic.com/>
 - 877-532-8778

Disputing YOUR CREDIT

OPTING OUT

COMMENCE THE DISPUTE:

- SageStream – call or fax to opt out:
 - <https://www.sagestreamllc.com/security-freeze/>
 - Fax: 858-451-2847
 - 888-395-0277
- ARS – call or mail to opt out:
 - <https://www.ars-consumeroffice.com/securityfreeze.faces>
 - 800-392-8911

You can use a basic dispute to challenge negative items on your credit report using the DIY credit repair template form. The form:

- allows you to challenge the validity of the accounts on your credit
- requests companies to verify that all of the accounts on your account are valid



Disputing **INFORMATION ON YOUR CREDIT REPORT**

DISPUTING INFORMATION ON YOUR CREDIT REPORT

- STEP 1: Basic Dispute
 - o You include inquiries, collection accounts, closed accounts.
 - o You'll receive letters back notifying you if the items were removed or verified.
 - o Then you proceed to step 2
- STEP 2: The 609 Letter (The Prove It Letter)
 - o The 609 letter is based on rights granted under Section 609 of the Fair Credit Reporting Act.
 - o Under Section 609, credit reporting agencies are required to disclose certain information to consumers who request it.
 - In addition to the required disclosure of information in your credit file, Section 609 of the FCRA requires credit bureaus to provide a summary of your rights under the FCRA, a list of the federal agencies who enforce the FCRA, and a statement that the credit bureau is not required to remove accurate, negative information unless it is outdated or cannot be verified.

- STEP 3: Validation of Debt to Creditor
 - Immediately after you receive your results, whichever accounts were verified you put them in the validation of investigations letter. Send this to the creditor not credit bureaus.
 - You have the right to request disclosure of information from the credit bureaus.
 - You don't have to state anything special or use certain language to exercise your right.
 - Simply write to the credit bureau and request disclosure of information under section 609 of the Fair Credit Reporting Act.
 - You should always draft your own letters to the credit bureaus based on your specific credit report information.
 - As with all correspondence with credit bureaus, send your letter via certified mail so you can track the receipt of the letter and time a response from the credit bureaus.
 - The FCRA doesn't dictate a specific time frame for a credit bureau to respond to a disclosure request made under Section 609; 30 to 45 days is a reasonable amount of time to wait for a response.

Credit

REPORT DISPUTE COMPANIES

Credit Report Dispute Companies

- Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)
 - An agency of the United States government responsible for consumer protection in the financial sector that works for American consumers, responsible providers, and the economy as a whole.
 - o To remove negative items, you can also use CFPB.gov.
 - o It's more time consuming but it is very effective.
- Federal Trade Commission (FTC) [If there was identity theft] - An independent agency of the United States government whose principal mission is the enforcement of civil U.S. antitrust law and the promotion of consumer protection.
 - o (Use FTC identity theft AFFIDAVIT (attached) You'll need to file a police report and say you lost your wallet, purse etc. a few years ago (before your negative accounts were opened).
 - o Then you'll need to get it notarized, attach an identity theft dispute letter, attach 502 law, copy of ID, copy of a utility bill.

- Better Business Bureau (BBB) - A private non-profit organization with the mission to advance marketplace trust. Most creditors have an established history and rating with the BBB.
 - o Contact the BBB when dealing with a company making the dispute process difficult.
 - o The business will have a better chance of complying with your dispute if their rating and reputation is at stake.
 - o You have a better chance of your collection being removed when coupled with a CFPB complaint.

- Attorney General in Collector's State - the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA) makes certain behaviors unlawful for third party creditors
 - o Contact the Attorney General's office in your state, to file a complaint against a creditor
 - o The state Attorney General has the ability to take action against a creditor, based on the details of the complaint filed.
 - o This action promotes an opportunity to invalidate your creditors during the dispute process.



Late **PAYMENTS & SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

LATE PAYMENTS

- If you have late payments, call the creditors first to see if they have a forgiveness program so they can remove those items from your report.
 - o You have to consider that the person who answers the phone may not be the individual who can help you.
 - o Make sure that you speak to at least 3 people at the company and request forgiveness assistance.
 - o If no one is willing to assist you with your request, you should send a forgiveness letter that details the steps that you took and your financial situation.
- The forgiveness letter may give you additional traction in your process.
 - o If that does not work, use the dispute process to state that they are reporting inaccurate information on your account about missed payments.
- You can use the dispute letters in the typical method or the 2-week method or the CFPB.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- Collection Accounts - Make sure you freeze everything for your big accounts including any collections, repossessions, closed accounts, foreclosures.
- Bankruptcies, judgments, and tax liens - Freeze everything, and submit a direct 609 letter to repair your accounts.
 - o The 2-week method has been very successful recently.
- When people file identity theft claims, credit bureaus are notorious for wiping out all their credit inquiries.
 - o Look and analyze your credit report.
- Pull your credit from Identity IQ or go to Experian.com to pull all 3 credit reports.



Deletion PROCESS EXPLAINED

DELETION PROCESS

- After we stage our credit report, we use the CFPB to overwrite the 3 credit bureaus. Here are the steps in the deletion process.
- Step 1 - File a basic dispute letter via certified mail.
- Step 2 - Provide companies with a 609 letter via certified mail.
- Step 3 - Provide companies with a validation to debt letter via certified mail.
 - When you go through the deletion process, always keep your letters.
 - It is illegal for credit bureaus to put negative items back on your report once it has been deemed unverified or inaccurate.
 - If they ever add it back to your credit report, file a report with CFPB to make sure that companies do not try to add those items back on your report.

CREDIT BUREAUS ARE PRIVATELY OWNED COMPANIES.

- They are not government-owned companies, but they are government-regulated companies.
- The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) regulates government companies like the credit companies.
- You can file a dispute with the CFPB, and they remove items within 14 days with companies except Equifax which takes longer.

14-Day DELETION METHOD

TWO WEEK METHOD - 14-DAY DELETION METHOD

- Stage your credit report and then send a direct 609 letter first.
 - We do not do a challenge before sending the letter.
- Send in a basic 609 letter backdated 2 weeks as the date of the dispute and do not send it certified mail so that the actual received date of the letter is not time stamped.
 - For example, if you are sending a dispute letter on the 28th to remove inquiries and negative accounts, put the 14th as the date on the letter.
- Make sure you do not put more than 10 items on your dispute letter.
 - The system sees the date that the letter was dated and registers that as the date it was received.
 - In 14 days, you send a Demand to Comply letter, which means if the collection company of the creditor has not responded, the company has to remove the item from your account.

- Go to CFPB and file a complaint against Equifax, TransUnion, and Experian and state that the credit companies are not complying with their own policies in a timely manner.
 - You should file the complaint with the CFPB 14 days after you mail your complaint letter regular mail so that it doesn't allow the credit bureaus time to investigate your claims.
 - Instead of having 30 days to respond to your letter, their system will register it as having been received 14 days earlier than it actually arrived.
 - The complaint with CFPB will allow them to contact the credit bureaus to inquire why your letter is unaddressed within 30 days even though it only has been 14 days.
 - CFPB contacts those credit bureaus to show the investigation that shows that the process was not completed within 30 days.
 - CFPB requires that the credit bureaus remove the negative items from your credit report.
- You can get about 60-70% of the negative items removed from the credit report with this process.

STRUCTURING

Your Credit

FIRST STEPS TO STRUCTURE YOUR CREDIT

- Your payment history needs to be 100%
- Your credit accounts should be at least 4 years old.
- Your derogatory marks should be 0.
- The system credit bureaus use is automated. It processes dispute letters when they are scanned.
- How do they verify the information in the dispute letters about negative collection accounts?
 - There is a computer system and database which houses the information.
- Credit bureaus use secondary reporting agencies such as LexisNexis, SageStream, CoreLogic, and Innovis on the backend.
 - These companies house our information on the back end which verify the information the creditors send to credit bureaus.
- You can only remove items from your credit report if they are unverified or inaccurate.

ADDITIONAL STEPS TO STRUCTURE YOUR CREDIT

- How can we make items on our credit report unverified or inaccurate?
 - We want to look at how many names we have on our credit report.
 - If you have 3 misspelled names on your credit report, this means the name is misspelled by the credit bureau.
 - Make sure you call the credit bureaus to use an over-the-phone dispute about the basic spelling of your name so they will remove it.
 - You are telling the credit bureau the person on the account is not you.
 - Remove the old addresses off your old credit report unless this is the place where most of your current accounts have been opened.
 - You may need to use a different address for your credit report like a relative's address so that it does not raise red flags with the credit bureaus.
 - Only have 1 job on your credit report.
 - When we do apply for funding, we show that we only have 1 job to show stability in our work history.

Secure Loans

AND PRIMARY ACCOUNTS

OBTAINING SECURE LOANS

- What accounts can we add to our credit report?
 - Use smaller local banks like PNC, SunTrust, and Regions Bank and credit unions for secured loans such as auto loans.

ADDING PRIMARY ACCOUNTS


- What other primary accounts can we put on our credit report?
 - A primary account is connected strictly to your social security number and your ability to pay the bill.
 - If you are a renter, use companies like Rent Reporters and Rental Karma to help you establish a positive rental history.
 - They backdate your rent by 2 years if your landlord says you have paid on time for this period of time.
 - They will open your account by 5 years, however, only report 2 years of payment history.
 - You can use 2 of these on your report.
 - If you have a family member who owns a home, they can report you as paying rent for 2 years to help you establish your good payment history using Rent Reporters and Rental Karma.




Monetizing **PRIMARY ACCOUNTS**

MONETIZING PRIMARY ACCOUNTS

- You can use tradelines to help people build their credit.
 - o Tradelines are lines of credit the borrower has had in good standing for at least 2 years.
 - o Tradelines add you as an authorized user to help you establish your credit and boost your credit score.
 - Authorized User - A person added to an account and has rights to use the account which is not in their name.
 - o Tradelines help you establish new credit, build business credit, purchase new homes, rent apartments, and lease or purchase cars.
- This cycle can last for about 3 months, and you can renew it for an additional cycle which will give a person 6 months of positive payment history.
- If you are a homeowner, and you have people who are looking to build their credit, you can charge them a fee to report them as having a positive payment history.
 - o Charge them \$1,000 to tell companies like Rent Reporters and Rental Karma that they have paid their rent on time so they can establish a positive payment history.

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- Many people need this service when they are rebuilding their credit because they do not have a positive rental history.
 - They may have been late on their rental payments in the past. They do not want their landlord to report their late payments which will lower their credit score.
 - If you have a 3-bedroom rental property, you can use this process for 3 people who are renting a room for you.
 - You can collect \$1,000-\$1,500 from each person so they can buy a primary and report their payment history to these rental verification companies even though they do not live at the address physically.
 - The credit score of the homeowner is not important to the companies. They only want to verify the individual made on-time payments to you to live at the address they provided.
 - Everything we do to build our credit turns into something we can use to make money and become a service.



Self-lenders & AGE OF TRADELINES

SELF-LENDERS

- Self-lender reports payments like you have a loan from them. They are like a savings account program which helps you build your credit history.
- You are making payments each month in which they give you back at the end of your agreement. You pay \$50-\$70 per month for them to report to your credit report that you pay on time each month.
- It takes 14-days for Rent Reporters or Rental Karma to report your payment history to your credit report.

AGE OF TRADELINES

- You can purchase tradelines which have balances under 5% utilization and over 5 years old. The age of your tradelines shows a longer payment history and makes you appear as a lower risk to credit agencies.
- Tradeline accounts should have low balances as to not increase your debt-to-income ratio on your credit report.