

What You Can Do to Improve Your Credit

Credit scores, along with your overall income and debt, are big factors in determining whether you'll qualify for a loan and what your loan terms will be. So, keep your credit score high by doing the following:

1. Check for and correct any errors in your credit report. Mistakes happen, and you could be paying for someone else's poor financial management.
2. Pay down credit card bills. If possible, pay off the entire balance every month. Transferring credit card debt from one card to another could lower your score.
3. Don't charge your credit cards to the maximum limit.
4. Wait 12 months after credit difficulties to apply for a mortgage. You're penalized less for problems after a year.
5. Don't order items for your new home on credit — such as appliances and furniture — until after the loan is approved. The amounts will add to your debt.
6. Don't open new credit card accounts before applying for a mortgage. Too much available credit can lower your score.
7. Shop for mortgage rates all at once. Too many credit applications can lower your score, but multiple inquiries from the same type of lender are counted as one inquiry if submitted over a short period of time.
8. Avoid finance companies. Even if you pay the loan on time, the interest is high and it will probably be considered a sign of poor credit management.

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