



FINANCING

Credit Readiness Checklist

Get your credit in order before a lender, or a finance manager, gets to look at it first.

A NOTE FROM OUR TEAM

Your credit file is going to be read by somebody before you drive off. We'd rather it be you, weeks ahead of time, with a pen in your hand. Work through this list in order, fix what you can, and you'll walk in knowing exactly what the lender is going to see.

— The Auto Advocate Team

A lender prices your loan from what's in your credit file. Errors, high card balances, and a scattered string of applications can all cost you rate, and rate costs you real money every month for years. Start this list **30 to 60 days before you plan to buy** so corrections have time to show up.

Weekly

FREE REPORTS FROM ALL 3
BUREAUS

30 Days

BUREAU DISPUTE
INVESTIGATION

14-45 Days

AUTO RATE-SHOPPING
WINDOW

≤ 30%

CARD USE EXPERTS ADVISE

1 Pull All Three Reports, Free

The FTC says you can check your report from each nationwide bureau (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion) **once a week for free** at **AnnualCreditReport.com**, or by phone at 1-877-322-8228. It's the only site authorized to fill those free-report orders. Imposter sites with similar names exist; type the address yourself and don't click links in unsolicited emails.

Equifax pulled on _____ Experian pulled on _____ TransUnion pulled on _____

READ EVERY LINE FOR

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Name, address, and employer spelled right | ☐ The same debt listed twice (original + collector) |
| ☐ Accounts you don't recognize | ☐ Credit limits reported correctly |
| ☐ Late payments you believe were on time | ☐ Closed accounts reported as open |
| ☐ Paid-off debts still showing a balance | ☐ Hard inquiries you didn't authorize |

2 Dispute Errors the Right Way

Per the FTC, dispute with **each bureau** showing the error *and* with the business that reported it. Explain each mistake in writing, include copies (never originals) of your proof, and keep records of everything you send. Certified mail with a return receipt gives you a paper trail. The bureau generally has **30 days** to investigate and must send you the results in writing.

ITEM IN DISPUTE	BUREAU / BUSINESS	DATE SENT	RESPONSE DUE	RESULT

3 Bring Your Card Balances Down

Scoring models look at how close you are to your credit limits. The CFPB says to keep balances low compared to your total limit and notes that experts advise using no more than **30 percent** (a common guideline, not a rule). Payment history matters most of all, so get current and stay current first.

CARD	BALANCE	CREDIT LIMIT	USE %	TARGET BALANCE
	\$	\$		\$
	\$	\$		\$
	\$	\$		\$
All cards combined	\$	\$		\$

Use % = balance ÷ credit limit × 100. Target balance at 30% = credit limit × 0.30.

4 Shop Your Rate Inside One Window

Comparing lenders is smart, and it doesn't have to hurt you. The CFPB says shopping for the best auto loan will generally have little to no impact on your credit scores, and that auto loan credit checks will **generally count as a single inquiry if they're made within 14 to 45 days of each other**. The exact window depends on the scoring model, so plan to do all of your applications inside two weeks. Applying for different kinds of credit (say, a mortgage and an auto loan) counts separately.

My shopping window opens _____ and closes _____

FROM THE INSIDE

Our team has spent years on the dealership side of the desk. When you let the dealership arrange financing, your application usually goes out to several lenders at once. The CFPB says dealers generally reach out to roughly five. That's normal, and it lands inside the same shopping window. What you want to avoid is spreading applications across a month of "just looking" at different stores. Get your own pre-approval first, then let the dealer try to beat it in the same week.

5 Get Pre-Approved Before You Shop

The CFPB describes a pre-approval as a loan quote that includes an **interest rate, loan length, and maximum loan amount**. It can strengthen your position at the dealership. Record yours, then carry it to **No. 09, Loan Offer Comparison Worksheet**.

Lender _____ APR _____ Term _____
 Max amount _____ Expires _____ Contact _____

6 Documents Lenders Want

The CFPB says lenders generally ask for personal identifiers, your addresses and employment history, income details, and information on existing debts. Requirements vary by lender, so ask yours for its list. Have these ready in one folder:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Driver's license or other government ID | ☐ Employer name, phone, and start date |
| ☐ Social Security number (memorized, not carried) | ☐ Current loan statements and monthly payments |
| ☐ Recent pay stubs | ☐ Proof of insurance or your agent's contact |
| ☐ Tax returns or bank statements if self-employed | ☐ Trade-in title or payoff letter (see No. 12) |
| ☐ Proof of address (utility bill, lease) | ☐ Your written pre-approval letter |

7 Your Credit Game Plan, Week by Week

WHEN	WHAT TO DO	TARGET DATE	DONE
60 days out	Pull all three reports. Send disputes for anything wrong.		☐
45 days out	Pay card balances down. Hold off on opening any new credit.		☐
30 days out	Pull reports again. Confirm corrections posted; follow up on open disputes.		☐
14 days out	Gather your documents. Apply for pre-approval with a bank or credit union.		☐
Shopping week	Let the dealership try to beat your rate, inside the same window.		☐
After you buy	Set up autopay. Payment history is the biggest factor in most scores.		☐

READY TO SHOP WHEN YOU CAN CHECK EVERY BOX

- ☐ All three reports pulled and reviewed
- ☐ Every error disputed and tracked
- ☐ Card balances paid down where possible
- ☐ Shopping window on the calendar
- ☐ Pre-approval in hand, in writing
- ☐ Document folder packed

FROM CREDIT-READY TO LENDER-READY

You prepared the file. Let's put it to work.

A clean credit file only pays off when it's matched with the right lender and the right vehicle. Walk-In Ready locates the vehicle, tells you who to ask for and what to say, gives you the exact documents to bring, and can make optional lender introductions, so you arrive located, documented, and lender-ready.

Walk-In Ready \$399

(405) 761-3390 • autoadvocacy.net
THE DEALERSHIP HAS EXPERTS. NOW YOU DO, TOO.

SOURCES

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This worksheet is an educational planning tool, not legal, tax, or financial advice. Verify all figures with your lender, insurer, and the dealership before you sign.