



TRAINER'S GUIDE

The ABCs of Credit Card Finance – Essential Facts for Students

2006

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The ABCs of Credit Card Finance
Pre-Test

1. Your Annual Percentage Rate (APR), which represents the interest you pay on unpaid credit card balances, is a function of:
 - a. Your age
 - b. The length of time you have had the card
 - c. The amount of money you owe on your credit card
 - d. The terms and conditions offered by your credit card issuer

2. All credit cards:
 - a. Have the same credit limit
 - b. Must be used each month or they become inactive
 - c. Have an annual fee
 - d. None of the above

3. It would take longer, but it wouldn't cost more to pay off your credit card balance if you paid just the minimum monthly payments rather than paying more than the minimum monthly payments.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. A credit report:
 - a. Is produced monthly by the federal government
 - b. Is changed only once a year
 - c. Is a financial report card
 - d. Is usually only of interest to individuals who plan to purchase a house

5. When you use a credit card
 - a. You are withdrawing money from savings
 - b. You are borrowing money from checking
 - c. Your bank is loaning you money
 - d. None of the above

6. Which of the following statements are true:
 - a. A credit card is required if you want to establish credit
 - b. All bank credit cards are the same
 - c. Credit cards are a privilege
 - d. You pay a fee every time you use a credit card

7. When you have a credit card:
 - a. You can buy what you want, as long as you can afford the card's minimum monthly payment
 - b. You will have a better credit score than if you do not have a credit card
 - c. You cannot charge over your credit limit
 - d. None of the above

8. Keeping a revolving balance on your credit card account means you pay more for your purchases.
 - a. True
 - b. False



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Presenting

The ABCs of Credit Card Finance

Message to Trainers

The ABCs of Credit Card Finance is revised yearly to ensure the accuracy of its content and to continually improve its effectiveness. We appreciate your participation and recognize your role in making this a successful learning experience. Because trainers personally interact with the students while presenting the materials, we have found that your feedback is particularly valuable. Please take a moment to provide us with your suggestions and comments by emailing us at feedback@cscce.com.

The program, ending with “Consequences of Irresponsible Credit Card Use,” takes approximately one hour to teach. Instructors who want to review the new section on “Identity Theft” will need to allocate approximately ten to fifteen minutes more. You may also want to include the new Pre-Test and Post-Test which are printed on the inside covers of the Trainer’s Guide. In addition, and as time permits, the following classroom exercises are provided for your consideration.

Suggested Classroom Exercises

- Bring into class several credit card offers and have students choose the best program. They should consider the card’s APR, whether or not there is an annual fee, the length of the grace period, the credit limit, how interest is calculated, penalty clauses, etc.
- Using the Budget Form printed on page 2 of the student primer, have students complete a budget exercise. More information on budgeting can be found at: www.mtstcil.org/skills/budget-15.html.
- Using the first table printed on the inside cover of the primer, ask students to determine the total payout amount and payout time required to pay off specific credit card balances when card use is discontinued and only the minimum monthly payment is paid on the account. Then direct students to the second table, and use the same credit card balances and APRs. Have them compare the payout times and payout amounts between the two tables to observe the impact of adding just \$10 to a minimum monthly payment, illustrated in the second table.
- Bring into class a Credit Report so that students can see what is included in an actual report. For more information, go to: www.transunion.com/sample_credit_report/sample_report.htm.
- Have students list the advantages and disadvantages of credit cards. For more information, go to: www.mtstcil.org/skills/budget-12.html.

Correct Responses to Pre-Test and Post-Test

Pre-Test – 1-d, 2-d, 3-b, 4-c, 5-c, 6-c, 7-d, 8-a

Post-Test – 1-a, 2-b, 3-a, 4-d, 5-b, 6-b, 7-a, 8-b

PowerPoint Presentation – TITLE PAGE (Slide 1)

Start *The ABCs of Credit Card Finance* by placing on the blackboard the seven points listed below. To emphasize their importance, ask students to copy them into a notebook. Each of these topics will be discussed during the presentation.

1. Charge only what you know you can afford to repay.
2. Purchases cost more when you use your credit card and keep a rotating balance (i.e., you don't pay your bill in full each month) because you pay interest on your outstanding balance.
3. Pay your credit card bill in full each month. If you can't pay in full, **ALWAYS** make more than the minimum monthly payment.
4. Don't spend over your credit limit.
5. Pay your bills on time. Your credit report is negatively affected when you make late payments.
6. Learn how to protect your credit rating ... it's your financial report card.
7. Never use one credit card to pay another (i.e., don't take out a cash advance on one card to pay another). In fact, obtain only one card to avoid many problems.

SUGGESTED INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS TO CLASS

Asset or Liability - Begin the lecture by telling students that credit cards can either be a financial asset or a financial liability. A suggested statement is: *When used and managed properly, credit cards offer us convenience, a sense of security, and allow us to build a healthy credit history. Irresponsible credit card use can result in excessive debt and can produce a poor credit score and become a long-term financial liability.*

Definition of Credit - Ask students if they can define credit. *Credit is a system of doing business where you promise to pay at a later date for goods and services received today.*

Credit Cards Function as a Loan – Many students do not understand that they are borrowing money from their issuer when they use a credit card. Emphasize that credit card charges are unsecured loans that must be repaid.

Budgeting - If the class is to be taught in one hour, there will be insufficient time to conduct a budgeting exercise. Here is a suggested statement to students to stress the importance of budgeting. *Please turn to page 2 in your primers where you will find a sample budget. Students can benefit immensely from having a clear understanding of their financial needs and spending habits. By creating a realistic budget, an individual has a personal plan for spending and saving money. Giving your financial behavior a structure can provide a sense of comfort and guidance, so if you don't already have a budget, please take the needed time outside of class to complete this exercise.*

PowerPoint – ESSENTIAL FACTS (Slide 2) – Primer Page 3

Make a statement to the class that credit card education can be grouped into two main categories:

- Credit cards costs, which includes how to wisely choose a card
- Credit card behaviors, which includes how to responsibly use a card

The lecture will begin with credit card costs.

PowerPoint – CREDIT CARD COSTS (Slides 3, 4, 5) – Primer Pages 3 & 4

Annual Fees – Banks may charge an annual fee for the privilege of using their card. It is becoming more common to find cards without an annual fee and banks are often willing to waive the fee if you simply ask them to do so. Students should be instructed to look for a card that has no annual fee.

APR – Financial institutions charge cardholders monthly interest on unpaid credit card balances. Interest rates are expressed as an “annual percentage rate” (APR). The higher the APR, the more money one pays for interest, so students should look for a card with a low APR. APRs can be fixed or variable. A variable rate APR is based on a published index, like the prime rate, plus a few percentage points more, which the card issuer determines. A fixed APR can be changed with 15 days written notice from the issuer. A variable rate APR can be changed without notice.

Credit card issuers use several different methods to calculate interest. The most common is the “**Average Daily Balance Method.**” Calculations are made as follows:

- Charges and payments are tallied on a daily basis to determine how much is owed each day. These totals are then added and divided by the number of days in the statement period. This figure reflects the average daily balance.
- To determine the “daily periodic rate,” the APR is divided by 365.
- The average daily balance is multiplied by the daily periodic rate and then multiplied by the number of days in the statement period to obtain monthly interest charges.

Instruct students to look for cards using the Average Daily Balance Method to calculate interest and to avoid the “Two-Cycle Average Daily Balance Method,” which can result in higher interest charges.

Cash Advances – These are cash loans one can get with a credit card. They’re expensive, and unless it’s an emergency, they should be avoided for the following reasons:

- They typically have an up-front fee applied when the money is issued which is often 3% of the advance or a minimum of \$5 to \$10.
- They usually have a higher APR.
- They typically are afforded no grace period and one is charged interest from the moment the advance is received.
- If a revolving balance is kept on a credit card account, which includes both purchases and a cash advance, it is difficult to pay off the cash advance balance because of the way payments are applied. When a payment is made, first, finance charges are paid. The credit card issuer then has the right to distribute what is remaining to pay down principals in a manner that is most beneficial to them. This often means the balance with the low APR must be paid in full before payments can be applied to the principal balance of the cash advance, which has a higher APR.

Convenience Checks – These are pre-printed checks linked to your credit card account that are mailed to your home. They function like cash advances (up-front fee, no grace period, higher APR, and

subject to the same payoff schedule) and should be avoided unless it is an emergency. Convenience checks should be destroyed before they are placed in the trash.

Penalty Rates – A penalty rate is a high APR. Most banks will apply a penalty rate if one makes a late payment, misses a payment or exceeds a credit limit. Some issuers even have a schedule of penalty rates that escalates according to the number of payments missed.

Low Interest Teaser Rates – These rates are often time-limited. Students should determine how long the low rate will be in effect and what the APR will rise to once the time period is complete. Typically, the low rate is replaced with a penalty rate with just one late payment.

Balance Transfers – Credit card issuers solicit new customers by offering low teaser rates to individuals who transfer their balance from one card to the new program. First, determine if there is a balance transfer fee. Second, determine how long the low rate will be in effect and the APR that will replace it when the time limit is complete. (There are some balance transfer offers that are not time limited.) Third, determine if the new rate applies to both the transferred balance as well as new purchases. Similar to low interest teaser rates, the low APR is typically replaced with a higher penalty rate with just one late payment.

If the balance transfer offer quotes two APRs, i.e., one for new purchases and one for the transferred balance, determine if the balance with the low APR (the transferred balance) has to be paid fully before the balance with the higher APR (new purchase) is paid down.

Choose a balance transfer offer that has no balance transfer fee and a long-term, low APR that applies to both the transferred balance and new purchases.

Late Fees - When a credit card payment is received after the due date, a late fee will be assessed. It is now common for banks to charge a tiered fee based on the amount of the outstanding balance. Fees typically range from \$15 to \$39. A low APR is usually replaced with a higher penalty rate with just one or two late payments. One's credit rating can also be negatively impacted because late payments are typically reported to the three major credit reporting agencies. This usually happens after two late payments.

Over-Credit Limit Fees – Banks will allow an individual to spend over their credit limit, however, an over-credit limit fee will be assessed every month until the balance is brought below the credit limit on the account. Most banks charge a flat fee of \$29 or more in over limit penalties. Many issuers will also apply a penalty rate APR.

Bounced Check Fees – If a credit card payment check bounces, issuers will likely charge a penalty fee of \$29.

Currency Conversion Fees – Credit card issuers typically charge a currency conversion fee of 3% on foreign purchases.

PowerPoint – CHOOSING A CREDIT CARD (Slides 6, 7, 8) – Primer Page 5

Advise students that not all credit cards are equal since credit card issuers are free to offer the terms and conditions they desire. They may want to check out Internet sites such as www.bankrate.com for

the best offers. Students should also understand that cards obtained on campus might not have the best rates.

When Choosing a Credit Card Look for ...

- A Low Annual Percentage Rate (APR)
- No Annual Fee
- A Long Grace Period ... at least 20 days. A grace period is the length of time after the receipt of one's credit card statement to the payment due date when no interest is charged
- Interest Calculated Using the Average Daily Balance Method
- Low Penalty Fees

Convenience Users - Convenience users pay their credit card balances in full each month and pay no interest on their purchases since they are able to take advantage of their issuer's grace period (defined above). Convenience users especially are looking for a card with a long grace period. This method of payment is the most cost effective.

Even if a student plans to be a convenience user, they should still look for a credit card with a low APR just in case they can't pay their balance in full one month. If one doesn't pay their balance in full one month, they will not be granted a grace period for the following month and will pay interest on all their credit card purchases.

"Revolvers" – Revolvers keep a revolving balance on their credit card account and pay interest on all their purchases. They do not benefit from a grace period. If a student plans to keep a revolving balance on an account, they should be especially careful to choose a card with a low APR so they can minimize the amount of interest they pay. They should avoid credit card programs that use the two-cycle average daily balance method of calculating interest because this can result in a higher interest payment.

Revolvers must learn to **ALWAYS PAY MORE THAN THE MINIMUM MONTHLY PAYMENT (MMP)**. Making just the MMP is the most costly way to pay off credit card debt. Direct students to the bottom of page 5 of the primer and review with them this example:

If you had a credit card balance of \$2,000 with an APR of 18% and made only the MMP which was based on 2% of the outstanding balance or \$20, whichever was greater, and you stopped using the card, it would take 19.3 years to pay off the debt and the total payout would be \$5,862.

To further emphasize the point that one should always make more than the MMP, write on the board these two examples and discuss them with the class. (Both examples assume discontinued use of the card and a MMP based on 2% of the outstanding balance, or \$20, whichever is greater.)

*\$1,000 debt, 18% APR, MMP paid – payout time 7.8 years, payout \$1,862
\$1,000 debt, 18% APR, MMP+ \$10 paid – payout time 3.9 years, payout \$1,397!*

Direct students to the tables on the inside cover of their primer. Point out that the bottom table shows the benefit of adding just \$10 to a minimum monthly payment.

PowerPoint – DOs & DON'Ts (Slides 9, 10, 11, 12) – Primer Pages 6 & 7

The “Dos and Don’ts” section moves the lecture from the “credit card costs” category to “credit card behaviors.”

Students Should Limit Themselves to One Card – This “Do” statement is based on the concept of temptation. Simply put, the more credit one has, the more tempting it can be to overspend.

Student Loans, Not Credit Cards, Should be Used for Tuition – Student loans are far more cost effective for tuition since they typically offer a lower APR than the average credit card. Another benefit is that payment usually starts six months after graduation. Advise students that it is well worth the time and trouble to complete the application process for a student loan.

Wants DO NOT EQUAL Needs – Students need to stop and think, “Is this something I want or something I really need?” “Can I do without this purchase?” Many young adults who have saddled themselves with excessive credit card debt report that they have nothing of substance to show for their large balance(s)! Plastic can make it easy to overspend.

Credit Cards Offer Convenience – Although credit cards offer us many advantages, they do not change our socioeconomic status. Students should buy only what they know they can afford to repay.

Pay More than the Minimum Monthly Payment – Several items listed under “Dos and Don’ts” have been previously discussed under “Credit Card Costs.” When this is the case, take the opportunity to ask students to explain why they should adopt a certain behavior. For example, students have previously been advised why they should be striving to pay off their credit card balance in full each month or to at least make more than the MMP. Instructors should ask, “... *Now why should we pay more than the minimum monthly payment?*” Making just the minimum monthly payment is the most costly form of credit card payment and should be avoided.

Manage a Credit Card Account like a Checking Account – Students need to actively manage their credit card accounts, just like they manage their checking accounts. For example, they should write down purchases so they know how much they’ve charged for the month. They should also know how close they are to their credit limit so they don’t go over. Emphasize that money should always be budgeted and available to make one’s credit card payment.

Don’t Skip Payments – Sometimes a credit card issuer will declare that a payment is not required that month. Instruct students that payments should not be skipped even if their issuer says it’s okay. Stress to students that they will owe more the next month even if they don’t use their credit card because of the continued accrual of interest.

Pay Bills on Time – Ask students, “*Why should we always pay our credit card bills on time?*” As previously discussed, credit card issuers assess late fees when a payment is received after its due date. Late fees are not only expensive, but they can trigger a higher penalty rate APR. Also, just one or two late payments can be reported to the credit reporting agencies. This can result in an undesirable lower credit score, which will be discussed in further detail under “Credit Reports & Credit Scores.”

Don’t Exceed Your Credit Limit – Ask students, “*Why should we be careful to avoid exceeding our credit limit?*” When you go over your credit limit, you will be charged an over limit fee every month

until the balance of the account is brought under the limit of the account. Also, a low APR will be replaced with a higher penalty rate APR. Emphasize that if students actively manage their credit card account(s) they won't be put in this dilemma.

Avoid Cash Advances – Ask students, “*Why should we avoid cash advances unless it is an emergency?*” Cash advances usually have an up front fee of 3% of the advance (with a minimum \$5 or \$10 charge), a higher APR, have no grace period, and are sometimes impossible to pay off if one keeps a rotating purchases balance as well as a rotating cash advance balance on the account. Instructors may also want to ask students, “*What constitutes an emergency?*”

Avoid Convenience Checks – Ask students, “*Why should we avoid convenience checks unless it's an emergency?*” Convenience checks are very similar to cash advances which typically have an up-front fee of 3% of the check (with a minimum \$5 or \$10 charge), a higher APR, and no grace period. Also, they usually share the same payoff schedule as cash advances, making them very difficult to pay off when one keeps a rotating balance with both purchases and courtesy checks on the account.

Teaser Rates – Ask students “*What do we need to know before we accept a teaser rate?*” Teaser rates are often time-limited, so one needs to know how long the low APR will be in effect and what it will rise to once the period of time has passed. Stress again to students that a low teaser rate will be replaced by a high penalty rate with just one late payment.

Avoid the “Credit Card Shuffle” – When short on funds, some students will resort to taking out a cash advance on one card to make a minimum monthly payment on another card (called the “Credit Card Shuffle”). This action simply creates more debt and should be avoided. Students should use savings, responsibly borrow money to make a payment or advise their bank that they're having trouble meeting their obligation and ask for assistance. Some issuers will offer an alternate payment schedule under these circumstances. Instructors should stress that this problem could be avoided if one has only one card!

Keep a Low Credit Limit - Sometimes an issuer will raise a credit limit when a student demonstrates responsibility by paying their bills on time. The higher limit is offered because the individual is perceived to be a low credit risk. It is recommended that students advise their issuer that they prefer to remain with their lower credit limit. Once again, this statement is based on the concept of temptation ... the less credit one has, the less tempting it is to overspend.

Quickly Mail Payments on Credit Card Accounts with a Revolving Balance – If a student keeps a revolving balance on their credit card account, they should make their payment as soon as possible and not wait for the “due date” to mail their check. By immediately mailing a payment, one reduces the average daily balance on the account and therefore reduces the interest paid on the account.

Credit Card Receipts Should be Saved – Receipts should be saved and compared to the charges appearing on one's monthly credit card statement. After accuracy has been verified, all but important receipts should be destroyed before placing them in the trash. If an error exists, the issuer should immediately be notified. They will provide forms, which are to be completed in writing and returned to the issuer.

Credit Card Issuers Should be Advised of a Change of Address – College students are notorious for making frequent residence changes. They should not depend on a change of address filed with their local post office and, instead, should directly advise their credit card issuer of their new address. Many

students needlessly pay late fees and face the other consequences of a late payment simply because their credit card issuer was not advised of their move and they received their credit card statement too late to make a timely payment.

Immediately Advise Your Credit Card Issuer if a Card is Lost or Stolen – If a lost or stolen card is reported before it has been used, the cardholder is not liable for any unauthorized charges. If the card is reported after it has been used, the cardholder may be liable for up to \$50 per card. Individuals are not liable if the account number, but not the card itself, is used illegally.

PowerPoint – THERE’S ALWAYS A SOLUTION (Slides 13 & 14) – Primer Page 7

Students who may have already accumulated burdensome credit card debt need to understand that there is always a solution to this problem. Overwhelmed by their predicament, some students try to deny that a problem exists. This further exacerbates a serious dilemma.

If a student is unable to pay even the minimum monthly payment on a credit card, skipping a payment is NOT a solution! First, they should stop using the card. Second, the student should call their credit card issuer and tell them that they are having difficulty making even the minimum monthly payment on their account. After describing their predicament, the bank representative may be able to offer a more manageable payment plan. If this is the case, it is best to get the offer in writing. Also, it is best to pay down high APR credit card accounts before low APR accounts.

Clearly, a student who is faced with excessive debt should look to increase their monthly income while reducing their expenses. If unemployed, seeking work is an obvious solution. If already employed, a second job may be required. Doing without extras seems obvious. Managing excessive debt can be psychologically stressful. Students should be informed not to isolate themselves and to talk about their problem. They should consult a school counselor, parent, or a therapist so that they don’t feel alone as they resolve their financial difficulties.

If all else fails, students can contact the National Foundation for Credit Counseling to discuss entering a debt consolidation program. They can be contacted at (800) 388-2227, or at: www.nfcc.org. Individuals who enter debt consolidation programs pay off their debt more quickly since they typically pay lower interest rates on their outstanding credit card balances.

PowerPoint – CREDIT REPORTS & CREDIT SCORES – Slide 15, 16, 17, 18 – Primer Page 8

Since our credit reports and credit scores have such a profound effect on our every-day lives, students should be clear about these topics.

Credit Reports – A credit report is a collection of information obtained from one’s creditors reflecting the extent of the individual’s credit and their payment history. It’s like a financial report card or a financial resume that shows how one handles their bills. Lenders buy these reports to determine whether or not they will grant an individual credit and at what rate. The lower the perceived risk, the better the interest rate offered.

The three major credit-reporting agencies are Equifax, Experian and Trans Union. All are listed in the student primer, along with contact information. Experts recommend that we check our credit reports at least once a year. A new law allows us to obtain a free annual credit report from each of the three

major agencies. This can be accomplished by calling 877-322-8228 or by going to www.annualcreditreport.com. This information is also listed in the primer.

Negative information can stay on one's credit report for seven years, while bankruptcies can remain for ten years.

Credit Scores – A credit score is a numeric value given to an individual by a credit reporting agency or a lending institution, which is obtained from a credit report and reflects one's credit history. It is typically referred to as a FICO score. FICO scores range from 300 to 850; the higher the number, the better the score.

Scores are based on a number of factors. Whether or not an individual pays their bills on time is weighted most heavily. Agencies also want to know how much unresolved debt is being carried. This refers to all accounts including installment loans and credit cards.

They look to see how many credit cards an individual has and their balances. It works against one's credit score to have many open credit card accounts, even if a zero balance is maintained on these accounts. This is based on the fact that a large amount of credit is available to an individual under these circumstances. One can go from owing very little one day to literally owing thousands of dollars the following day under these conditions.

The number of years one has credit is also considered. The individual who has demonstrated financial responsibility for 20 years will have a higher rating than the individual who has demonstrated financial responsibility for five years.

Finally, credit-reporting agencies look at one's quest for new credit. Every time a balance transfer is made or a new account is opened, an inquiry is placed on the individual's credit report. Those with numerous inquiries on their reports are perceived to be a higher financial risk.

PowerPoint – CONSEQUENCES OF IRRESPONSIBLE CREDIT CARD USE – Slides 19 & 20 – Primer Page 8
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While reiterating that credit cards offer us many advantages, students should have a clear understanding that there are serious and long-lasting negative consequences for those who do not responsibly use and manage their credit cards.

Denial of Credit and High Interest Rates – Students with a marred credit report and a low credit score risk being denied credit as they move out into the world after graduation. If granted credit, it is likely they will be assigned high APRs since they will be considered a poor credit risk. They, therefore, will be unable to benefit from the low interest rates enjoyed by those who have behaved responsibly and consistently with their personal financial management. Emphasize to students that this will prove to be a tremendously expensive and long lasting burden as they assume adulthood and buy their first home, automobile, appliances, electronics, and all big ticket purchases.

The Universal Default Clause – Some credit card issuers are now including a “Universal Default Clause” into their agreements, which usually states that if an individual is late in paying their bills to the issuer or any other lender, the interest rate on the credit card could be raised. Banks utilizing this relatively new clause periodically check the credit reports of their cardholders. If a credit score is

lowered for any reason, then the clause can be activated. This allows a credit card issuer to raise a cardholder's interest rate if they've made a late payment ... even if it's to someone else. Take this opportunity to emphasize to students, AGAIN, the importance of paying their bills on time!

Difficulty Renting an Apartment – Students with a low credit score may have difficulty renting an apartment because they are considered to be a poor credit risk who may not pay their rent in a timely fashion.

Denied Employment – Employers and recruiters have access to our credit reports. Students may be denied employment, for which they are otherwise qualified, only because they have a poor credit report and a low credit score. This is especially true for those who are attempting to find employment where they would handle company funds.

Denied Financial Aid for College & Graduate School – College and graduate school Financial Aid Offices may deny aid requests for the individual with a poor credit score.

Higher Auto Insurance Premiums – Individuals with a poor credit report and low credit score typically pay higher insurance premiums.

Cell Phones – Cellular phone companies routinely check a customer's credit score before entering into a contract with the individual. Customers with a low credit score will usually have to pay a high security deposit whereas those with a high credit score pay no deposit.

At the end of this lecture, the following statement is suggested: *Students should clearly understand that while credit cards are a great financial tool, they are also a big responsibility, which require maturity, consistency and sound financial management skills so that they can enjoy the benefits of credit while avoiding the pitfalls.*

Some instructors will choose to end the lecture here. Others may want to discuss the topic of Identity Theft, which follows:

PowerPoint – IDENTITY THEFT – Slides 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 – Primer Page 9
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Definition of Identity Theft – First, define Identity Theft to students. *Identity Theft occurs when an impostor steals personal information such as a social security, driver's license, bank account or credit card number in order to impersonate someone else. The information is then used to obtain credit, merchandize, and services in the name of the victim or to provide the thief with false credentials.* Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the United States.

Signs of Identity Theft – Signs of Identity Theft are listed in the student primer. Instructors may want to review the list with students.

- A credit card or statement is received for an account that wasn't requested.
- A statement is not received, suggesting that an unauthorized change of address may have occurred.
- Unauthorized charges appear on the credit card statement.
- You are denied credit for no apparent reason.
- Debt collectors call and write regarding purchases, services and credit you didn't initiate.

Minimizing the Risk of Identity Theft – No one can totally protect himself or herself from Identity Theft, but the risk can be minimized. Ways to minimize the risk are listed in the student primer and are reviewed as follows.

- Don't give out personal information unless you initiate the contact.
- Try not to use your social security number for identification.
- Leave your social security card at home and don't print this number on checks.
- Carry in a wallet only what is needed. Leave extra cards at home.
- Obtaining a photo ID credit card can be helpful.
- Become familiar with billing cycles and when statements should arrive in the mail.
- Shred all but the most important credit card receipts after confirming their accuracy against your monthly statement.
- Don't leave mail in the mailbox and use the Post Office for outgoing mail.
- Use creative passwords. Avoid the last four digits of your social security number or your mother's maiden name.
- Only make online purchases if the website is secure and protected by an encryption system.
- Keep personal information in a safe place at home.
- Review credit reports at least once a year.
- Place virus protection software on your computer.

Victims of Identity Theft – Victims of Identity Theft can spend months or even years trying to clear up their good name. Listed in the student primer, experts recommend that victims take the following steps to start the process:

- First, contact the three major credit-reporting agencies and ask them to place a "fraud alert" on your file. Creditors will then know to contact you before opening new accounts.
- Order a free credit report from each of the agencies and review the reports.
- Contact the fraud departments for creditors who show either a false account or one that has been tampered with.
- Close these accounts and follow up with a letter.
- File a police report and ask for a hard copy.

Contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). They maintain the Identity Theft Data Clearinghouse that provides lots of important information for identity theft victims. They can be reached at (877)-IDTHEFT or www.consumer.gov/idtheft.

The ABCs of Credit Card Finance
Post-Test

1. A credit card's APR is:
 - a. Most important to a "revolver"
 - b. Most important to a convenience user
 - c. Is equally important to both "revolvers" and convenience users
 - d. Is not important

2. An annual fee may be waived by your credit card issuer if you:
 - a. Charge more than \$150 per month
 - b. Call and ask them to cancel it
 - c. Have used your credit card responsibly for one year
 - d. None of the above ... banks don't waive annual fees

3. A missed credit card payment can stay on your credit report for seven years.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. Failure to responsibly manage your credit card can result in the following:
 - a. You could have difficulty renting an apartment
 - b. You could be charged more for your car insurance
 - c. You can be turned down by an employer for a job
 - d. All of the above

5. Which of the following is true?
 - a. Costs and terms for a fixed rate credit card can only change once a year
 - b. If your credit card is lost or stolen, your personal liability is usually limited to \$50
 - c. The more credit cards you have, the better your credit score
 - d. Paying more than the minimum monthly payment doesn't appreciably reduce your total payoff time and costs

6. Going over your credit limit can result in a higher APR and the assessment of an over-credit limit fee every month until your balance is brought under your limit.
 - a. True
 - b. False

7. If you are having difficulty keeping up with your credit card payments, which of the following is the recommended course of action?
 - a. Call your bank, tell them your situation, and ask if they can offer an alternate payment plan
 - b. Skip a few payments until you have the money
 - c. Take out a cash advance on another card so you'll have the money to make the payment
 - d. Relax ... banks understand that students don't have much money and they'll cut you a break

8. Which is the least costly way to pay off your credit card debt?
 - a. Always make your minimum monthly payment on time
 - b. Always make more than the minimum monthly payment, even if the payment is late
 - c. Always pay your credit card balance on time and in full each month
 - d. All of the above



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