



## Scanning a Credit Report for Signs of Identity Theft

A credit report can be a powerful tool for consumers concerned about identity theft. A proper review could allow the consumer to discover incidents of credit-related identity theft and, in some cases, other types of identity theft. Here, we provide information and tips for both obtaining and analyzing your reports.

### Obtaining Your Credit Report

First step—obtain copies of your credit reports. Every consumer who has established credit in the last several years likely has a credit file with at least one of the three national credit reporting agencies (CRAs)—Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. The Annual Credit Report Request Service provides consumers with a way to request a free credit report once every 12 months from each of the CRAs. You can order these by calling 877-322-8228, request by mail or online at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com).

A consumer may order all three free reports at one time or choose to order one report from each bureau periodically (e.g., order the Equifax report in January, Experian's in May and TransUnion's in September). Ordering the three reports over the course of a year allows you to see snapshots of your current credit history at regular intervals.

### Analyzing Your Credit Report

Second step—review each section of the credit report(s) looking for information that is not accurate. Understand that credit reporting errors do happen and inaccurate information on a credit report does not confirm identity theft but even simple errors need to be addressed. Sections of the credit report include:

**Account Information.** The credit report reveals not just your current accounts, but the history of your use of credit over the last seven years or more. Are there accounts listed that you did not authorize?

**Derogatory Accounts.** These are usually collection accounts or accounts to which payments were 30 or more days late. If someone used your personal information but with a different address when opening an account with a creditor and then didn't pay the debt, you may not find out about it until a collection action is taken.

**Public Records, Judgments, and Liens.** If you find data here that is not your own, verify that the information reported is really associated with your personal identifiers. This will involve a call to the court or records office in question.

**Inquiries.** Review only the inquiries that reflect consumer action; that is, the inquiries from companies that pulled your credit report because of an action taken, such as applying for a credit card, car loan, or utility service. If you find inquiries that do not reflect your own activity, it might be a sign that someone applied for credit or another service using your personal identifying information.

Note that inquiries related to offers of credit not initiated by the consumer are not indications of identity theft.

**Demographics.** This can include name, alias names, associated addresses, date of birth, Social Security number and phone number. If there are names you've never used, addresses at which you've never lived, or employers for whom you've never worked, it warrants further discovery.

### What to Do if There's a Problem

When you find inaccurate information on your credit reports, the easiest first step is to dispute the inaccurate information with the CRA that is reporting the information. If it is an error, the data will be removed or corrected. If the CRA doesn't correct an error it may be because the creditor has an error in the information they supplied to the CRA. You may have to call the creditor and have them correct the error.

However, if there is a credit account on your credit report that you did not authorize, then your first step should be to call the creditor involved. Ask to speak to the fraud department and have them search by your Social Security number to determine if there is an account associated with it that you did not authorize. If there is, you've confirmed identity theft and need to start the dispute process by calling your LegalShield Identity Theft Plan.

### Clues to Other Problems

Although review of a credit report usually will reveal only credit-related identity theft, it may help you discover other types of identity theft as well. For example, an inquiry from a property management company may be a sign that someone applied for an apartment using your identity. An unfamiliar tax lien may indicate that someone did something with your information (i.e., started a business) that created a tax debt that was not paid.

Everyone with a credit history should review his or her reports at least annually. Remember, just because you aren't using your identity to obtain credit, that doesn't mean someone else isn't.