Field guide · How to read your credit report like an auditor

The auditor's checklist: *14 error patterns*

Where each one hides, and the evidence that proves it. Work your three reports section by section.

1 Account that isn't yours (mixed file)
Where it hides: Tradelines, personal info
Evidence: Your ID and address history; list of every unfamiliar name/address on file

2 Identity-theft account
Where it hides: Tradelines, inquiries
Evidence: FTC identity-theft report (IdentityTheft.gov), police report

3 Duplicate tradeline (same debt listed twice)
Where it hides: Tradelines + collections
Evidence: Both entries side by side; matching original creditor, amounts, dates

4 Original creditor AND collector both showing a balance
Where it hides: Charge-off + collection entries
Evidence: "Sold/transferred" remark on the original account; collection notice

5 Wrong balance or credit limit
Where it hides: Revolving tradelines
Evidence: Your latest statement showing the true limit and balance

6 Late payment that was on time, or wrong severity (30/60/90)
Where it hides: Payment-history grid
Evidence: Bank statements, payment confirmations, autopay records

7 Re-aged DOFD
Where it hides: Date fields on collections/charge-offs
Evidence: Old statements or letters showing when you actually first fell behind

8 Obsolete item past the 7-year/10-year window
Where it hides: Any negative item
Evidence: DOFD from your records vs. the report's removal date

9 Closed account reporting open (or open reporting closed; wrong "closed by grantor")
Where it hides: Tradeline status
Evidence: Closure confirmation letter or email

10 Paid or settled collection still showing a balance
Where it hides: Collections
Evidence: Settlement letter, proof the payment cleared

11 "Settled" status when you paid in full
Where it hides: Status/remarks
Evidence: Paid-in-full letter, final statement showing $0

12 Debt discharged in bankruptcy still showing a balance
Where it hides: Tradelines + public records
Evidence: Discharge order and creditor schedules

13 Unauthorized hard inquiry
Where it hides: Inquiries
Evidence: Your own application history; fraud report if theft

14 Deceased indicator on a living person
Where it hides: Personal info, account remarks
Evidence: Government ID; SSA correction if the flag traces to Social Security records

Payment grid: OK Current · 30 30 days late · 60 60 days late · 90+ 90+ days late · CO Charge-off / collection

Only inaccuracies *are disputable.*

Accurate negatives call for goodwill letters, negotiation, or time — not "not mine" disputes.

Educational information, not legal or financial advice. Synthetic example data. You review your own reports and send any disputes yourself.

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