

THE MESQUITE GROUP

Personal Financial Management Instructional Course

*Presented by financial counselors and educators
dedicated to helping you survive and thrive in today's difficult financial climate*

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Visit us online at: www.themesquitegroup.org

One of the greatest gifts we ever receive is the opportunity for a second chance.

I. Future: Hopes, Dreams, Goals and Plans

- **What's important to you?**

Make a list of the most important things in your life, things you have now or want to have, things you want to be remembered for, things you want to do, relationships you want to have, places you want to go, etc.

To make these important things a reality, goal-setting is essential. Goals should:

- Be specific and set according to what you value
- Relate to what's most important in your life
- Help set priorities and create order in your life
- Focus your attention and give you something to look forward to

Dreams need dates to become goals, so set deadlines to achieve them.

- **Short-term and Long-term Financial Goals**

- **Short-term financial goals**

- Generally achieved in one to two years or less
 - Make a list of your short-term financial goals

- **Long-term financial goals**

- Cover longer periods, years or maybe a lifetime
 - Usually require more resources to achieve them
 - Make a list of your long-term financial goals

- **Prioritize Your Goals** - There are always more things we want, or want to do, than there is time or money to achieve them.

- **Goal Achievement**

Goals and dreams are important. Develop and cultivate skills and make plans to achieve your goals.

- Visual reminder
 - Look for expenses to cut to free up money for goals, then set aside a specific amount of money each paycheck, week, month, etc.
 - Discipline yourself to continue to save regularly and adopt a practical lifestyle that allows you to spend less than you earn
 - Manage your time according to your priorities.
 - Evaluate your progress and adjust your goals if necessary
 - Celebrate your successes

Goals are accomplished by following a plan. For every goal, write down the following items:

- Goal:
 - Date to accomplish:
 - Resources needed:
 - People or experts to help:
 - Education or training needed:
 - Steps to take to make it happen:

- **Wants v. Needs: Decision-Making Skills**

Knowing how to distinguish between needs (things you must have to live) and wants (things you'd like to have) can give you a lot of power over your money. The basic needs of life are food, clothing, shelter and transportation, but with so many choices and so much advertising, it becomes hard to determine if you want it or need it.

- Take care of basic needs first and pay yourself first – save money for future needs
- Prioritize purchasing, shop with specific goals in mind, not just to see what's on sale
- Create notes or pictures to remind you of your goals and priorities when shopping
- Before making a purchase, stop and ask yourself if you really **NEED** it
- Compose, ahead of time, your response to friends or family members who may try to get you to spend money for something you know is **not needed**
- Ask yourself if there is a cheaper or free way to get something you want
- Ask yourself why you want something and see if there is a really good reason or if it is just an emotional desire

Human being experience change in stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. Having all these feelings about filing bankruptcy is normal.

II. Present: Protect Your Financial Resources

- **Calculate Gross and Net Income**

Your **gross** pay is the amount your employer pays you before any deductions are made for federal withholding, social security, Medicare, insurance, dues, qualified retirement, etc. Your **net** is the amount you actually bring home after all deductions are made.

When working on your budget, always use the lower or lowest amount you might earn. Don't use a budget and set your spending limits based on expectations for overtime or commissions that can fluctuate or be eliminated.

How much money do you have to pay your expenses each month?

How often are you paid? How much is your average or usual paycheck? Don't use the highest paycheck you might receive, with overtime. Don't use the lowest when you have missed a day or two of work during that pay period.

Paycheck Amount	Total Monthly Income
\$ _____ (weekly x 4.3)	\$ _____
\$ _____ (bi-weekly/every two weeks x 2.16)	\$ _____
\$ _____ (semi-monthly/twice a month x 2)	\$ _____
\$ _____ (monthly x 1)	\$ _____

If there are two or more of you with income, add all income together. Include any disability payments, child support or other income.

Total net monthly income \$ _____

- **Expenses: Fixed, Variable and Periodic**

- **Fixed payments** are the same each month
House payment, car payment, child support, property taxes, Insurances
- **Variable expenses** can go up and down from month to month
Groceries, electricity, gasoline
- **Periodic expenses** happen infrequently, but may be very costly
Home or auto repairs, medical expenses

- **Inventory or Track Spending**

- Your household is actually a small business. A business that takes inventory gains a lot of valuable information. You, too, should take inventory periodically. You do this by writing down everything you spend every day for at least a month. The only way to know where your money goes each month is to write it down as you spend it. Record your spending for **one month**. Find your spending habits and leaks are.
- Carry a 3 x 5 index card with you every day. Put the date on it and record all the money you spend that day. Put expenses in categories and total at the end of each week, then for the month. Here are some helpful categories to organize your spending information:
- groceries, meals out, meals at work, snacks/sodas/coffee, clothing, laundry/dry cleaning, gasoline, parking/bus/train, child care, children's lunches, children's expenses, haircuts/nails, pet food and expenses, alcohol, tobacco, recreation/entertainment, prescriptions,
- See www.mvelopes.com

- **Savings Categories – Two kinds:**

1. Set-aside account to be used for periodic payments and to prepare for unexpected expenses and emergencies.
2. Long-term savings to be used for specific financial goals such as retirement or a down payment for a car or house, vacations or college education for children.

Establish a **HABIT** of saving. In the beginning the habit is more important than the amount you save. Get in the habit of putting aside part of every paycheck to use for large expenses and purchases or save for your long-term goals. Think about this: \$20.00 per week saved for a year will give you \$1,040. If saved every week for five years you will have \$5,200 (+ interest earned!).

Ideal Goal: Have 3-9 months worth of living expenses in savings at all times.

- **Suggested or Ideal Spending Percentages**

What are your monthly **housing costs**? Ideally they should be about 30% of your net income.

(Rent + utilities and insurance. Mortgage(s) + taxes, insurance, utilities, homeowner's dues, repairs)

$$\frac{\text{Total monthly housing costs}}{\text{Net income}} = \text{_____} \%$$

What are your monthly **auto/transportation costs**? Ideally they should be about 15%.

(Car/Truck payment + insurance, gasoline, oil changes, repairs, inspections, registration)

$$\frac{\text{Total auto/transportation costs}}{\text{Net income}} = \text{_____} \%$$

What are your monthly **food, grocery, cleaning and household supplies**? The ideal is 15% or less.

(Groceries, snacks, sodas, work lunches, school lunches, eating out, take out, cleaning products, paper and plastic supplies)

$$\frac{\text{Total grocery and/or food}}{\text{Net income}} = \text{_____} \%$$

Note: *The three expenses above should not be greater than 65% of net your income. So, if housing is 40%, then the percentages of food and auto together cannot be greater than 25%.*

Savings Maybe it's not possible now, but set a goal to save 10% each month.

$$\frac{\text{Total savings}}{\text{Net income}} = \text{_____} \%$$

Debt and charitable contributions/tithes The ideal would be 15% or less.

$$\frac{\text{Total debt and contributions}}{\text{Net income}} = \text{_____} \text{ your } \%$$

Miscellaneous The ideal would be about 15%.

(Phone, Internet, cable/satellite, Direct TV, prescriptions, doctor, dentist, co-pays, glasses, contact lens, child care, clothing, shoes, haircuts, nails, gifts, hobbies, deductibles, entertainment, pet expenses, alcohol, tobacco products, etc.)

$$\frac{\text{Total Miscellaneous}}{\text{Net income}} = \text{_____} \text{ your } \%$$

How do your percentages compare with the ideal? What changes would you make?

10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Housing			Auto		Food +	Savings	Debt + charity		Misc

III. Purchasing and Future Credit

- **Comparison Shopping**

Compare before you buy! Don't be stuck with a bad deal because you bought it on impulse!

1. Compare apples to apples - by ounce, pound, liter, etc. Many grocery stores have pricing labels on the shelves that help you make this comparison. Larger sizes may not always be cheaper if compared by the ounce or pound. Carry a small calculator with you to help you figure the best deal for you.

2. Don't assume the store will have the best prices on the biggest displays.

3. Some stores will honor lower prices from other store's ads, use this to your advantage. Use newspaper ads and the Internet to compare prices before driving to the store. (www.couponsurfers.com or www.thegrocerygame.com or www.sistersofsavings.com or www.couponforum.com)

4. When making a large purchase:

- do your research, spend time shopping and comparing for the best deals
- shop and buy at the end of the season
- compare features for different models and prices, make lists to compare at home
- in appropriate circumstances, ask if the seller will take less

5. Look for local message boards or on the Internet to put you in touch with other consumers who may know of good deals and services in your area (i.e., craigslist.org, gasbuddy.com).

6. Autos:

- Shop for auto with payment amount in mind. Arrange your financing at a credit union, if you can, before you begin shopping.
- Shop for used cars on the internet. If purchasing from an individual, ask to take the car to a garage or shop you can trust for inspection before finalizing the deal.
- Research reliability. Know the problems with particular models before purchasing.
- Shop the classified ads in your local paper or other auto trader publications
- Remember the sales person is working for the seller, not you.

- **Alternatives to Credit**

- Pay cash, pay cash, pay cash....
- If you use a credit card, use a **prepaid** card
- Use your debit card
- Save enough to make the entire purchase
- Barter or exchange goods and services with someone that has what you need
- Use Craig's list for wherever you live. See www.craigslist.org
- See www.freecycle.org
- If you borrow money, pay it back before it's due

- **Types of Personal Credit**

- **Installment credit**

- Short term and you repay the amount borrowed in equal periodic payments. Examples: cars loans and appliances

- **Non-installment**

- Single payment loans; you pay the entire amount by a specified date

- **Open-end credit, or 'revolving credit'**

- You can borrow additional funds when needed, as long as your balance does not exceed a predetermined limit. Examples: Line of credit, Credit cards

- **Sources of credit**

- Banks
 - Credit Unions
 - Mortgage Lenders
 - Finance Companies
 - Credit Cards

- **Very Expensive Credit**

- Rent-to-own - 300% or more in interest or cost of credit
 - Pawn shop loans - 15 to 20% per month, or 240% per year
 - Payday Loans - annual interest rate of about 400%
 - Cash Advance Loans - annual percentage rate of 600%
 - Auto pawn or title loans - up to 250% per year

- **IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER**

- Read the fine print.
 - Make sure you understand what kind of credit is being offered to you.
 - If you don't understand all of the terms of your credit agreement, don't sign it.
 - Ask questions until you completely understand the loan terms and amount you are expected to repay

- **Payment Amount**

- How much do you want to borrow, at what interest rate and for how long? Find out your payment amount at: <http://www.bretwhissel.net/cgi-bin/amortize>

- **Check Your Credit Reports**

- The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) is a federal law. It allows you to request a FREE copy of your credit report from each of the credit reporting agencies (Experian, Equifax and Trans Union) once every 12 months.

- www.annualcreditreport.com
 - Toll free: **1- 877-322-8228** (Hearing impaired: 1-877-730-4104)
 - Annual Credit Report Request Service
P.O. Box 105281
Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

- Experts suggest you order one of your credit reports every four months, rotating between the three credit reporting agencies. Order your Experian report, wait four months and order your Equifax report, wait four months and order your Trans Union report. This allows you to monitor your credit reports throughout the year.

Rebuild Your Credit - Check and correct your credit reports NOW

- Take advantage of the free credit reports you are entitled to receive each year.
- Make sure all creditors included in your bankruptcy are noted on your credit report.
- Cancel accounts you no longer use.
- Look for accounts that do not belong to you and dispute these with the credit bureau.

• Improve Your Score – Rebuild your good credit

- Establish a savings plan, make regular contributions to build up your reserves. These are necessary to protect you from income gaps and help cover emergency expenses.
- Join a credit union and establish checking and savings accounts. If you don't already belong to a credit union, ask at your work if your employment makes you eligible for membership. Look for membership groups that provide eligibility. Search for a credit union by either checking the yellow pages or search at www.cuna.org search under consumer information, then locate a credit union.
- Obtain a secured card by making a deposit that will be security for the account. (www.bankrate.com)
- **Do not exceed the credit limit on the card.** Pay off the balance within one to two months.
- **Make no late payments on any accounts.**
- Save the money to make a large purchase (refrigerator, set of tires, home air conditioner), borrow the money for this purchase. Ask for a loan that will allow you to only pay interest for the time you have the loan and will not penalize you for paying off early. Pay off this loan within one to three months with the funds you have saved. Good trade will be placed on your credit report.
- Do not have more than two credit cards. Maintain balances at ½ or less of the available credit limit.
- Each credit bureau and credit grantor uses a unique formula to determine a credit score, but the following are general guidelines to help understand how to achieve the highest credit scores:
 - 35% - payment history
 - 30% - debt-to-available-credit ratio
 - 15% - amount of time you have managed credit
 - 10% - how many different types of credit you have handled
 - 10% - new credit applications (inquiries)

Record Keeping

Keep the following important documents in one place where you can get to them easily:

- Receipts for tax purposes, bills to be paid and those paid in the current year
- Receipts for current year, current year bank statements and employment records
- Health benefit information and family health records
- Credit card information and current year statements
- Insurance policies, wills
- Appliance manuals and warranties, including receipts of items still under warranty
- Education information (transcripts, diplomas, license, certificates, etc.)
- Social security information on benefits and regulations
- Inventory of safe deposit box and key, loan and contract documents
- Bankruptcy paperwork: notice, schedules (especially D,E,F), Matrix (mailing list), Discharge

IV. Consumer Information

Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act (FACTA or FACT Act) Summary

- Credit reporting agencies must tell you everything in your report, including medical information. In most cases you can ask for the sources of the information. You can receive a list of everyone who has requested your report within the past year.
- There's no charge for a credit report if you've been denied credit, a company takes adverse action against you or you've been denied insurance or employment. You must request your report within 60 days of receiving the notice of the action. The notice will give you the name, address, and phone number of the credit reporting agency.
- Credit reporting agencies must investigate the items you believe are wrong. If a company finds their information is inaccurate they must notify all credit reporting agencies to correct this information in your file. After the investigation is finished, the agency must give you the written results and a free copy of your report if the dispute results in a change.

• Identity Theft

Monitor your credit reports and be aware of Identity Theft, the fastest growing crime in America.

- Never give your personal information to any person calling you on the phone (social security number, driver's license number, bank account numbers, etc.)
- Do not carry your social security card with you, leave it at home in a safe place
- Destroy or shred any credit card offers you receive, don't just put them out in your trash
- Mail your bills and payments at a post office, if possible
- Remove mail from your mail box promptly, if you will be out of town, have your mail held at the post office or have someone pick it up for you
- Do not throw away any receipts, paperwork, bank statements, checks, etc., with your personal information or credit card numbers on them
- If you find anything suspicious on one of your accounts, put a fraud alert on your credit report by contacting any one of the three major credit bureaus. Once you contact one bureau, it will automatically notify the other two.

Equifax – 1-800-525-6285

Experian – 1-888-397-3742

TransUnion – 1-800-680-7289

www.consumer.gov/idtheft or 1-877-438-4338; TTY 1-866-653-4261

If you suspect someone is fraudulently using your Social Security number, file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at : www.consumer.gov/idtheft

Telephone— 1-877-IDTHEFT (1-877-438-4338); TTY— 1-866-653-4261

- **Do Not Call List**

To eliminate telemarketing calls to your home, cell phone or business line:

- **Register at the National “Do Not Call List”** at www.donotcall.gov
Call, toll-free: 1-888-382-1222 (TTY 1-866-290-4236).
- Your home state may also have a “**Do Not Call List.**” Inquire at your state’s consumer information department.
- After you have registered at the “Do Not Call List” and need general information, referral services, or assistance in filing a telemarketing complaint, call the **National Fraud Information Center** at (800) 876-7060.

- **Cut down on the junk mail in your mailbox**

- You can choose to stop receiving “prescreened” offers of credit by calling toll free 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (888) 567-8688 or visit www.optoutprescreen.com
- Register for the Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference Service (MPS) to reduce the amount of unsolicited national advertising you receive at home.

There is no charge for registering by mail; however, it may not take effect for 30 to 60 days because your data is manually added to the service. Mail a postcard or letter that includes your name, home address and signature to the following address:

Mail Preference Service
Direct Marketing Association
PO Box 643
Carmel, NY 10512

- Register at the DMA website for \$1 - www.dmaconsumers.org
- The state of California has good info about reducing and disposing of unwanted mail: go to: <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/WPW/Home/JunkMail.htm>

Consumer Resources and Protection

- **Better Business Bureau (BBB).**
BBBs are non-profit organizations, sponsored by local businesses, meant to promote good relations between consumers and businesses. Though BBBs have no legal authority, they may contact a business involved in a dispute and offer some form of arbitration to settle the matter. Look in the phone book for the nearest BBB.
- **Consumer Product Safety Commission** (a federal agency) provides public information on consumer products.
<http://www.cpsc.gov/>
Call toll-free (800) 638-2772.
- **Consumer Action Handbook** – Information on company and brand name products. Order the handbook: <http://www.consumeraction.gov/>
Or write: Consumer Information Center
Pueblo, CO 81009

- **Insurance: Who, What, Where, How Much**

- Insurance coverage **you may need**: *Health, Disability, Life, Homeowners, Renters, Automobile (liability, full coverage, gap coverage)*
- Insurance coverage **you may NOT need**: *Mortgage life, Insurance on outstanding credit card balances, accidental death and dismemberment, flight, cancer*
- Before buying any insurance, know exactly what you're purchasing. Get a second opinion from someone other than the insurance agent or salesman. Consult others who know and understand these types of insurance.

- **Additional Credit Counseling Assistance and Consumer Information**

- **National Foundation for Consumer Credit** has a toll-free reference line to locate an area member office of Consumer Credit Counseling Services, non-profit groups offering advice and debt management programs for little or no charge. To locate the nearest office, call (800) 388-2227.
- **Better Business Bureau (BBB)**.
BBBs are non-profit organizations, sponsored by local businesses that promote good relations between consumers and businesses. Though BBBs have no legal authority, they may contact a business involved in a dispute and offer some form of arbitration to settle the matter. Check the phone book for the nearest BBB.
- **Consumer Product Safety Commission** (a federal agency) provides public information on consumer products.
<http://www.cpsc.gov/>
Call toll-free (800) 638-2772.
- **Consumer Action Handbook** – Information on company and brand name products. Order the handbook: <http://www.consumeraction.gov/>
Or write: Consumer Information Center
Pueblo, CO 81009
- For publications by the federal government on consumer issues contact the <http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/>
Call toll-free (888) 878-3256
- The **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** (www.ftc.org/gov) deals with fraud and deceptive business practices, and has the legal authority to file lawsuits and freeze company assets. The FTC has a number of consumer protection publications available on the website or by writing to:

FTC, Public Reference Branch
Sixth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20580

Call (202) 326-2222

- The **Federal Communications Commission** (www.fcc.gov) handles complaints concerning: obscene, profane and indecent broadcasts, slamming complaints, telemarketing, junk fax and email messages to wireless devices. To file a general complaint (forms are available at the website) contact:

fccinfo@fcc.gov or fax Toll-Free: 1-866-418-0232.

If you have questions or need assistance filing a complaint, call Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. ET, Toll Free: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice, 1-888-TELL- FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY.

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Complaints
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Financial Support

- **Financial assistance with prescription drugs:**
If you're having trouble paying for your medications, go to these websites and see what help might be available.
 - **Partnership for Prescription Assistance**
www.pparx.org Toll free: (888) 477-2669
 - **SelectCare Benefits Network**
Toll-Free: 1-877-331-0362 Fax: (512) 996-9409
 - **Help with prescriptions** - Information on available assistance programs, it does not supply medicine or financial assistance. www.needymeds.com
 - Visit www.rx.com to inquire about their prices for prescriptions and other medical supplies
- **Assistance for Veterans**
Contact VA Benefits to locate the services and facility nearest you: 1-800-827-1000
- **Help with groceries and food**
<http://www.angelfoodministries.com/default.asp>
Angel Food Ministries is a non-profit, non-denominational organization dedicated to providing grocery relief to communities throughout the United States. Angel Food works through churches and community organizations in over 32 states.
Angel Food Ministries
1620 South Broad Street
Monroe, Georgia 30655
Telephone: 770-267-7015/888-819-3745
Fax: 770-267-8031
Hotline: 1-877-FOOD-MINISTRY

Emotional Support

- **Support Groups**

- **Debtors Anonymous**

<http://www.debtorsanonymous.org/>

Debtors Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from compulsive debting. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop incurring unsecured debt. There are no dues or fees for D.A. membership, it is self-supporting through contributions. D.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. It suggests you attend at least six meetings as soon as possible. If you do not like one meeting, attend another. Find one that suits you. The important thing is to keep coming back.

Debtors Anonymous
General Service Office
P.O. Box 920888
Needham, MA 02492-0009
Telephone: 781-453-2743
Fax: 781-453-2745

- **Gamblers Anonymous**

<http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/>

Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from a gambling problem. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling. There are no dues or fees for Gamblers Anonymous membership, it is self-supporting through contributions. Gamblers Anonymous is not allied with any is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stop gambling and to help other compulsive gamblers do the same.

Gamblers Anonymous
International Service Office
P.O. Box 17173
Los Angeles, CA 90017
Telephone: 213-386-8789
Fax: 213-386-0030
For Further information, E-mail isomain@gamblersanonymous.org

- **SCORE**

“Counselors to America’s Small Business” is America’s premier source of free and confidential small business advice for entrepreneurs. SCORE’s 10,500 volunteer counselors have more than 600 business skills. Volunteers are working or retired business owners, executives and corporate leaders who share their wisdom and lessons learned in business.

<http://www.score.org>

- **Debt Warning Signs**

Put a check in front of each sentence if you've ever found yourself in any of these situations.

- ___ 1. Routinely spend more than you earn.
- ___ 2. Skip payments on some bills to pay others.
- ___ 3. Use credit cards to buy things you used to pay with cash (groceries, electric bill).
- ___ 4. At, or over, the limit on credit cards and make only minimum payments on cards.
- ___ 5. More of your total income goes to pay off debts, which doesn't leave enough for basic needs such as food, clothing, insurance, the house payment or rent.
- ___ 6. Have more than two or three major credit cards.
- ___ 7. Use overnight mail or Fed Ex to get payments to creditors.
- ___ 8. Transfer balances from one card to another instead of making a monthly payment.
- ___ 9. Use cash advances to pay bills or make payments on other cards.
- ___ 10. Written a check hoping that you'll be able to cover it by the time it clears your bank.
- ___ 11. Tried to make a purchase with your credit card and it was declined or you were denied credit or a loan.
- ___ 12. Creditors or collectors were calling you about overdue bills.
- ___ 13. You lie to or argue with your spouse or other family member about your spending or hide credit card statements from family members.

These are **debt warning signs**. If you've experienced **five or less** of these, you may have caught the problem before it's unmanageable, but you must act immediately to change your spending habits. If you've experienced **six or more** of these, your problem is much more serious and will require more drastic steps.

PLEASE RETURN YOUR STUDENT EVALUATION FORM TO:

The Mesquite Group
2125 Martin Dr., Ste 200
Bedford, TX 76021