January is Financial Literacy Month - How Savvy Are You?

Check the correct answer. If you don’t know the answer, check “don’t know.”

1. If you buy a company’s stock,
   □ A. you own a part of the company.
   □ B. you have lent money to the company.
   □ C. you are liable for the company’s debts.
   □ D. the company will return your original investment to you with interest.
   □ E. don’t know

2. If you buy a company’s bond,
   □ A. you own a part of the company.
   □ B. you have lent money to the company.
   □ C. you are liable for the company’s debts.
   □ D. you can help manage the company.
   □ E. don’t know

3. Over the past 70 years the type of investment that has earned the most money, or the highest rate of return for investors has been
   □ A. stocks.
   □ B. corporate bonds.
   □ C. savings accounts.
   □ D. don’t know.

4. If you buy the stock of a new company,
   □ A. you cannot lose money.
   □ B. you can lose all the money you used to buy the stock.
   □ C. you can lose only a portion of the money used to buy the stock.
   □ D. don’t know

5. Monique owns a wide variety of stocks, bonds and mutual funds to lessen her risk of losing money. This is called
   □ A. saving.
   □ B. compounding.
   □ C. diversifying.
   □ D. don’t know.

(answers in February Newsletter)

6. Carlos has saved some cash and faces these choices. What would be the best thing for him to do?
   □ A. put it in his savings account.
   □ B. invest in a mutual fund.
   □ C. buy a U.S. Savings bond.
   □ D. pay off the balance on his credit card that charges 18% interest.
   □ E. don’t know

7. Maria wants to have $100,000 in 20 years. The sooner she starts to save, the less she’ll need to save because
   □ A. the stock market will go up.
   □ B. interest rates will go up.
   □ C. interest on her savings will start compounding.
   □ D. don’t know.

8. Jennifer wants to take some of her savings and invest in a mutual fund because mutual funds are
   □ A. guaranteed to earn more than saving accounts.
   □ B. risk free.
   □ C. managed by experts at picking investments.
   □ D. don’t know.

9. Bob is 22 years old and wants to start saving now for his retirement in 43 years. Of these choices, where should Bob put most of his money now for this long-term goal?
   □ A. a savings account at the bank.
   □ B. a checking account at the bank.
   □ C. a mutual fund that invests in stocks.
   □ D. the stock of one company.
   □ E. don’t know

10. Federal and state laws protect investors by requiring companies to
    □ A. show profits before they can sell stock.
    □ B. give investors important information.
    □ C. pay dividends.
    □ D. repay investors who have lost money.
    □ E. don’t know

Source: Investor Education
January is the Time to Undeck the Halls

Do you add to your holiday décor each year? Where do you store everything?

Lights

If you just whip off the lights from the house and the tree and toss into a box you will hate yourself next November when you find them twisted and tangled and broken. Wrap them around an empty paper towel or wrapping paper roll. Cut a notch in one end of the roll and tuck the end of the string of lights in the notch and begin rolling them around the tube. When you get to the other end of the tube, make another notch for the end of the string. Roll each string of lights separately. Label each as you go – indoor or outdoor, tree lights or decorative strands, etc. make sure you discard any that are not functional.

Large lights or extra long lengths can be rolled in a circle. Delicate, expensive or special lights can be stored in the type of inexpensive plastic bowls that come with covers. The lights will not get crushed and you can stack them for storage.

Christmas Trees

Taking down the tree takes two people. For real trees, get a tree bag to avoid needles getting all over your floor. Make sure the bag is large enough to cover the base of the tree and long enough to cover its height. A large covering, like a plastic shower curtain, can also protect your floor as you take down your tree.

Artificial trees can be stored fully assembled in Christmas tree storage bags. Simply open the bag, “fold” up the limbs on the tree as directed (Did you keep the instructions that came with your tree?) place the tree carefully into the bag and zip it up! Lack of storage space may dictate that you dismantle the tree as directed (Did you keep the instructions that came with your tree?) place the tree carefully into the bag and zip it up! Artificial wreaths can be stored in a large pillowcase or in a large plastic bag. Wrap some tissue paper around the wreath first. If the ribbon gets flattened during storage, plump it up with a curling iron.

Ornaments

Dust the ornaments before you store them. Used fabric soften sheets work well. (You can also use these to wrap ornaments for storage.) Shoe boxes, plastic storage cartons and metal popcorn canisters work well for storing ornaments. Do not overcrowd the ornaments in the container or force the lid to close. Label each container with the type of ornaments in each one. Delicate elongated ornaments can be stored inside a toilet paper tube or paper towel tube. Smaller items can be placed in egg cartons.

Wrapping Paper

Make an inventory list of the Christmas paper you have before you store it so you won’t buy what you don’t need next season. Long plastic storage containers that fit under the bed work well to store wrapping paper. You can simply lay several rolls of paper on the floor and tie them together with string and then slip them into a large garbage bag. Some people store their paper and ribbons in an old suitcase. Just remember to label the container where you store it.

More tips…

- Dust silk flowers with a blow-dryer, set on cool before storing them.
- Save empty baby wipe boxes for storing gift tags.
- Store Christmas dishes in plastic wrap or stacked in Ziploc™ bags.
- Always launder Christmas tablecloths and napkins prior to storing. Old spills will oxidize during storage and can be difficult, if not impossible, to remove.
- Artificial wreaths can be stored in a large pillowcase or in a large plastic bag. Wrap some tissue paper around the wreath first. If the ribbon gets flattened during storage, plump it up with a curling iron.
- Make a note of what seasonal items you have stored and where you have put them.
- Remember to purge broken items before you put them away.
- Use the buy 1 - get “rid” of two principal. When you refresh up new decorations, remove -donate-the items you are not going to use. Places to donate? Resale stores, day care centers, family day home providers, local business, church(es).

Source: Mississippi State University Extension

Bed bugs: A Costly Pest

Dr. Mike Merchant

Forget the economy, forget the Cowboys, forget “Dancing with the Stars”. If you want to start a lively conversation these days, just bring up the subject of bed bugs. These tiny blood-sucking parasites have finally reached celebrity status.

So why the fuss? Before the year 2000 only 25% of U.S. pest control professionals had ever seen a bed bug. As of this year, 95% of these same folks are encountering bed bugs on a nearly daily basis. The upswing in the U.S. bed bug population is likely due to a combination of factors, but the two most commonly mentioned are increased international travel and resistance among bed bug populations to many of the most commonly used insecticides.

Should you be worried? I’m not sure worried is the right word, but caution is certainly warranted. Although bed bugs in hotels are still relatively rare, these days I always leave my bags at the door and do a quick check around the room before settling in.

Continued on next page
I would never consider picking up used furniture off the street curb (I've done it in the past), as this is another common route for bed bugs to enter a home. It's not worth the risk--financially or emotionally--to bring home unwanted hitchhikers.

Bed bugs can be expensive. If you live in an apartment or condo, treatment costs to eradicate bed bugs can range from $500 to $1500. While the risk from bed bugs for owners of single family homes maybe probably less, the cost to treat an entire house will be greater. And pest control companies report more and more infestations of detached homes. No one is immune from this problem.

If you do rent, you might assume that your landlord will pick up the cost of a bed bug treatment, not necessarily. In fact, many landlords are asking prospective tenants to sign a document stating that they do not have bed bugs or are not moving from an apartment complex with bed bugs unless all their belonging have first been treated. Some of these agreements also require new tenants to pre-inspect their apartment and certify that they see no signs of the little pests, much like you check a rental car for dings. Apartment managers, you see, have learned how expensive a bed bug problem can be.

Unfortunately, bed bug problem are sometimes difficult to detect or diagnose. Because of bed bug fears, one pest control company I spoke with recently said that 70% of their bed bug calls turn out not to be bed bugs. On the other hand, according to one recent study, up to half of folks with bed bugs may not even recognize they have a problem. Empty homes and apartments are also difficult to inspect. Bed bugs in such situations are usually well-hidden, and their signs may be obscured by fresh paint.

Inspecting for, and controlling, bed bugs is a job for professionals. The high cost of a bed bug job is due to the high labor costs associated with inspecting and treating every nook and cranny of your bedroom and furniture.

Here are a few tips to avoid headaches with bed bugs:

► When traveling, do a quick check of your room--especially around the headboard and mattress. Look for tiny, flattened insects no bigger than an apple seed, and for dark specks or stains that indicate dried blood.

► In a hotel room avoid placing your suitcase on the ground next to the bed. Use the luggage rack and keep it as far away from beds as practical. This minimizes the chance of a bed bug stowing away in luggage.

► Never bring home used furniture off the street. There may be a good reason folks are dumping their furniture, and it might have six legs.

► If you think you might have bed bugs, call a professional. A professional has the experience and knowledge to help you know if you have a problem, and will be able to design the best control program for your needs.

► If you, or someone you know, get bed bugs, don't throw away that expensive mattress. A new mattress won't solve the problem, and will quickly become infested from bed bugs in the rest of the home. Instead, use a bed bug-proof encasement for your mattress and box spring. These effectively seal in any bed bugs and provide few places for bed bugs to hide compared to bedding.

For more information about bed bugs, including identification and control, I invite you to visit my website at: http://citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/biting-stinging/others/#Bedbugs

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1. **Pay on time.**
Paying your credit card account on time helps you avoid late fees as well as penalty interest rates applied to your account, and helps you maintain a good credit record. A good credit record leads to a higher credit score, which helps you qualify for lower interest rates. Know the date your payment is due. If your bill is due at an inconvenient time of the month—for example, if it's due on the 10th and you get paid on the 15th—contact your credit card company to see if they will change your billing cycle to fit your cash flow.

2. **Stay below your credit limit.**
If you go over your credit limit on your card, your card issuer could charge a fee and increase your interest rate to a higher penalty rate. To avoid this, keep a record of your spending or check your balance online. Also, be aware that some merchants (for example, hotel and car rental companies) put a “hold” on your credit card based on their estimate of the amount you will charge. This can reduce your available credit until the final charge is processed.

3. **Avoid unnecessary fees.**
Credit card companies not only charge late payment and over-the-limit fees, but also fees for cash advances, transferring balances, and having a payment returned. Some companies charge a fee when you pay your bill by phone. Pay attention to the transactions that trigger these fees. If you need a cash advance, withdraw enough so that you don't have to take a second cash advance—and incur a second fee—later in the month. Read your credit card agreement to learn more about the fees that your credit card company charges.

4. **Pay more than the minimum payment.**
If you can't pay your balance in full each month, try to pay as much of the total as you can. Over time, you'll pay less in interest charges—money that you will be able to spend on other things, and you'll pay off your balance sooner.

5. **Watch for changes in the terms of your account.**
Credit card companies can change the terms and conditions of your account. They will send you advance notices about changes in fees, interest rates, billing, and other features. By reading these “change in terms” notices, you can decide whether you want to change the way you use the card. For example, if cash advance fees increase, you may decide to use a different card for cash advances. If you have a card with a variable rate or if you have an introductory rate that is ending, be aware that credit card companies are not required to send you a notice about raising your interest rate. Interest rates are listed on your monthly bill. Read your bill carefully and take note of any changes.

Source: [www.federalreserve.gov](http://www.federalreserve.gov)