



Your Bottom Line

Your go-to resource for timely information about personal finance, college planning and student loan management



Fall into Successful Habits

Summer is over and back-to-school routines are in full swing. Fall is quickly approaching and the holidays aren't far behind. This time of year can feel a bit chaotic, but you can manage the chaos by incorporating strategic daily habits that can help you enhance your chance of success.

- **Plan your day.** One habit that can produce significant results is to plan out your daily tasks. Take a look at your work and personal calendars each night before bed so you know what your agenda for the next day will be. Knowing your schedule ahead of time will help you decide what to wear, see if you need to pack a lunch, determine when you need to leave the house, or remind you of evening activities that may require some pre-planning. Thinking through your day while there's

time to get ready for it will help to decrease unnecessary stress that comes with being unprepared.

- **Prep meals.** We know that eating healthy is better for our body's physical health, but it can also have a significant impact on your level of success. Choosing healthy meals can improve the brain's cognitive function, keeping our minds sharp, focused, and ready to handle daily responsibilities. Many times our healthy eating habits are derailed by a lack of preparation. Packing a lunch or keeping snacks in your office will reduce the temptation to pull into a drive-thru or raid the office vending machines. Eating more nutrient-dense foods will not only keep your brain firing on all six cylinders, but will save you from the cost

of dining out, too.

- **Get your beauty rest.** Proper sleep is crucial to productivity and overall health. Instead of staying up to cram for a test or prepare for a presentation, go to bed. Without sufficient sleep, the body and mind start to break down. Not only will you feel exhausted the next day, you'll be less focused and more forgetful. Continuous lack of sleep can also lead to serious and costly health issues.
- **Wake up early.** Try going to bed earlier so you can wake up early. Nothing sets a negative tone for the day like running late. Creating a daily habit of waking up early will help eliminate this unnecessary stress and give you time to go over your to-do list, savor a

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quiet cup of coffee, or enjoy time for reflection through devotions, meditation, or journaling.

- **Schedule time for physical activity.** It can be hard to find the time for fitness, but it can be argued that our activity level affects everything from our health to our state of mind to our relationships. While you may not be ready or willing to commit to a gym membership, there are a lot of other options that can help you incorporate more movement into your day. Set a timer on your phone or computer to remind you to get up and move around, stand up while doing your desk work or recruit a co-worker to take a walk during breaks. Visit [Thrive.ok.gov](https://thrive.ok.gov) for more resources to incorporate healthy habits in the workplace.
- **Continue learning.** Ongoing learning is vital to keeping your mind active and alert, which keeps you on top of your game. Devote time to reading (autobiographies about successful people or other success-related books are good options), listen to audio books on your daily commute, attend lectures or seminars, or take a continuing education class.

Available
Oct. 1

5 steps for completing the FAFSA

1 GATHER MATERIALS

Visit [StartWithFAFSA.org/Resources](https://startwithfafsa.org/resources) to determine your dependency status.

That will determine what types of information you'll need on hand to complete the FAFSA.

2 CREATE AN FSA ID

Go to fsaid.ed.gov to create a user name and password. Save this information, because it's how you'll access all FAFSA-related information and complete future FAFSA applications.

3 FILL IT OUT

Fill out the FAFSA online at [FAFSA.gov](https://fafsa.gov) for easier completion and quicker processing time. Remember to save your work often!
Send your FAFSA results to up to 10 schools.

4 SIGN AND SUBMIT

Review your answers, enter your FSA ID to serve as your electronic signature, and don't forget to hit 'submit.'

5 FOLLOW UP

Watch your email for a Student Aid Report (SAR) and information from the schools that received your FAFSA information. Respond to school requests for more information ASAP!



The Right Chores for the Right Age

The vast majority of today's parents were required to do chores when they were children, but only 28 percent of them ask their children to take responsibility for tasks around the house. According to a study conducted by the University of Minnesota, this trend is more harmful than helpful. In fact, the study shows that doing household chores is the best predictor of future success in education, career and personal relationships.

Below is a list of age-appropriate tasks that can help your child contribute to the household and develop a sense of responsibility, independence and perseverance.

- **Ages 2-3:** Put toys in their place; put dirty clothes in the hamper; match socks; pick up trash; dust baseboards.
- **Ages 4-5:** Set the table; sort laundry by color; fold towels; feed and water pets; water houseplants.
- **Ages 6-7:** Make their bed; choose outfits; take out the trash; clear the dishes after meals; pull weeds; replace paper towel and toilet paper rolls.
- **Ages 8-9:** Load and empty the dishwasher; keep their bedroom clean; put away laundry; sweep the floor.
- **Ages 10-11:** Vacuum; wipe down counter tops; gather mail; sweep porch and/or garage; put groceries away.
- **Ages 12-13:** Cook simple meals; rake leaves; mop floors; clean toilets.
- **Ages 14-15:** Wash windows and mirrors; baby-sit; do their own laundry; scrub bathtub.
- **Ages 16-18:** Work a part-time job; mow the lawn; cook family meals; clean kitchen after meals; iron clothes; wash vehicle.



Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program

Jaime Shelton, Senior Regulatory Compliance Specialist
Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP)

Jaime Shelton from the Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) answers questions about the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program.

What is the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program?

The Teacher Loan Forgiveness (TLF) Program was created to encourage people to become educators within designated schools that serve low-income families. Teachers with Stafford loans may qualify for loan forgiveness if they meet the program's specific eligibility requirements.

Who is eligible for the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program?

Teachers working in a Title I school (low-income) are eligible for the TLF program. If a teacher isn't sure if his or her school qualifies as a Title I school, s/he can look it up on the [Federal Student Aid Teacher Cancellation Low Income Directory](#) by selecting the state and the year s/he began teaching. If the school is listed the year s/he began teaching, then all subsequent years of work at that particular school will count toward the program regardless if the school falls off the list.

What if a teacher's school isn't listed the year he or she began teaching?

The teacher will need to select each school year thereafter until the school is listed; if the school is still not listed, then it's not a qualifying school. Only the years of service after the school enters the list will count toward years of service for the TLF program. If a teacher feels the school should be listed, this can be verified with the state's department of education. Teachers can find the state's contact information on the [Federal Student Aid State Contact Information](#) list.

Is there a number of years a teacher is required to teach?

To qualify for TLF, educators must teach in a qualifying school for a total of five consecutive years.

What if a teacher has worked at multiple schools?

The teacher is required to send an application for each school regardless if the schools are in the same district.

What if a teacher doesn't know which lender has his or her student loans?

Teachers can locate their federal student loan information using

the [National Student Loan Data System \(NSLDS\)](#). They may need to create a [FSA ID](#) in order to see their loan information. Once access is gained, they should be able to view their loan history and their loan holder's contact information.

What if a teacher has multiple student loan lenders?

They can send the application(s) to each loan holder, unless the amount awarded is enough to cover just one loan.

Where can a teacher find an application for the TLF Program?

An application and additional program information can be found at [ReadySetRepay.org](#), or the teacher can request an application directly from the loan holder.

Are there other loan forgiveness programs if a teacher doesn't qualify for TLF?

Yes, any person working for a school of any kind in any position may be eligible for [Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(PSLF\)](#). This program forgives Direct Federal Loans and requires 10 years of service and 10 years of payments.

Time-Saving DIY Meal Hacks

If you're tired of eating out all the time or hearing your kids complain about their school's cafeteria food, check out these meal prep hacks that will make your brown bag the envy of the lunch room.

- **Cook in bulk.** Instead of scrambling for lunch items during your morning rush, pick one day each week to prep meals for the entire week. Use large baking sheets to cook meats and veggies or use muffin tins to make omelets to-go. Divide single portions into containers for grab-and-go meals that will help curb the urge to hit the drive-thru.
- **Maximize your slow cooker.** Preparing home cooked meals is a breeze when you freeze meal ingredients in gallon storage bags. When days are busy and nights are filled with activities, empty the frozen ingredients into a slow cooker before you leave for work for a no fuss, nutritious meal when you get home. For easy cleanup, line your slow cooker with waxed paper or invest in disposable crock liners.
- **Buy quality reusable containers.** Glass jars are a great eco-friendly way to pack and store meals. Large jars are great for layered salads or stew, and smaller jars are ideal for packing breakfast or snacks. Glass or plastic storage containers are also a nice option for dividing up leftovers for an easy next-day meal. If you prep meals for multiple family members, consider buying containers in multiple colors and assign family members their own colors to help with portion control or specific dietary needs.

Protecting Your Social Security Number

Your Social Security number (SSN) is the brass ring for individuals who want to steal your identity. They could use your SSN to open accounts and make purchases in your name. If identity theft is recognized in time, victims can contest illegitimate purchases and will not be held liable for the money that was spent. However, even if you don't lose money, recovery takes time and your credit score could suffer.

A very common - and easily avoidable - mistake people make is carrying their Social Security card in their wallet. A better option is to memorize your SSN and store your card somewhere safe, preferably in a fire-proof safe or a lock box at a bank.

Use extreme discretion before giving anyone your SSN. Government agencies and financial institutions will never call to ask for your SSN. If you suspect someone has stolen your information, report it to the [Federal Trade Commission](#). If accounts have been compromised, close them immediately and report what happened to the respective financial institutions.



Shred all documents that contain personal information, especially your SSN. Never leave sensitive information where identity thieves could take advantage of it.

The easiest thing you can do to protect your information is to closely monitor all your financial activity. Criminals are banking on the fact that you don't monitor your accounts. At the very least, monitor your bank and credit card statements monthly and request one free credit report from each of the three credit bureaus once per year at [AnnualCreditReport.com](#).



Apps & Websites for Managing Your Finances

Through the use of various financial websites and mobile apps, it's become more convenient to manage personal finances. Below is a look at three web-based resources that may aid you in your pursuit of financial stability.

- [Money Under 30](#) provides advice for young adults who are looking to take control of their finances. Whether the goal is to eliminate your credit card debt or you're in the market for a new home, this site guides you through the various trials and opportunities that you may face in many financial situations.
- [Digit](#) is a site that connects to your checking account and automatically pulls out a "safe" amount of money each day. The software calculates this amount based on your spending habits and gives users a 1 percent bonus after the first three months. The service costs just \$2.99 per month and insures your funds up to a balance of \$250,000.
- [Mint](#) is a financial tool that brings all your economic wants and needs together in one spot. This free app links your bank accounts and your credit accounts to track your spending and compares it to your budget goals. Mint will notify you when you're getting close to reaching your budget limits, as well as alert you to any suspicious changes to your accounts. The ability to monitor all financial accounts through one application allows users to confidently and quickly manage assets.

On Our MIND

What's on the mind of OCAP staff? This month, staff assistant Jordan Evans talks about saving money as an adult student.



It only took a semester out of college to get the itch to go back into the classroom to pursue my master's degree. Going back to school as a working adult isn't only intimidating, it can be pricey, too.

During the last few semesters, I've picked up some habits to help manage these growing costs. Below are some easy ways to save money while getting back into the classroom.

- **Meal prep.** While working during the day and going to classes at night, it's easy to get in the habit of grabbing a quick dinner from that fast food restaurant across from campus. This practice is not only expensive, but can lead to health issues down the road. I like to take advantage of lazy Sunday evenings and prep a few grab-and-go dinners that I can eat on the move.
- **Scholarships.** That's right, scholarships aren't just for undergrads. There are plenty of scholarships available that are specifically designed for graduate students, and often there is less competition to win the prize. Many schools also have an abundance of departmental scholarships that are available for graduate students. You can find a list of scholarships at UCanGo2.org.
- **Student discounts.** One of the perks of being a student is having access to a student discount. This discount can save you a few dollars when you do decide to go out to eat or hit the movie theatre. More places will accept this discount than you would think, so don't be shy and ask everywhere you go if they offer one.
- **Used books.** As you examine your list of required books, it becomes clear that this is an expense that quickly adds up. You can find great deals on used books by looking at websites like [Chegg](#) or [Amazon](#), or at the university bookstore. If you buy used books, you also have the option of selling your book after you're done with the course. Often you can save more money than you would've if you spent the money renting the book, while avoiding the potential fees if you forget to return it.

Investing Tips for Beginners

Investing can be intimidating for most individuals. Many people think you need to have a finance degree and ample knowledge of the stock market before you dive into investing. In truth, the advent of technology has brought plenty of easy ways to explore investing options.

Mutual funds are generally considered a “safe” starting place for new investors to investigate if playing the stock market is the right venture for them. You can get started either with an online broker or with a direct mutual fund account. If you would rather not choose your individual investments, look into an online broker like [Betterment](#) or [Wealthfront](#). They use “robo-advisors” to help diversify your investments and keep costs down. To further simplify investing, there are apps you can download to manage investing on your phone. [Stash](#) is a good option if you want to invest in a personalized stock portfolio, while [Acorns](#) uses spare change from debit card purchases for “micro investing” to build wealth.

Remember that investing is for reaching your long-term goals and not a tool for short-term savings. Think about your long-term goals and when in the future you’ll need to use the funds. You’ll also need to understand that investing involves a degree of risk. Consider working with a certified financial planner who can help you assess your risk tolerance. If you’re younger and just starting out in your career, you may be able to tolerate higher-risk investments. If you’re near retirement, you will want to explore low-risk investments. You’ll also want to talk with your certified financial planner about diversification to ensure you’re using a mix of strategies in case a segment of market takes a turn for the worse.

Don’t wait to start investing in your future. Thanks to the magic of compounding interest, the earlier you get started, the more money you can potentially earn. For more tips on investing and retirement planning visit OklahomaMoneyMatters.org.



Thousands of Oklahoma students will soon take advantage of College App Week (CAW) 2017 through college planning events across the state.

CAW is part of a national initiative sponsored by the Kresge Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the American Council on Education. CAW is proudly sponsored locally by the Oklahoma GEAR UP Program and the Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP). During CAW, the objective is to give every high school senior the opportunity to complete one or more college applications online at a high school, technology center, library or community center, with assistance from knowledgeable staff and volunteers who are present during the application process.

This year, the week designated for CAW in Oklahoma is September 18-22. Schools/organizations that are unable to fit their CAW events into that week are free to hold their event during any week during the fall semester, through the month of November.

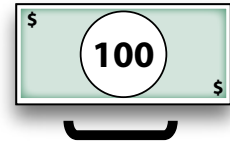
Each year since the Oklahoma GEAR UP program piloted CAW in November 2012, thousands of Oklahoma students have submitted college applications during CAW. This special yearly emphasis has made a dramatic difference in the number of completed college applications, particularly for those students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education.

For more information and planning tools, visit OKCollegeAppWeek.org.

THE DEBT SNOWBALL

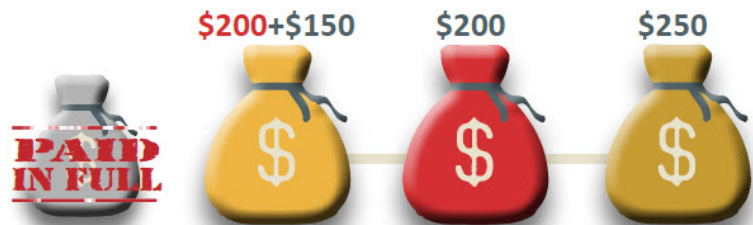
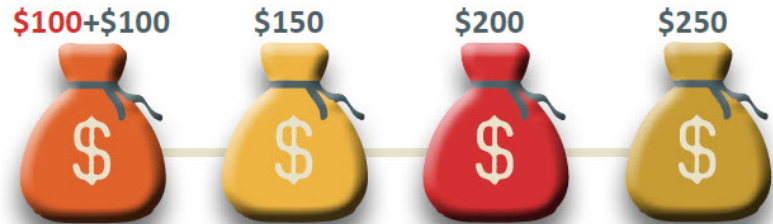
This repayment strategy can help you quickly and effectively gain momentum toward a debt-free lifestyle. The key to success is identifying a dollar amount that you can commit to debt reduction each month (\$100 in the example below). Commit to increasing the minimum payment on your smallest debt while continuing to make minimum payments on all others. Once a debt is paid, use that money to accelerate your payment on the next debt. Continue this pattern until all debts are paid.

List all debts from smallest to largest



Identify money that you can commit to debt repayment

Pay extra on the smallest debt payment while continuing to make regular monthly payments on all other debts



Find your motivation

Brainstorm a list of all the things you would like to do when you're debt-free.



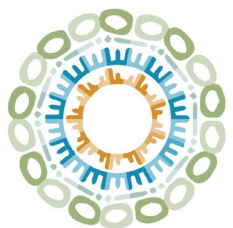
Partner News and Events



Member Meeting
Wednesday, October 25
11:30 – 1:00

Credit Union House of Oklahoma
Topic: Taking the Fear out of Grantwriting

For more information,
email Pam Campbell at pam.campbell@kc.frb.org
or visit OklahomaJumpstart.org.



Save the Date
Financial Education in Oklahoma Conference
Wednesday, November 1
Moore-Norman Technology Center's S. Penn Campus

Have News to Share?

Let us feature it! Do you have a contest, educational workshop or other event you'd like us to highlight in a future edition of the newsletter?
Send a note to bnichols@ocap.org today; space is limited.



Oklahoma Money Matters (OKMM), an initiative of the Oklahoma College Assistance Program and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, is a personal finance education program that helps K-12 schools, higher education campuses, businesses and community partners develop or expand educational services that empower Oklahomans to make positive financial choices.

Visit us online at
OklahomaMoneyMatters.org.

To ask questions or share comments regarding this newsletter, call 800.970.OKMM (toll free) or email OklahomaMoneyMatters@ocap.org.



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