Winning Essays - 2016 MD|DC Credit Union Scholarships

Applicants were asked, to submit a 750-or-fewer word essay based on the topic, You and a friend would like to start building your credit. Discuss with your friend what good credit is, ways to start building credit, how your credit union can help, and the benefits earned by having good credit.

Here are the 2016 scholarship-winning essays:

Charlotte, a college student, is sitting at a table, eating, when her friend, Rose, sits next to her

Rose: I can't believe I forgot to pay my credit card statement again this month. Not only that but I don't even have the money to pay for what I did buy with it.

Charlotte: Rose, you know you're going to ruin your credit score by doing that and get in a whole lot of debt. Do you really want to pay back what you owe and the interest? You might even get your credit card cancelled.

Rose: So what? It's not like I need any credit now anyway. And I'll make more money at some point to pay it back. That doesn't happen in real life, Charlotte. They just say that to scare you.

Charlotte: Being in debt your whole life isn't really the best of life plans. What about when you get older and want to buy a car or a house? You won't have any money to do that because you'll be in debt and no bank or credit union will ever give you a loan with the credit score you'll have at that point. And yes, it is real. It happened to my aunt. She lost everything. She lost her house in Chicago and now she can't get a credit card or a loan to even help pay for anything.

Rose: Okay well that's a long time off. I'll be fine by then. I'm young. Can't I just live my life now and fix it later? I don't need any of those things now.

Charlotte: Sure, you could but it's always better to get ahead and start building up credit. And what if you need a loan for college? With the way your credit score is now with all these missed and unpaid payments, I wouldn't be surprised if you have a hard time finding anywhere that's willing to give you a loan to help pay for college. We still have three years left. Who's to say you won't need a loan for college, or even for anything else? Didn't you say you wanted an apartment one year? What if you want to get an apartment but can't find a roommate the first couple of months? Who's going to pay for the rest of the rent if you can't get a loan for it? With a credit score that low, a landlord might not even let you rent an apartment.

Rose: Alright, I guess it would be for the best to start paying on time and only buying what I have the money for, if it would help my credit. But how am I going to fix it now? I'm so late on some of these payments and the money I have I need for groceries and hanging out with my friends.

Charlotte: Try to cut back on your spending. I'm sure going out with all of us, despite us loving to have you there, isn't totally necessary. And maybe buy food at a less expensive store. I'm sure you can find the same thing for cheaper. What really helped me to get good credit was that I went to my credit union. They gave me some really helpful advice on what to do. Instead of getting a credit card, I started out with a credit card from my credit union. It was kind of annoying at first but it did help me to build up my credit score. And eventually I could finally get a credit card once I built up my credit.

Rose: Really? I didn't know you were part of a credit union.

Charlotte: Yeah, I joined and that was probably one the easiest decisions I've made, looking back at it. Not only do I have a low interest rate on my college loan, but I also easily built up my credit score. I just had to make sure I paid on time. They gave me great advice, otherwise I'm not sure if I would have even cared about my credit score. Now my credit card limit is higher so I can spend more, as long as I know I'll have the money to pay for it.

Rose: Maybe I should look into joining a credit union, or at least working on my credit score. I don't want any opportunities in life to be affected by my credit score.

Charlotte: That's the spirit! You'll be fine in no time once you start building up credit.

" Where did the time go? I can't be old enough to get a loan already. I can't believe it is time to go to college already! Life is going by so quickly, Sydney. How can we possibly keep up? I know in my head that it is time to grow up and face this thing called life. My financial future is in my hands and I need to tread carefully so I do not mess it up. Where do I start", I asked myself. My good friend Sydney may know a thing or two about how to start a positive financial future. " Hey, Sydney...wait up!"

"I have a question, Sydney. What is good credit?"

"Oh that is an easy one to answer. Good credit comes from paying your bills on time, not having too many loans, and making wise financial decisions. A good way to track your credit is by using an online credit reporting service. These reporting services give you a number that indicates numerically good or bad credit. So when you apply for a loan, they know whether you are a high risk customer. A good credit rating can also save you money. You can bargain for a lower percentage rate on the loan if you have great credit."

"But Sydney, how can I build my credit? I'm young and have no loans yet." "Well, you can have your parents co-sign a loan for you, then pay the loan back on time, that will help you build credit. Start out slow and work your way up. In addition, if you have a student loan, paying that back right away is also a good thing to do."

"I belong to a credit union, is that a good thing?" "Yes!! Being a member of a credit union is a great thing. Credit Unions are owned by the members and elect a Board of Directors to make wise financial decisions for them. Credit Unions tend to be more personable than big banks, have lower loan rates, higher savings rates, and free checking accounts. All of those things can save you money."

"In the end, having great credit, using a credit union, and making wise financial decisions can save a good bit of money over time. A great credit rating can save you money on loan rates for cars, school, and eventually a mortgage. That saves you thousands over time. Plus, it is much easier to get a loan when the loan officer looks at your positive credit rating."

"Thanks, Sydney, that helps me put things into perspective." I'm looking forward to getting started on building my credit and keeping that credit rating high!"

If I were to ask what makes a good friend, I'm sure you would know immediately how to respond. A good friend is someone you trust, enjoy spending time with, and who demonstrates interest in your well being. Now if I were to ask who would be a good person to loan money to, you might list some similar characteristics. A good borrower is someone you can trust and who provided a reliable return on investment in previous borrowing opportunities.

In the process of forging friendships, you have the

opportunity to gauge someone's ability to become a good friend over time by observing how he behaves with others. You could determine if your potential friend has earned people's trust and what he chose to do with this confidence. Maybe you yourself would spend time with the individual and through small acts of loyalty build up trust with the person.

In contrast, loaning money is a less forgiving process. There is nothing gradual about a loan, except for maybe recurring payments. Once the lender has released his capital, return on investment is in the borrower's hands. As a lender, therefore, you would want to be certain that the borrower has the means and responsibility to make required payments. This is where credit history and its associated numerical scores come into play.

Credit scores are a numerical representation of one's credit use, estimating how past and current performances predict future credit dependability. While there are a number of institutions that collect and analyze credit data to formulate independent scores, they consider a number of common factors, including payment history, outstanding loans, the length of one's credit history, recent credit uptake, and types of credit used. Of these, payment history is the most important. Credit reports look closely at past loans and transactions, making sure payments have been made on time. In addition, financial institutions evaluate outstanding debt to ensure that potential borrowers do not already have large amounts of debt before taking on another commitment.

So all of these components are combined into a formula, and a number between 300 and 850 pops out—but why is this useful? After all, you don't pick your friends with spreadsheets and formulas. Why would you need a formula for your finances? Let's foresee a future in which you rent your first apartment, take out a loan to help with tuition, or lease a car. Knowing that you are likely to get the best rates and service at your local not-for-profit credit union, you choose to evaluate potential credit union financing options rather than those at a traditional for-profit bank.

Despite being a member of the credit union, your loan officer would need to see your credit scores. With thousands of dollars on the line, the officer considers your financial stability, credibility, and payment history to determine the loan and interest rates offered. Unlike choosing a friend, in which you might take months to grow the relationship, a loan officer is expected to make a rapid business decision. Credit scores help expedite the process by providing a easily available, standardized measure across all applicants.

No matter your path in life, good credit will help you achieve your financial goals. In a subscription-based digital society, a good credit score is essential for everyday purchases, large or small. While credit score evaluations are mandatory for big-ticket loans like a mortgage or car loan, they are equally important for smaller items like credit cards, apartment leases, and cell phone accounts. Having no credit history is not equivalent to a good credit history. Therefore, it is important to start advancing your credit opportunities early in life. Starting with reliable credit card payments and working into larger loans as they suit your life circumstances, while avoiding large amounts of debt, is a great plan. Limiting credit score inquiries will also raise your score.

With so many factors to take into account, establishing and maintaining good credit may seem formidable, but your credit union can make it easier. One way is through credit cards and loans taken out through your local credit union. Many credit unions offer a certain number of free credit score reports, and even more provide free access to online payment systems to streamline your payment processes. Credit union financial advisors are also happy to provide advice about various financial opportunities. Despite the daunting world of finance and credit, your credit union is a friend ready to help.

It is never too early to start preparing for the future, but often teenagers do not have a true understanding of financial responsibility and its impact on lifelong success. As my best friend and I begin our journey to college, we realize that an important part of our success is the ability to make good financial decisions. We must learn what is considered good credit, how to build and maintain solid credit, and how to use the benefits of achieving an excellent credit score to help us reach our goals. To begin our adventure into financial stability, my

friend and I visited our local credit union. We met with a financial service representative (FSR), who explained to us that credit is the ability to borrow money. We learned that when you borrow money, you are promising to pay that money back with interest, but lenders have to determine if you are a good candidate. The FSR told us before a financial institution decides to lend money, a loan officer will consider the "Four C's", which are capacity, capital, character, and collateral. In other words, to be considered for a loan, a loan officer wants to know if you are employed, what your monthly expenses are, how much money you have saved, whether you have past credit that has been paid back on time, and if you own anything of value that could be used to repay the loan. We learned that each loan applicant is given a credit score, which is determined by your past financial history. The better your history, the higher your score will be; however, we learned that it takes time to build that history. It seemed like a simple concept, but my friend and I did not know where to begin to build our own credit. The credit union recommended that we start by opening a checking account and having our parents authorize us as users on a credit card.

We each met with our parents about opening a checking account and acquiring a credit card. I told my friend how my parents were excited about helping me get started and taught me how to balance a checkbook. Both of our parents agreed to cosign for a credit card and explained to us the importance of only making necessary purchases, paying off our balances in full, and making our payments on time. My dad told me that having too many credit cards could actually weaken my credit score because it makes it appear like my only financial means is through borrowing money. He stressed that making elaborate purchases and creating debt would negatively impact my credit. My friend told me how her parents explained that if she made poor financial decisions with her credit card, it would also have negative consequences for her parent's credit because they cosigned for the credit card. After a long discussion, my friend and I were confident that we were ready to successfully take on this responsibility.

We returned to the credit union to open a checking account and apply for a credit card. We were pleased to find out that the credit union offered a free checking account and a credit card that had no annual fee and low interest rates. The student checking account required no minimum balance, charged no monthly maintenance or check fees, and gave us access to surcharge-free ATMs nationwide. In addition, the credit union made being financially responsible even easier by having 24-hour online account access and easy payment options for credit cards. We were on our way to building our credit and it felt great!

Before we left, my best friend and I learned that after college, all our hard work in establishing good credit would pay off. The credit we build now will help us achieve many of our future dreams. Being creditworthy people will enable our credit union to offer us pre-approved loans for a car or home, with competitive rates and flexible terms. As we left the credit union, I told my best friend that I felt learning about the importance of credit and financial responsibility had helped us get ready for the next phase of our lives, and with the help of our credit union, our possibilities were unlimited.

Most people look at good credit as having paid bills in a timely fashion as agreed to on their credit agreements along with their records of punctual loan payments. However, for people our age, it is easily explained like this: good credit gives us purchasing power. Teenagers and college students are greatly affected by higher financing rates and interest rates, and a good credit score helps balance out those negative aspects. For example, if you want to buy a car to drive yourself to college, it is essential to have good credit. An individual with a high credit score

will get a lower finance rate when purchasing a car, so the overall amount to pay for the car is significantly cheaper. Or when you are ready to move out of your dorm, you have a better chance of landing an apartment if your credit score is in the clear. If you have a superior credit, people are more likely to allow you to rent because they know you are conscientious and prompt with your payments. Now, I know the idea of building credit is intimidating, so this is where you start. Ask your parents to either have one of them co-sign on a credit card for you or gain user status on one of their cards. This will help you build credit while you are still dependent, so when you want to spread your wings, you will do so with ease.

After you start building your credit score with a credit card, you need to consider other important monetary actions. The Credit Union has a whole section of its webpage called the Youth Center that is dedicated to helping teenagers and college students like you and me understand and effectively build upon our credit score while also considering our current needs. For instance, I know you need to start considering a loan for your graduate school. The Youth Center has a calculator to help you decide what loan you can and cannot afford when it comes to your education. Additionally, someone our age needs to consider reserving money in a savings account for future endeavors, and there is a calculator for that, as well. These tools along with many other links for the Credit Union's website have helped me get in control of my credit and money. My favorite links are the extra information links. They are links to articles written to help guide teenagers to successfully acquiring a job, managing a checking account, and additional information on building a good credit.

Overall, I hope you better understand the importance of good credit and go to the Credit Union's website to get started on your future.

Every day during my seventh grade lunch, my friends and I would discuss how many bedrooms our homes would have, the luxury cars we wanted to drive, and how we planned to decorate our mansions. It's safe to say we all had pretty big dreams. One day during our usual lunch conversation, a teacher joined us. She was unusually quiet as we spoke about acreage and square footage, room colors and floor plans, and locations and security. It wasn't until the bell rang that she spoke words that I will never forget, "I hope you have good credit." Her words resonated with me, not because I didn't know what they meant, but because I didn't know how much of an impact a seemingly meaningless yet familiar word, had on my goals and aspirations. That day marked the beginning of a journey for me to understand the significance and vitality of credit. I have shared what I learned about credit with many peers.

As a graduating senior having a profound interest in finance, I feel obligated to help my peers understand credit. I've taken various financial literacy classes, and have made several steps to begin building my own credit. When my peers are confused by "good credit" and its definition, I often explain to them what the principal of credit actually is. I tell them that credit is basically an advanced offset of an "I owe you". Credit allows a person/consumer to obtain goods or services before payment. Similar to an "I owe you" it's based primarily on the trust that the person will actually pay you back. Good credit then, is just proof that you actually pay people back. In a sense, it's a value placed on your trustworthiness and ability ranging from 301 to 850. I go on to inform them that there is a lot of uncertainty as to what a "good" credit score is but it is generally is a score of 700 or above.

Usually at this point, there's a pause and then one person that asks the critical question of "how do build good credit?" I tell them that it's very similar to school assignments. If you have ten assignments due and you turn each of them in late, there's no way you will get a good final grade. Similarly to credit, if you get approved for a certain amount or limit, get a bill, and pay late, you won't have a good credit score. I go further to explain that obtaining good credit is fundamentally the same as paying on time, building trust, and not using all the borrowed money at once just because you have it. I touch on interest rates and tell them how credit unions can help them.

Inevitably I get asked, "Where do you bank?" I love this question. I proudly respond, my whole family are members of a credit union and have been for many years. We have mortgages, credit cards, savings and checking accounts, and purchased our cars from the credit union. I opened my very own checking account when I got first job at McDonald's. I am a pro at online banking and using their teller machines.

Another question they ask, "Why bank there?" I respond, many credit unions are community oriented and focus on their members versus solely focusing on profit. For this reason, many credit unions are able to provide many perks and incentives that aide in the building of credit. For example, currently at our credit union you can get a credit card with no annual fee, no balance transfer fee, auto rental insurance,

and credit limits up to $30,000 provided you get approved. These incentives help you build credit by keeping more money in your pocket, and thus decreases the chance of late payments and defaults. In addition, their mortgage and auto loan rates are usually significantly cheaper than most commercial banks.

I remind my friends of their goals of mansions and luxury vehicles and tell them about that teacher who sat down at my lunch table in seventh grade. I tell them the benefit of having good credit is that without it, your dreams easily become dreams deferred. We live in a society where your credit score is the best measurement of you, and by starting now, you have the chance to make that measurement as high as you want.

Friend: Hey, can I ask you something? Me: Yeah sure, go ahead.

Friend: I want to start building my credit, but I don't really know how to start. I'm also a bit uncertain about what good credit even is. Can you help me?

Me: Oh, yeah sure! I actually was looking to build my credit too. But yeah, you should know what good credit is. Have you ever heard someone say, "I want to take out a loan to buy a car but I don't know if I will be approved?"

Friend: Oh, yeah I think I heard my neighbor say something like that when he was buying a new car.

Me: Yeah, exactly. To get approved, you should have good credit, and to have good credit basically means that you pay back money that you borrowed on time. So you know how you get a credit card bill every month? If you pay the credit card company in full and on time, that can help to build your credit score, and if you were to take out a car loan, keeping up with the monthly payments to pay off the loan can also help to build your credit. It's always a good idea to establish a good credit history too. Obtaining a cosigner for your first loan or credit card can establish your credit history. You should also apply for a collateral loan. This means that you pledge an asset of yours to the lender as assurance, in the case you cannot pay back the loan. Your car could be used for this, as well as investments and equity in your home.

Friend: Oh that's cool. I think I'm going to have to stop just paying the minimum on my credit card bill and start paying in full. Is there like, a number to represent a good credit score?

Me: Yeah, the credit range goes from 300 – 850. Having a credit score from about 720 and above places you in good standing with your credit. Hey by the way, did I mention that your credit union can help you build your credit score? Since credit unions are member-owned, they are more than happy to help their members build their credit. They accomplish this by offering low-cost secured loans, free credit counseling and online debt management courses.

Friend: Wow, I never knew that. I'm going to have to take advantage of the tools my credit union has to offer to help. Can you tell me about the benefits of having good credit?

Me: Yeah that's the best part! When you have a good credit score, lenders feel like they can trust you, and when anyone can trust you, that makes life a whole lot better. If you are looking to buy a home, you will be more likely to get approved for a loan if you have a good credit score, and it gets even better. Having a good credit score can lead to lower interest rates on loans that you take out, which makes paying it off all the more easier. This goes for financing a car as well. Oh, and if you have good credit, it makes applying for a credit card easier and you can obtain a higher credit limit to use on that card.

Friend: Oh, that's great! Thanks a lot that was very helpful. I'm going to go start building my credit right now!

Josh is called back to the bench after tirelessly scoring three soccer goals.

"Hey Josh," I said, "do you know anything about credit cards and credit?"

"No, why?" he breathlessly asked.

"I'm thinking about getting a credit card and I wondered if you knew much about credit."

"Blah," he exhaustedly blurted.

"Good credit is like your coach's trust in you," I told him, "the more consistent you are and the better you do what he wants you to do, the more trust he will have in you. Then he will send you into the game more often."

"Fine" he said, "what is good credit?"

"I'm so glad you asked! Good credit is when the borrower has a very low risk history, which is good because it motivates lenders to offer larger and lower-interest loans to you. There are multiple ways to measure the risk factor, but the FICO score is the most used quantification. Having good credit is very helpful because you can get a mortgage more easily, lower mortgage interest rate, better car insurance rates, buying power and negotiating power, a good reputation, respect, multiple rewards, and the ability to use average billing with utility companies. A good credit score may even allow you to land and keep a job. Also, as you prove that you are a responsible credit card holder, your borrowing limit rises. Don't forget that having good credit helps you get lower interest rates when buying a vehicle or paying for student loans, which is especially useful for us. Overall, having a good credit score is really beneficial."

"Wow," he said, "so... how do I improve my credit score?"

"I knew I could persuade you!" I said triumphantly, "there are lots of ways to improve your credit score, and it really helps to know what the score depends on. The FICO score depends on amounts owed, new credit, length of credit history, credit mix, and payment history. Now we can look at the individual aspects. Generally, the less you owe, the less risk you pose. Never spend more than you have in your checking account, don't max out your credit, keep your credit card required payment below 10% of your monthly income, and never...ever... borrow more than 20% of your yearly net income. New credit is not as important in calculating the score, but research has shown that opening several credit accounts in a short period of time represents a greater risk. Your credit account history also affects your credit score. The older your accounts and the more often you use these accounts, the greater the positive effect of this aspect on your score. The mix of your credit cards, retail accounts, installment loans, finance company accounts, and mortgage loans. In general, as you use these accounts more responsibly and frequently, they will have a more beneficial impact on your credit score. Payment history is the single most important factor in your score. When you pay your accounts on time or earlier, then your risk factor will decrease."

"That sounds difficult to get into." Josh sighed.

"Yes, but if you sign up for a credit union, they can help."

"Sure they can," he stated with immense sarcasm.

"Yep," I cheerily responded, "firstly, the credit union can loan you an amount of money to help establish your credit and, conveniently, the credit union can also set you up to pay that loan through your credit union bank account electronically, a nearly foolproof way to make required payments on time."

"BROADMAN," the coach resoundingly yelled.

"Your coach knows that putting you in is a very small risk..." I said, as Josh immediately interrupted with, "and now I'm ready to play the game... of credit too."

Finally, he ran in and swiftly scored the winning goal within the next two minutes. Prepared for the future... in both soccer and the credit world.

Hello Amber,

I am sorry that so much time has passed since my last letter. I've been so busy with college that I have had little time for anything else. My busy schedule has left me with little time to take care of my banking needs and as a result, my relationship with my bank has suffered. I was encouraged by several friends to establish an account at the community credit union. I immediately noticed the difference between the two institutions. I was able to discuss my credit issues with a knowledgeable staff person who took me on an educational journey to understand that the credit union and all its services were designed to help me reach my financial goals.

One of the many lessons I learned was centered on establishing and maintaining good credit. I am twenty so what do I know about credit. I discovered that credit is a historical account of how you pay your bills. Good credit is paying at least the minimum monthly payment on all your credit obligations before the payment due date. Creditors are then able to view your payment history/credit report and make decisions to extend or deny credit. So yes, maintaining good credit can ultimately save you money. Your credit report is a reflection of your character. When you accept an extension of credit you are legally bound to the terms and conditions of that contract. People with character and integrity honor their contractual obligations.

I also learned that there are several ways to build good credit. The best way to start building credit is to open a credit card account with a low credit limit and make the monthly payment on time. If the credit union has secured credit cards or secured loans, these products are also beneficial in building good credit. Refrain from opening several loan accounts. One or two accounts are sufficient to start building good credit. Create a budget so you can determine how much you can afford to allocate to monthly loan expenses. The best advice I can give you once you have established one or two accounts is pay your bills on time each month. If you encounter a problem in making your monthly payment on time, be proactive and contact the lender to make alternate arrangements so that your payment history isn't adversely affected. Lastly, review your credit report annually to ensure that the information contained in the report is accurate.

There is a definite benefit gained from maintaining good credit. You are able to borrow money at a lower rate which means you pay less to borrow the same money that someone with less than favorable credit would pay. You have more negotiating power and access to a wider array of lending products and services. Good credit can also affect your employment opportunities. Employers are now looking at credit history as an indication of how trustworthy and responsible a potential employee would be. Good credit is also a source of pride and personal satisfaction.

By now I am sure you're wondering why I am writing to you about credit. I don't want your first experience with credit to be negative. I want you to be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to make informed decisions about your finances. My advice to you is, run to your community credit union, establish an account, and discuss all the ways they can help you establish and maintain good credit. I guarantee you won't regret your decision. I know I haven't.

Until next time

One day, Melanie and I were at the airport, waiting for our plane to depart for a college visit. Melanie, seeing a credit card advertisement in the terminal, confided that her parents were having trouble paying their credit card bills. She told me that she overheard her parents wishing that they had maintained better credit when they were younger, because then they might not be in this mess. She asked me why credit was so important and how she could build good credit. This is what I told her:

So, Melanie, you want to start building good credit? Well my friend, there are many ways to begin; but no matter where you start; you have to understand what good credit is. Good credit means you are a reliable and credible source to loan money to, so lenders can feel confident that they will be paid back on time. Good credit can be measured in a numerical calculation known as a credit score. This score is what credit unions and other financial entities use to make their loan decisions.

To earn and maintain a good credit score, you must pay bills on time, keep balances less than 50 percent of the credit limit, avoid opening up too many credit cards, and manage a good mix of credit types. While this may sound like more of an "adult" responsibility, maintaining good credit can start when you are a teenager, with something as simple as paying your first cell phone bill. You also have to make sure not to take out excessive loans that you cannot repay, especially during your college years. College loans may sound like a good idea at the time, but borrowing too much and making only minimum payments could mean you will be paying off loans for the rest of your life.

Now, friend, this may all sound overwhelming at first, but our local credit unions are here to help! Credit Unions are very good at explaining how interest on loans work, walking you through the loan process, and helping you comb through contracts that are seemingly too good to be true. My mom always says, "If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is", and this is the case with a lot of commercial loans and credit card contracts. All of this may seem intimidating at first, but I swear, credit unions are there to help you manage your money correctly so that you make the best decisions financially!

As most adults know, having a good credit score can be very rewarding when you are taking out a loan, or signing for a mortgage. A bad credit score can ruin your chances of starting a business, or being able to take the big step of buying your first house. Now you may be asking: "Why should I care whether I have good credit, if I don’t plan on taking out any major loans?” Well, I would tell you that no matter how much you make or how well you manage your money, eventually your credit score will matter in some way when you apply for a mortgage or a car loan. Even a future employer may look at your credit when considering you for a job or a security clearance.

By maintaining good credit, you could be offered more attractive mortgage and refinancing rates, be eligible for lower financing rates on car loans or leases, and have more negotiating power with

potential loan sources. These factors are all very important in getting the best loan possible so that you pay it off quicker and with less hassle.

As you can see, Melanie, good credit is very important in shaping your future. Do you want to be a savvy saver and a credible loan applicant? Or, do you want to be a graduate riddled with debt, not able to lease a car or rent an apartment? The choice is yours, although I think we both know the better option.

So head on down to your local credit union, and see what they have to offer you! There are financial counselors on site, as well as numerous online courses to help you learn more about good credit. The credit union may even be able to help your parents with a lower cost credit card or debt consolidation loan too! After all, it’s never too early or too late to improve your credit.