



# IDENTITY THEFT

Advanced ESL Level



## I. Pre-reading

Do you know what *identity theft* is? Do you know anyone who has had his personal information stolen? What can you do now to protect yourself from ID theft?

## II. Vocabulary

fraud  
criminal  
victim

divert  
identifiable  
unauthorized

existing  
fraudulent  
complicated

initiate  
compile  
deceptive

## III. Reading

*What is identity theft?*

Identity theft or identity **fraud** is a crime. A thief takes someone's private information. This could be a Social Security number, a bank account or credit card number, a telephone calling card number or other valuable data. The **criminal** then uses this information to buy things and services. **Victims** can spend an average of \$1,400 and 3 to 6 months to correct ID theft. They usually find out about the crime after more than \$20,000 has been spent in the victim's name.

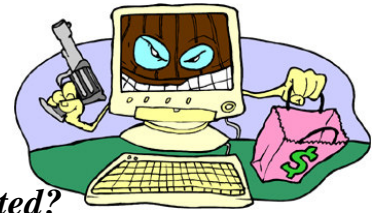
**How does it happen?**

There are many ways for thieves to take your private information. They may:

- steal wallets and purses
- steal your mail, including:
  - your bank and credit card statements
  - pre-approved credit offers
  - telephone calling cards
  - tax information
- complete a "change of address form" to divert your mail to another location
- go through your trash to find personal data
- get your business or personnel records at work



- use personal information you share on the Internet
- buy your personal information from other people such as store employees who work with **identifiable** information



***What are different kinds of identity theft that have been reported?***

- credit card fraud
  - New accounts are opened in your name. This is the most common fraud reported.
  - **Unauthorized** charges are made on **existing** accounts.
- telecommunications fraud
  - Cellular phones are bought in your name.
  - New telephone service is created in your name.
  - New utility accounts are opened in your name.
  - Unauthorized charges are made to your existing utility accounts.
- bank fraud
  - Fraudulent checks are written on existing accounts.
  - New accounts are opened in your name.
  - Unauthorized electronic withdrawals are taken from your accounts.
- employment fraud
  - Identity thieves use your personal information to gain employment.
- fraudulent loans
  - Personal, student or business loans are opened in your name.
  - Auto loans or leases are opened in your name.
  - Real estate loans are opened in your name.
- government benefits
  - A driver's license can be obtained in your name.
  - Fraudulent tax returns are submitted in your name.
  - A Social Security card is obtained in your name.
  - Fraudulent claims for government benefits might be received in your name.



***What can you do to minimize the risk of becoming a victim?***

Manage your personal information cautiously. Be aware of how identity theft can happen. Here are some helpful tips:

- Before you give anyone personal information, find out how it will be used and if it will be shared with others.

- Pay attention to billing cycles. If your bill does not come on time, call the credit card company to find out why.
- Guard your mail. Pick up your mail from your mailbox as soon as you can every day. Do not leave mail to be picked up by the mail carrier if there is any personal information inside such as a check. Take it to a postal box to deposit safely. If you are planning to be away from home, put a hold on your mail.
- Do not use passwords that are easy to find in your personal information such as your phone number or your mother's maiden name. Make them more **complicated** so no one can guess what they are.
- Don't carry all of your credit cards. Only carry what you will use.
- Do not have your Social Security number written down anywhere inside your wallet or purse.
- Make a copy of everything in your wallet or purse, and keep it in a file. Then if anything is stolen, you can tell the police exactly what was taken.
- Do not give your personal information on the phone, through the mail, or over the Internet unless you have **initiated** the contact.
- Keep important documents in a safe place.
- Shred any documents or credit card offers before you throw them away.
- To limit the amount of phone calls coming to your house from telemarketers, register with the National Do Not Call Registry. The federal government created this to allow citizens to stop unwanted calls. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) **compiles** the phone numbers and gives them to the telemarketers, who are asked not to call these numbers. Register online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov) or call toll-free (888) 382-1222.
- There are three credit bureaus. You can ask for a credit report once a year from each of them free of charge.
  - Equifax – [www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com) - (800) 685-1111
  - Experian – [www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com) - (888) 397-3742
  - Trans Union – [www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com) - (800) 888-4213
- The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, **deceptive** and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357).



## IV. Post-reading

### True or False?

1. T F Choose easy passwords such as your phone number.
2. T F Keep your Social Security number in your wallet.
3. T F There is no way to stop telemarketers from calling you.
4. T F You can request a credit report for only \$10.00.
5. T F Pick up your mail as soon as you can every day.
6. T F Pay attention to billing cycles.

### Choose the correct answer.

1. Manage your personal information \_\_\_\_\_.  
carelessly      cautiously      fraudulently
2. Thieves may make \_\_\_\_\_ charges to your credit card.  
common      existing      unauthorized
3. The \_\_\_\_\_ then uses this information to buy things and services.  
police      bank      criminal
4. You can safely give personal information over the phone if you \_\_\_\_\_ contact.  
initiate      open      deny
5. \_\_\_\_\_ documents before you throw them away.  
tape      shred      fold



## V. Activities

**If you are working with a tutor or a partner, discuss your answers.**

1. Make a list of everything in your wallet. Make sure your Social Security card is not there. Copy everything else, and put it in a file at home. You will need this if your wallet/purse is ever stolen.
2. Request a credit report. What do you think you can do to improve your credit rating?