

Financial Algebra: Summer Packet 2026

Due on the first day of class

Name: _____

Welcome to Financial Algebra!

The course you're about to take is rather different than the math classes you've taken this far in your high school careers. While this is still a math class and your skills from all your previous math classes will be useful, this course is *interdisciplinary* in nature, meaning that you will be expected to use your skills from other subjects in order to succeed. I find that running Financial Algebra in this way levels the playing field, since this class is often made up of students of all mathematical skill levels, who all deserve a reasonable challenge.

Like the class as a whole, this assignment is a little bit different than a traditional math summer assignment as well. For each of the math sections, I have provided an overview of the topic and a couple model problems to try to help you. Because of all the overview, this assignment is not as long as it looks! You are also welcome to use any reputable online resource at your disposal (I especially recommend Khan Academy). If you choose to use an online resource, please indicate on which problems you used it, so I know where you had some difficulty. It's okay to get help— in fact, I expect you to in some cases— just be honest about when and where you did.

For the reading and writing component, it should be fairly straightforward. Read and mark up the article as you go, and work thoroughly. I'm a math teacher— I'm not looking for the absolute, most proper writing— but I do expect you to organize your thoughts in a clear manner and use an appropriate academic tone. You will prepare points for discussion as well as summarize your thoughts in a brief reflection.

As of right now, Mrs. delaCruz and I will split the Financial Algebra classes. For me, **I plan to count the math part and article-specific questions as a series of homework grades, and the final synthesis question as a 10-point quiz grade.** I don't know what Mrs. delaCruz's plans are yet, and things often change over the summer. No matter who your teacher is in the fall, assume that this assignment will count as a grade and that the content will be assessed in some way.

You must show all work to receive full credit, and work should be completed neatly and thoroughly, preferably in pencil. In the interest of saving some paper, I didn't provide a lot of room to complete this assignment, so **please work on separate sheets of paper, and attach them to this packet before submitting.** You may type and submit the reading questions, if you prefer. You will find your calculator helpful at times, but please show enough setup so I can follow your work.

If you have any questions at all over the summer, please reach out to me! My email is **rcox@theproutschool.org**. I would be happy to Zoom with you on a case-by-case basis if you're having difficulty.

Have a great summer! - Mr. Cox and Mrs. delaCruz

1 Math content review

1.1 Manipulating functions

Evaluating functions

We can think about a function as a machine with an operating system. A function f (which is the name of our machine) is a rule (operating system) relating inputs to outputs. Every input x in the *domain* must go to exactly one output y in the *range*. It's okay to have two inputs go to the same output—we can have two computer commands for the same function, for example—but we can never have one input go to two different outputs.

We typically notate our functions algebraically by the function's name and the variable it takes as an input: $f(x)$, for example. Then we define the rule: $f(x) = x^2 + 1$. So, this function's "operating system" takes every input, squares it, and adds one. It doesn't matter what we put inside. Even this is perfectly acceptable:

$$f(\quad) = (\quad)^2 + 1$$

Which, I think, shows even more clearly that whatever I plug in to f as an input is what is applied to the function's rule:

$$f(2x) = (2x)^2 + 1 = 4x^2 + 1$$

$$f(3) = 3^2 + 1 = 10$$

We call this process *evaluating* a function.

1-4. Let $f(x) = 3x^2 - 4x + 9$. Find the following, and simplify completely.

1. $f(-1)$

2. $f(3)$

3. $f(0.25)$

4. $f(2x)$

5-8. Let $g(x) = \frac{1}{5x + 6}$. Find the following, and simplify completely.

5. $g(-2)$

6. $g(10)$

7. $g(5x - 1)$

8. $g(t^2 - 1)$

9-12. Let $h(x) = \sqrt{x^2 - 5}$. Find the following, and simplify completely.

9. $h(3)$

10. $h(\sqrt{8})$

11. $h(p + 1)$

12. $h(2p^3)$

Operations with functions

For four of our operations, the rule is simple: *whatever operation is present in parentheses, do that operation between the two functions.* So, we can define addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division for functions:

$$\begin{aligned}(f + g)(x) &= f(x) + g(x) & (f - g)(x) &= f(x) - g(x) \\ (fg)(x) &= f(x) \cdot g(x) & \left(\frac{f}{g}\right)(x) &= \frac{f(x)}{g(x)}, g(x) \neq 0\end{aligned}$$

For example, let $f(x) = x + 1$ and $g(x) = x^2 - 2x$:

$$\begin{aligned}(f + g)(x) &= f(x) + g(x) & (f - g)(x) &= f(x) - g(x) \\ &= (x + 1) + (x^2 - 2x) & &= (x + 1) - (x^2 - 2x) \\ &= x^2 - x + 1 & &= 1 + 3x - x^2 \\ \\ (fg)(x) &= f(x) \cdot g(x) & \left(\frac{f}{g}\right)(x) &= \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} \\ &= (x + 1)(x^2 - 2x) & &= \frac{x + 1}{x^2 - 2x} \\ &= x^3 - x^2 - 2x & &= \frac{x + 1}{x^2 - 2x}\end{aligned}$$

Things get slightly more complicated when we talk about *composition* of functions, defined and notated this way:

$$(f \circ g)(x) = f(g(x))$$

Remember how we just talked about evaluating functions? This time, we're "evaluating" a function with another function. Problems 4, 7, and 8 were actually examples of function composition. I find it helpful to rewrite the problem with that substitution, so it looks like those problems, as I do below.

For example, let $f(x) = x^2 + 5$ and $g(x) = x - 1$. Find $(f \circ g)(x)$ and $(g \circ f)(x)$.

$$\begin{aligned}(f \circ g)(x) &= f(g(x)) & (g \circ f)(x) &= g(f(x)) \\ &= f(x - 1) & &= g(x^2 + 5) \\ &= (x - 1)^2 + 5 & &= (x^2 + 5) - 1 \\ &= x^2 - 2x + 1 + 5 & &= x^2 + 4 \\ &= x^2 - 2x + 6\end{aligned}$$

13-16. For each pair of functions f and g , perform the indicated operation, and evaluate if required. Answers should be simplified fully.

13. $f(x) = x^2 + 1$, $g(x) = 2x - 3$

a. $(f + g)(x)$

b. $(fg)(x)$

c. $(f \circ g)(x)$

14. $f(x) = x^2 + 2x - 1$, $g(x) = 2x$

a. $(f \circ g)(x)$ b. $(g \circ f)(x)$ c. $\left(\frac{f}{g}\right)(x)$; simplify your answer

15. $f(x) = x^2 + 1$, $g(x) = 2x - 3$

a. $(f + g)(0)$ b. $(fg)(2)$ c. $(f \circ g)(-3)$

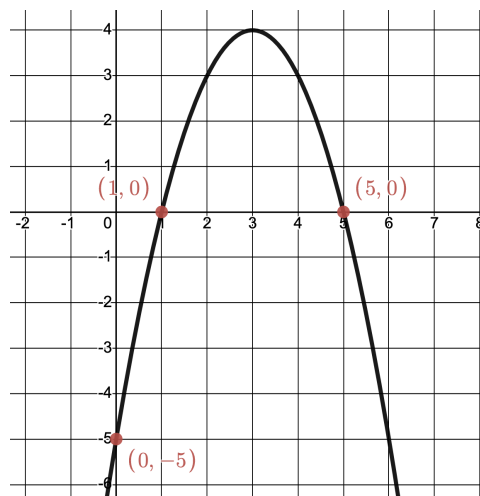
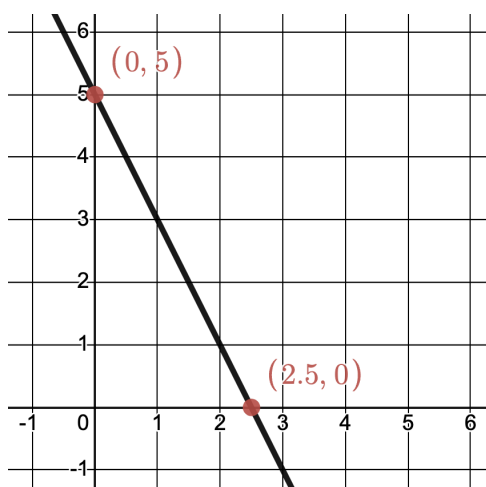
16. $f(x) = 2x + 3$, $g(x) = x^2 - 5x + 1$

a. $(fg)(1)$ b. $(f - g)(-2)$ c. $(f \circ g)\left(\frac{1}{2}\right)$

1.2 Analyzing functions and their graphs

Interpreting intercepts

In application problems, the *intercepts* can be useful tools for interpreting data in a real-world context. The *x-intercept* is the point $(x, 0)$ where the graph touches or crosses the *x*-axis. Similarly, the *y-intercept* is the point $(0, y)$ where the graph touches or crosses the *y*-axis. In the graphs below, the *x*- and *y*-intercepts have been labeled for you.



To find the *y*-intercepts, evaluate $f(0)$. To find the *x*-intercepts, solve the equation $f(x) = 0$. In other words, **plug in 0 for the other variable and solve**. For example, for the equation $y = 3x - 1$:

<i>x</i> -intercept:	Let $y = 0$	<i>y</i> -intercept:	Let $x = 0$
	$0 = 3x - 1$		$y = 3(0) - 1$
	$1 = 3x$		$y = -1$
	$x = \frac{1}{3}$		

So, the intercepts are $(\frac{1}{3}, 0)$ and $(0, -1)$. This can also be done on your graphing calculator, and we'll talk about that (and applications) during the year.

17-21. For each of the functions given, find all x-intercepts and y-intercepts. You may need your graphing calculator for #21.

17. $y = 6x + 7$

18. $3x - 4y = 10$

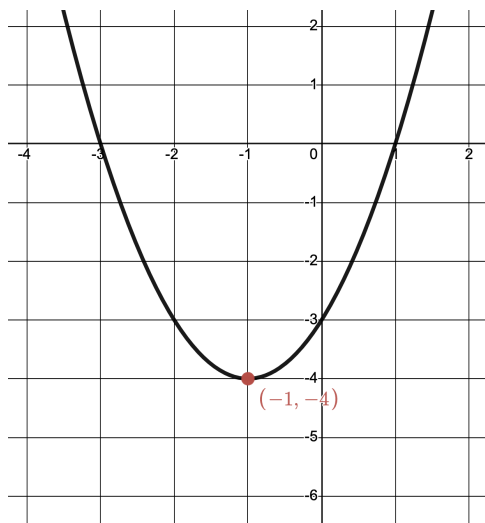
19. $y = x^2 - 4$

20. $x + 5y - 2 = 0$

21. $1.72 + 3.17x - 0.422x^2 = 0$

Maxima or minima of a parabola

Extrema, the general term for maxima or minima, are also useful in application problems. This year in particular, we'll talk about cases where businesses look for ways to maximize their profit or minimize their costs. In the graph below, the minimum of the parabola is shown.



Two notes:

- There is a calculus method for finding local extrema that some of you in IB may have learned (or will learn). I won't teach that in this class but you're welcome to use it if you know.
- For now, we'll keep the numbers simple, as I haven't taught you the method on your calculator yet. We'll spend a bunch of time on this though during the first unit.

For a quadratic equation in standard form $f(x) = ax^2 + bx + c$, the x -coordinate of the max/min is given by $x = -\frac{b}{2a}$. Then, substitute that value into the function to find the y -coordinate. Hence, for $y = 2x^2 - 3x + 1$, the minimum point is $(\frac{3}{4}, -\frac{1}{8})$.

22-27. Find the maximum or minimum value for each of the quadratic functions given.

22. $y = 3x^2 + 2x - 3$

23. $f(x) = 2 - 4x - x^2$

24. $f(x) = 2x^2 - 3x - 3$

25. $y = x^2 + 3x - 5$

26. $g(x) = 3 + x - x^2$

27. $g(x) = 1 - x - x^2$

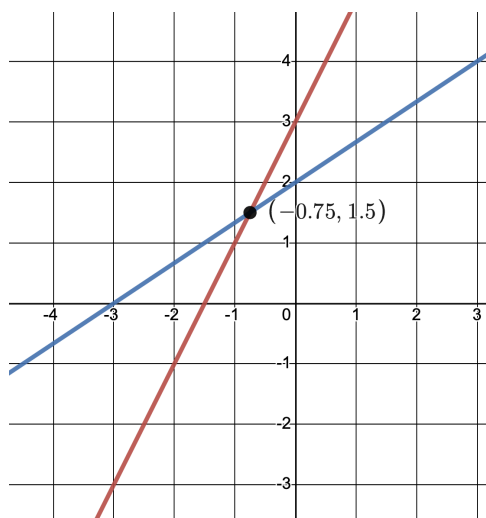
Finding the intersections of graphs

Two graphs *intersect* one another when their function values are equal. Again, there's a calculator way to do this, but we'll focus on solving them by hand for now. Simply set the functions equal to each other and solve for x .

For example, let $f(x) = 2x + 3$ and $g(x) = 3x - 5$ and find their intersection:

$$\begin{aligned}2x + 3 &= 3x - 5 \\-x + 3 &= -5 \\-x &= -8 \\x &= 8\end{aligned}$$

Then, substitute the x -value into either function to find the y -coordinate. $f(8) = g(8) = 19$, so the point of intersection here is $(8, 19)$. Using different functions, an intersection looks like this:



28-30. For each pair of functions, determine the point(s) of intersection.

28. $\begin{cases} y = 3x + 5 \\ y = 2x - 7 \end{cases}$

29. $\begin{cases} y = \frac{1}{2}x + 1 \\ y = 3 - x \end{cases}$

30. $\begin{cases} y = 2x + 5 \\ y = 2x^2 + 1 \end{cases}$

1.3 Writing and using algebraic expressions

I get it...word problems can be challenging. Unfortunately, they are an important part of Financial Algebra. Let's talk about a couple helpful tips:

- Write down any important details off to the side or in the answer space for a problem.
 - Some teachers tell students to underline or circle within the paragraph, but that doesn't fix the real problem, which is having to pick through the paragraph when you need information. **Collect all important details somewhere outside of the paragraph, such as in the margin or in a dedicated spot on the side.**
- As you identify information, assign logical variables to the information you isolate. (C for cost, t for time, etc.)

- Sort your information into what was *given*, and what your *goal* is.

There's not much to demonstrate here, so try the following problems.

31-36. Write an expression or equation that represents the problem. Then, solve using the given conditions.

31. Zoë is buying tickets for an upcoming performance of *Into the Woods*. Ticketmaster charges her \$74.95 per ticket, plus a flat \$32.08 processing fee for the order. Write an equation for the cost C of buying t tickets, then calculate how much it will cost Zoë to buy 4 tickets.
32. Ben works for Graphic Expressions and is assessing the cost of producing senior class t-shirts. Suppose that it costs Graphic Expressions \$2.85 to buy each shirt plus \$21.76 to run the printing machine for the order. Write an equation for the expense E of producing s shirts, then calculate how much it will cost to produce 102 shirts.
33. Ava is rewatching *The Pitt* before Season 3 is released. For the sake of this problem, assume that Netflix releases one episode of *The Pitt* per week (or 1 episode every 7 days). Ava watches 2 episodes per day to catch up. At the time of writing, there are 30 episodes out.
 - (a) Write an expression for the number of episodes n available d days since Ava started watching.
 - (b) Write an expression for the number of episodes n Ava has watched in d days.
 - (c) After how many days will Ava be caught up?
34. Tyler and Erik are in a race. Suppose that Tyler is running at 8 miles per hour. Erik, however, is running at 6 miles per hour, but gets a $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile head start.
 - (a) Write an expression for the distance d that Tyler covered after t hours.
 - (b) Write an expression for the distance d that Erik covered after t hours.
 - (c) After how many *minutes* does Tyler catch up to Erik?
35. Connor works as a scout for the Buffalo Sabres and receives \$225 a day to cover lodging, plus \$0.72 per mile driven.
 - (a) Write an expression for the total daily cost C of Connor driving for the Sabres.
 - (b) Suppose that the Sabres will only reimburse up to \$500 a day of Connor's travel expenses. What is the maximum number of miles that Connor can drive before he maxes out his reimbursement?
36. Michael works in marketing for JB Plates and receives a monthly salary of \$3,100 plus a 7.5% commission on his sales. Write an expression for Michael's monthly wage W in terms of his sales s . How much in sales does Michael need to make in order to earn a total of \$5,000 this month?

The second part of this assignment begins on the next page.

2 Talking about personal finance

For this part of the summer assignment, read the two articles attached (hyperlinks also included below). These are your copies to use, so I highly recommend marking them up by underlining or highlighting important points and making notes in the margins with any questions or thoughts you have as you're reading. (This is also good practice for skills that will be useful when you get to college.) Then, answer the following questions.

- For the questions about each individual article, just jot down some bullet points about your thoughts, reactions, and questions while reading. We'll use these as discussion points in class.
- For the synthesis question at the end, answer this in more formal academic writing. Use full sentences, paragraphs, and logical organization to form your argument. This should be about 1.5-2 pages long (double-spaced), or about three paragraphs, because you are expected to talk about both articles in detail, plus draw some connections.

CBS News article

Article link: ["Americans' financial literacy slumps to a 10-year low"](#) (Aimee Picchi, *CBS News*, 1 June 2026)

1. What were some of the most surprising causes of the drop in financial literacy?
2. Why is a class like Financial Algebra so important?
3. Try the financial literacy questions and see how you do! (Sorry about the poor formatting.)

Washington Post article

Article link: ["Millions of Americans are paper-wealthy, wallet poor"](#) (Michelle Singletary, *Washington Post*, 3 June 2026)

1. How has the definition of "financial fulfillment" changed in the last decade?
2. One stereotypical, dismissive response to young adults (young Millennials and early Gen Z) who struggle with money is often something along the lines of "well, if they didn't spend \$10 on Starbucks every day, they would have the money they need."
What's your gut reaction to that line? How does this fit in with the narrative in this article? How does this fit into the reality of Americans' economic status?

Synthesis

1. Although personal finance classes like this one are becoming graduation requirements across the country, it seems like Americans' grip on personal finance is slipping. Economic sentiment is slipping too; even if Americans have the knowledge to get ahead, executing it is something entirely different. Talking about your finances is still a cultural taboo.

How might we be able to use the resources around us to become better positioned to enter a turbulent financial world? What can we do to open up conversations about money, to help ourselves and others become better educated on saving and spending?

Americans' financial literacy slumps to a 10-year low, new study finds

 [cbsnews.com/news/financial-literacy-10-year-low](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/financial-literacy-10-year-low)

Aimee Picchi

June 1, 2026

[MoneyWatch](#)

By

/ CBS News

Americans' understanding of basic financial concepts has fallen to a 10-year low, raising concerns that households are becoming less prepared to manage debt, savings and retirement decisions, according to a new study from investment giant TIAA and Stanford University's Global Financial Literacy Excellence Center.

In 2025, U.S. adults correctly answered only 47% of the 28 questions used to assess financial literacy, down from a high of 52% in 2020 and the lowest score in the decade since the survey began. The decline was driven by a growing share of Americans with very low financial literacy, which has jumped to 25% this year from 20% a decade ago, the study found.

The findings are troubling because low financial literacy is linked with worse outcomes, such as carrying higher levels of debt, Surya Kolluri, the head of TIAA Institute, told CBS News. The survey didn't examine why scores declined, but he said possible factors include misleading financial information on social media, [weaker overall literacy](#) and the financial strains many households already face.

"Those with lower levels of financial literacy are four times more likely to have trouble making ends meet," Kolluri said.

Women and younger adults scored lower than other groups. Women answered 44% of the questions correctly, compared with 50% for men. Gen Z adults, ages 18 to 29, had the lowest score of any generation, at 38%, while baby boomers had the highest, at 54%.

The generation gap is partly due to Gen Z's age, as many aren't likely to be well-versed in the retirement topics addressed in the survey. But Kolluri also suspects it could be due to financial pressures on young people, such as high student debt and a sense that buying a home may be out of reach.

Financial burden

Economists and experts also [point](#) to a broader problem: Should the burden of knowledge be placed on consumers, or should the complex financial system be overhauled to make it easier for people to understand what they're buying or signing for? Blaming consumers for failing to understand increasingly complicated products may miss the real problem, they argue.

As two economists, Harvard University's John Campbell and Imperial College London's Tarun Ramadorai, [wrote](#) in a 2025 book, the U.S. retirement system "appears too complex for many people to understand."

Still, although financial services have become markedly more complex, many of the basic concepts remain the same, said LendingTree chief consumer finance analyst Matt Schulz.

"Sure, plenty has changed in the last decade or more in the financial services space, but the fundamentals of financial knowledge really haven't," he said. "The fact that people are faring worse and worse on these kinds of tests is troubling, for sure."

Schulz thinks the decline could be due to the surge of financial information on social media, much of it inaccurate. Consumers without a grasp of the basics may struggle to distinguish good advice from bad.

"Knowing what financial content to follow and trust has never been harder," he said. "There's an enormous amount of really smart and insightful personal finance information out there, but there's also a sea of garbage, and if you don't know the difference, it can cost you."

Financial industry critics also contend that companies including banks, credit card issuers, insurance companies and other firms often [deliberately complicate](#) their products, burying key details in the fine print or lengthy disclosure statements. Many personal finance decisions, such as buying a home or planning for retirement, also involve sums of money well beyond what people are used to dealing with.

Can you answer the questions correctly?

TIAA released eight questions from its financial literacy test. See if you can answer them correctly.

1. Mark's salary has increased over the past two years. What would be a plausible reason for this?
A. The number of workers with Mark's skills increased where he lives and works
B. New technology reduced the demand for workers with Mark's skills
C. Mark completed several training courses at a local college
D. Don't know

2. A household budget cannot be used for which of the following?A. To track household financial assetsB. To plan for necessary household expensesC. To plan household discretionary spendingD. Don't know

3. Akiko has \$1,000 in savings that earns a 2% rate of return over the course of the year. The inflation rate during the year is 3%. Which statement is true?A. She can afford to buy fewer things at the end of the yearB. She can afford to buy more things at the end of the yearC. It's not clear whether she can afford to buy more things or fewer things at the end of the yearD. Don't know

4. Which statement about investing is correct?A. Investing in the stock of a single company is typically safer than investing in a mutual fund that holds shares of many companies in multiple industriesB. Investing in a mutual fund that holds shares of many companies in multiple industries is typically safer than investing in the stock of a single companyC. Investing in the stock of a single company and investing in a mutual fund that holds shares of many companies in multiple industries are typically equally safeD. Don't know

5. José owes \$1,000 on a loan that has an interest rate of 20% per year compounded annually. If he makes no payments on the loan, at this interest rate, how many years will it take for the amount he owes to double?A. Less than 5 yearsB. 5 to 10 yearsC. More than 10 yearsD. Don't know

6. Katherine is a single 25-year-old worker who is in good health. What type of insurance coverage is she most likely to need in the near term?A. Life insuranceB. Disability insuranceC. Long-term care insuranceD. Don't know

7. Lottery A pays a prize of \$200, and the chance of winning is 5%. Lottery B pays a prize of \$90,000, and the chance of winning is 0.01%. Expected winnings are greater in which lottery?A. Lottery AB. Lottery BC. They are equalD. Don't know

8. Which of the following appears to be inappropriate investment advice for the respective individual?A. A stock index fund to a 30-year-old worker saving for retirementB. A bond fund to a 60-year-old worker for some of her retirement savingsC. A stock fund that invests in small start-up businesses to a 75-year-old retireeD. Don't know

Answers, with the percentage of Americans who answered the question correctly:

1. C: Completing training courses increases Mark's skills and earning potential: 56%
2. A: A budget plans spending and expenses; it is not designed to track financial assets: 49%

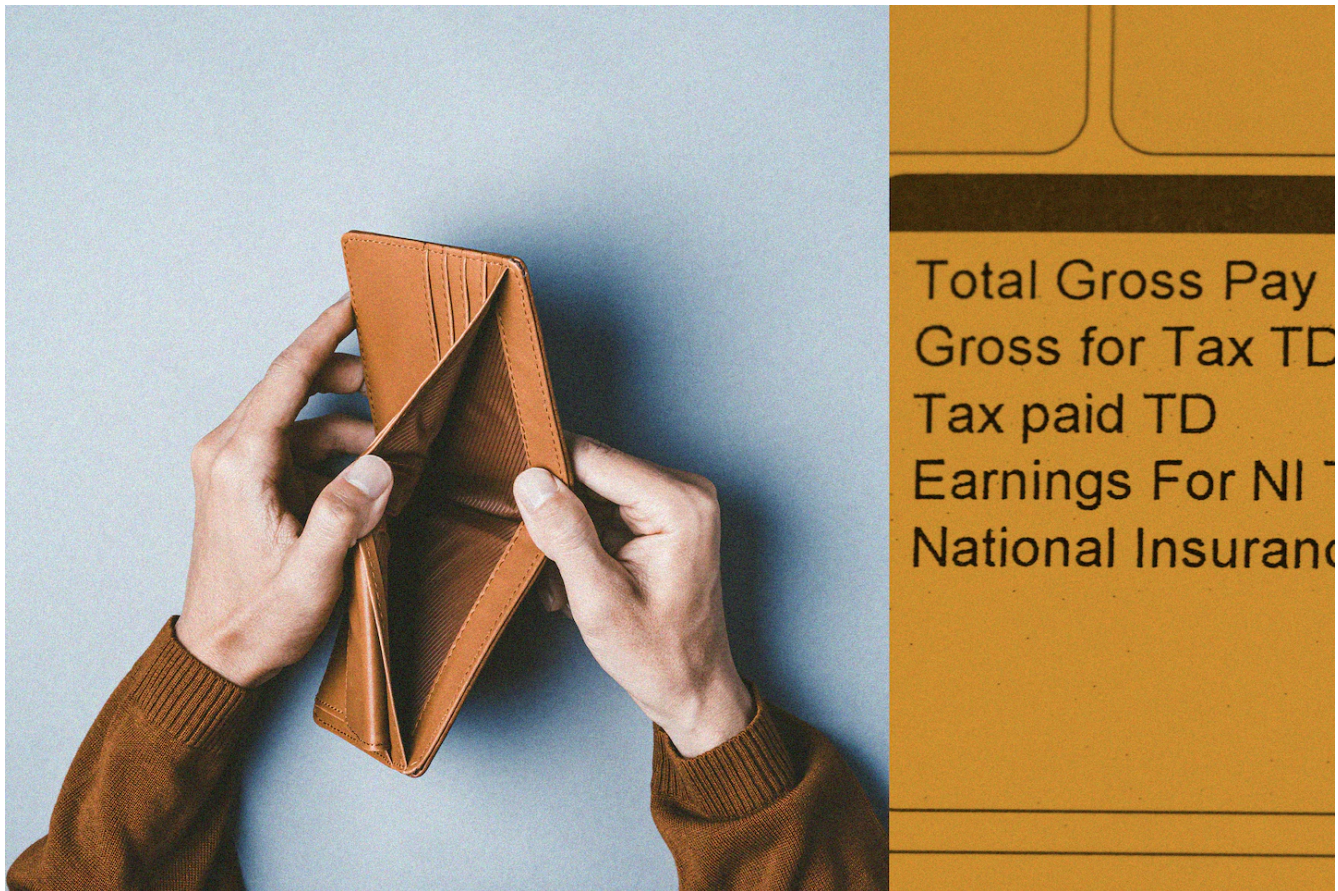
3. A: Because inflation (3%) exceeds Akiko's return (2%), her purchasing power decreases:
48%
4. B: A diversified mutual fund is typically safer than a single stock: 54%
5. A: At 20% compounded interest, the debt doubles in less than 5 years: 40%
6. B: A young worker is most likely to need disability insurance to protect her income if she cannot work: 27%
7. A: Lottery A's expected value is \$10 ($5\% \times \200); Lottery B's is \$9 ($0.01\% \times \$90,000$):
46%
8. C: High-risk growth stocks are generally inappropriate for a 75-year-old retiree: 46%

Millions of Americans are paper-wealthy, wallet-poor

 [washingtonpost.com/business/2026/06/03/millions-americans-are-paper-wealthy-wallet-poor](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2026/06/03/millions-americans-are-paper-wealthy-wallet-poor)

Michelle Singletary

June 3, 2026



On paper, does your financial life appear stable?

You may earn a good salary, which allows you to dine out or take annual vacations, but you may still feel deep financial unease.

It can be easy to dismiss your feelings. You might ask yourself, “What am I complaining about?” when others are struggling to afford necessities.

For instance, millions of people are seeking out the [211 helpline network](#) just to keep a roof over their heads, food on the table and the lights on. Last year, 211 referrals jumped to 19 million — a million more than the previous year — and calls for employment assistance surged by 28 percent, according to [data](#) from 211 supporter United Way Worldwide.

But financial pain isn’t just felt at the poverty line. Millions of Americans with decent paychecks feel insecure. They have enough coming in to live well; however, their well-being is tenuous. They are paper-wealthy, yet wallet-poor.

A newly released [report](#) from Gallup and Edward Jones explains this paradox and divides Americans into three groups, showing how people differ in their money mindsets.

Financially fulfilled. Representing 16 percent of Americans, this group reports high financial confidence, clear long-term goals, and a deep sense of control over their finances. People's spending and saving habits align with their values.

While this mindset is more common among older adults who have had time to build wealth, the survey notes that "income and age do not fully explain financial fulfillment." In fact, about 1 in 10 Americans with income of between \$35,000 and \$84,999 said they were financially fulfilled.

It's also not just about the money. Those who fall into this category are six times as likely to rate their mental health as very good or excellent.

"For me, it is less about affording luxuries, and more so knowing that if I lost my job tomorrow, I could still pay my mortgage for the next few months," a 30-year-old Michigan man told researchers.

Financially conflicted. Making up the 51 percent majority, people within this group experience a frustrating mix of economic stability and strain. They may be doing fine for now, but they are deeply worried about the future.

"I would say we are stable, but we have concerns with the way the economy is going," a 54-year-old woman from Missouri said, noting that her family canceled vacation plans this year. "This is a newer challenge for us," she said. "I'd say it's gotten worse in the last three to four months, just with world events and gas prices, and price increases just not coming down."

Financially stressed. At 32 percent, this group is twice the size of the fulfilled crowd. People in this category are stuck in a state of constant anxiety.

"We're doing okay, but if an emergency comes up, that would be really hard," a 34-year-old Wisconsin resident explained. "It is one of those things that is always in the back of your head. My wife and I have been cutting back on groceries even, especially beef."

The biggest factor separating those who have achieved money harmony from the other two categories is not just their earnings. It's how intentionally they track their money, seek professional guidance and plan for the future, according to David Gunn, head of the U.S. and Canada Business Units at Edward Jones.

"Being financially fulfilled is very likely within your reach," Gunn said.

Here's how to get there.

If you're challenged in the money-management department, stop trying to figure it all out on your own. The financially fulfilled are more likely to work with a financial adviser than those who are stressed. An adviser is often a behavioral coach who can provide not just advice on how to invest, but the objective guidance you need to overcome emotional blocks, bad habits and fears that keep you from reaching the very goals that will make you feel financially fulfilled.

When I first started to invest in my late 20s, I was terrified of risking my money in equities. My entire retirement portfolio was made up of low-yield bonds — until a financial planner pointed out that I had decades until retirement and that if I wanted more growth, I had to accept more risk. Because she truly listened to me and talked me out of my fear, I changed course, and I'm incredibly happy I took her advice.

If you struggle with basic budgeting or have gotten into unmanageable debt, get help from a nonprofit credit counseling agency through the National Foundation for Credit Counseling ([nfcc.org](https://www.nfcc.org)).

Bringing an outside perspective can help you see the blind spots that keep you in debt or prevent you from building wealth.

Part of your plan has to be building a budget buffer. When your money is tied up, as it might be in a retirement account, you look wealthy on paper, but a large car repair becomes an emergency. Having a liquid cash cushion can help you ride out the unexpected bumps.

Ultimately, the Gallup and Edward Jones research proves that chasing a specific salary or net worth isn't a cure-all for people's financial anxiety.

Obviously, income and net worth influence the ability to build wealth, Gunn said. But focusing on the behavior you can control drastically increases your chances of ultimately feeling fulfilled.