



Intelligent Investing

ADVISORS

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Financial Freedom Calendar

January: Automate Your Security

Write down your financial goals. The New Year is a good time to think about new financial goals. Be sure to write them down and be as clear and precise as possible.

Automate. No one's ever achieved financial fitness with a January resolution that's abandoned by February. Building security requires a commitment to saving, and the easiest way to save is to automate it. Set up monthly or semi-monthly deposits from your checking account to your savings or investment accounts.

Max the Match. If your employer matches employee contributions to a 401(k), sign up now. Already enrolled? Make sure you're contributing enough to qualify for the maximum company match, and if you're not, boost your contribution rate by one percentage point each year until you're eligible for the maximum match. Then make funding your individual retirement account (IRA) or Roth IRA automatic as well by linking it to your checking account.

Tax Folder. Create a tax return folder and begin putting all your tax related documents into it as you receive them.

Timely Tip: If you or your child will be attending college this fall, submit your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form ASAP, using estimates of your recent tax return.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Bedding and linens.** Department stores hold bedding and linen “white sales” in January with deep discounts on sheets and towels.
- **Fitness equipment.** Retailers know you want to get in shape. Expect fitness equipment and apparel sales to abound at sporting goods stores.
- **TVs.** Just before the Super Bowl, retailers normally discount their selections of HDTVs and other home-theater essentials.

Be Careful to Buy:

- **Electronics, Computers.**



February: Get Ahead of the Game

Create a budget. A budget will help you keep track of your income and spending. Remember to be realistic when setting up your budget and don't forget to examine your credit card payments. Consider setting up an escrow account with your bank to save for non-monthly expenses (insurance, HOAs, etc....) Consider using Mint.com if you are tech-savvy.

Tax Time. You should have received all documents necessary—your W-2, 1098 (if you have a mortgage), and 1099s—to complete your taxes. You've still got two months, but not procrastinating has major benefits. If you're surprised by a tax bill, you have time to figure out a payment strategy. If you're entitled to a refund, you will receive it that much sooner.

If you are eligible and haven't maxed out your Traditional or Roth IRAs, consider doing so before the tax deadline.

What to Consider Buying:

- **TVs.** TV sales spill over from January into February. Aside from Black Friday, this is one of the prime times to buy a new TV.
- **Winter products.** With winter winding down, stores will be looking to unload their inventories of cold-weather products. Look for sales on apparel and winter sporting accessories.
- **Home goods.** Presidents Day is a day where you can expect retailers to have home and apparel sales on that Monday and the weekend preceding the holiday.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Traditional Valentine's Day gifts, technology that is about to be updated.



March: Spring Cleaning

Trash Time. Make time to toss any outdated paperwork. You should keep a copy of your tax return indefinitely, but you need to save supporting documents for only three years. If you're self-employed or have income from multiple sources, hold on to your documents for six years. That's how long the IRS has to challenge your reported income. Next, roll over 401(k)s from old jobs and IRAs at different firms into one location at Intelligent Investing—it's easier to keep track of this way and mitigate risk in overlapping funds and holdings.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Golf clubs.** Expect to find discounts on golf clubs in preparation for summer. Whenever consumer demand is down, prices usually are, too.
- **Grills.** Buy your summer grilling necessities in March to avoid the spike in prices that will come when summer arrives.
- **St. Patrick's Day essentials.** St. Patrick's Day is March 17. Around that time, online retailers and department stores usually discount their selection of green-themed clothing, party supplies and jewelry.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Spring apparel.



April: Don't be a Fool

Reassess your Savings Goals, Time horizons, and Risk. Consider your short, medium, and long-term financial goals. Are you saving enough for your annual vacation? Do you plan to buy a new car in a couple of years? Have you setup a 529 college savings account?

For long-term savings goals, stocks have the potential to generate inflation-beating gains. Sticking with a diversified global portfolio can help mitigate risk. It is vital that you be in the right “risk-profile” portfolio with low-cost exchange traded funds (ETF) and mutual funds. Intelligent Investing can help you determine your risk profile as well as matching that risk profile to the appropriate diversified portfolio.

Adjust Withholdings. If you do file your taxes in April, let your tax return guide your next move. If you're owed a refund, change your W-4 withholding to get that money back in your paychecks where it belongs. If you owe a penalty, make sure you're not having too little money withheld.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Vacuums.** Buying a vacuum isn't the most exciting purchase, but it'll be less painful if you take advantage of a spring cleaning sale. Look for these at department stores as well as manufacturers like Dyson.
- **Jewelry.** The general rule is to avoid buying jewelry close to major holidays. Try to get a good deal when jewelers have a slower period and may be more motivated to make sales.
- **Freebies.** Year after year, retailers and restaurants try to lighten the burden of Tax Day with discounts and freebies. Keep an eye out for these around mid-April.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Laptops, mattresses, home goods.



May: Hit a Home Run

Review Renters' or Homeowners' Insurance. If rebuilding costs in your area have fallen in recent years, you could be over insured. Confirm that you have an extended replacement policy, which pays a set percentage over the dollar value of your coverage. And switch to a higher deductible (at least \$1,000 or so), which will lower your premium. Cover any expenses that amount to less than \$1,000 with your emergency savings fund. Finally, check your property tax base. If your current property tax bill is based on an old valuation of your home, contact your local tax assessor—you may be paying too much.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Spring cleaning necessities.** Before summer arrives, act on spring cleaning discounts on vacuums and mops.
- **Small kitchen appliances.** Use May discounts as a perfect opportunity to buy small kitchen appliances, such as coffee makers and blenders. These products normally are included in Memorial Day sales.
- **Furniture.** Three of the biggest blowout shopping days are Black Friday, Labor Day and Memorial Day. Look for plenty of furniture and home-decor discounts from big-box stores.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Jewelry, traditional Mother's Day gifts.



June: Gift Smart

Gift Smart. With all the graduations and weddings coming your way, you're probably planning to purchase some presents. Remember to respect your current financial situation. The last thing family and friends want is for you to spend money on them that you don't have, or you can't spare. Consider a more personalized gift that comes from your heart.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Gym memberships.** Consider buying a gym membership during the summer, and don't forget to negotiate to get the best possible deal. Gyms may be more eager for sign-ups at this time.
- **Gifts for dad.** You don't have to buy dad's gift at full price. Expect Father's Day deals this month, especially the closer you get to the holiday.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Grills, Apple products.



July: Have the Talk

Estate Plan. Perhaps you will have a summer vacation with your aging parents. Take time to talk to them about their financial well-being. First, confirm that they have the key estate documents: a will, a revocable living trust, and durable power of attorney for both healthcare and financial matters. Have they reviewed their beneficiaries recently? If not, they should do so now.

Long Term Care. Next, see if it makes sense to look into long-term care insurance at www.LongTermCare.gov. Finally, help them formulate an advance directive—a document that spells out the medical care an individual wants in the event he or she becomes physically unable to communicate. It may be a difficult conversation to have, but it lets your parents know that if the time comes, you'll make sure their exact wishes are followed. That's a great way to honor what they mean to you.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Apparel.** If you don't want to wait for end-of-summer sales, buy clothes in midsummer. You'll likely find a better price than you would at the start of the season.
- **Patriotic items.** Retailers like a reason to celebrate. In the days leading up to the Fourth of July, there is usually an abundance of sales on red, white and blue products (and products that are all three colors), as well as on sporting goods, jewelry and furniture.
- **Personal electronics.** Black Friday is a big deal day that falls in November, but many retailers have begun hosting Black Friday in July sales, including Best Buy and Amazon. Expect discounts in nearly every product category.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Back-to-school items, grills, patio furniture, Prime Day "filler" deals.



August: Teach Your Children a Lesson

Work for Pay. This school year, think about instituting new money rules for you and your kids. I'm a big advocate of a work-for-pay setup rather than an allowance that isn't attached to chores—it's a great way to impart the value of money to your children. If they're older, consider going on a date with them and giving them some money to give away creatively. Have them report back to you with a plan and watch them give generously.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Cars.** If you need a new car, dealers are eager to make room for next year's models.
- **Back-to-school supplies.** The start of school marks the need to buy small items such as pencils and expensive ones like laptops. Generally, the closer to the start of the school year you buy, the better your chances of getting a good price.
- **Lawn mowers.** Ride out the end of summer with a big deal on lawn mowers and other seasonal outdoor equipment.
- **Swimsuits.** There may not be many swimming days left by the time August rolls around, but that's exactly why swimsuit clearance sales will crest. Buy your swimsuits now to stock up for next year.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Grills, patio furniture, fall apparel.



September: Check It Out!

Check Credit. Have you checked your credit report in the past year? Didn't think so.

Visit AnnualCreditReport.com, where you can access your reports on file at the big-three credit bureaus—for free. If you anticipate taking out a loan in the next six months or may be job hunting, or if your credit report turns up any mistakes, you should also obtain your FICO credit score (MyFICO.com.)

What to Consider Buying:

- **Mattresses.** Year after year, September is the time for mattress sales. Expect these from department stores and mattress centers, usually as a part of Labor Day deals.
- **iPhones.** Apple has been known to announce its new iPhone installments at the company's annual keynote in September. Usually, the unveiling is followed by a drop in prices on the current phones in anticipation of the new models.
- **Appliances.** Expect a series of blowout deals in the week leading up to Labor Day, including promotions on appliances big and small.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Winter apparel, and electronics or appliances that can wait until Black Friday.



October: Brace for Life's Tricks

Review Life Insurance. I wish you only treats this Halloween. But while we all hope for the best, we still need to prepare for the worst. Parents of young children must have life insurance and a will in place—it's non-negotiable. For most families, term life insurance is the easiest and least expensive solution. Go to [SelectQuote.com](https://www.SelectQuote.com) or [AccuQuote.com](https://www.AccuQuote.com) to make sure you're looking out for your family's best interests if the worst should happen.

Draft a will. If you don't have a will, should you pass away, everything you own will be shared in a standard way as defined by law. A will, or a full estate plan, can provide you and your family with peace of mind, and you should review it frequently to ensure it is in line with your wishes.

Timely Tip: Parents of new college grads: The six-month grace period between graduation and repayment for many student loans is approaching. Make sure repayment arrangements are nailed down.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Outdoor furniture.** People generally spend less time outdoors when the temperature drops. Expect deals on patio furniture and outdoor living products when summer ends.
- **Jeans.** Fall inventory arrives in stores in August and September, but you'll pay top dollar unless you wait a few weeks. October is a great time to buy a new pair of jeans.
- **Candy.** The closer you get to Oct. 31, the better your chance at snagging a discounted bag of candy for your trick-or-treaters.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Winter apparel, and electronics or appliances that can wait until Black Friday.



November: Bag the Best Benefits

Review Benefits. Fall is typically open-enrollment period at work, when you can make changes to your benefits package for the coming year. If you learn that your health insurance rates will increase next year, check whether your company offers a high-deductible plan that's paired with a health savings account. If you're in good health, this can be a great way to reduce your premium costs by agreeing to pay a higher deductible. You can then possibly invest in an HSA, which allows your tax-deductible contributions to be used for medical expenses, including the deductible. Your unused HSA balance can be rolled over and used in subsequent years.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Tablets and laptops.** Electronics take center stage during Black Friday sales. Look for discounts on smartphones and activity trackers, too.
- **Gaming systems.** Black Friday is the best time to buy a discounted gaming console or gaming system bundle like Xbox or PlayStation.
- **Home appliances.** Reserve your major home appliance purchase — refrigerator, washer, dryer, dishwasher, etc. — for Black Friday deals. Often, sales on these can be found throughout the month.

Be Careful to Buy:

- High-end computers, winter outerwear, gift cards.



December: Pay in Cash

Pay in Cash. Financially speaking, December can be rough: Gift giving, holiday parties, and vacations all take their toll. Consider stashing your credit cards and live within your means by using cash or a debit card all 31 days of this month. Avoiding that nasty January credit card bill that you can't pay off is the surest way to start the new year on the right financial foot.

Reflect on the Past Year. The end of year can be a good time to reflect on the blessings and mistakes of the past 12 months and to think about the year ahead.

What to Consider Buying:

- **Toys.** Since toys are a popular Christmas gift, stores generally host big toy sales as the holiday season ends.
- **Christmas decorations.** Beginning the day after Christmas, shop sales for deep discounts — often upward of 50% — on decorations, wrapping paper, ornaments, artificial trees and similar seasonal fixings.
- **Cars.** The end of December is an ideal time to buy a car. That's when dealerships are looking to meet end-of-year sales quotas.

Be Careful to Buy:

- Jewelry, electronics, calendars.



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