

Investing Starter Checklist

Questions to answer and steps to take before your first investment, so your money grows with a plan instead of a guess.

Before you invest

- ☐ I have an emergency fund of at least three months of essential expenses.
- ☐ I am paying down any high-interest debt, such as credit cards.
- ☐ I know my monthly budget and how much I can invest regularly.
- ☐ I understand that investments can lose value, especially in the short term.

Your goals

Goal (retirement, home, education, other)	Amount needed	Years until I need it	Monthly amount

Time matters more than timing. Money invested early has more years to compound. Regular investing every month, through good markets and bad, is often more effective than waiting for the perfect moment.

First steps

- ☐ If my employer offers a 401(k) or 403(b) match, contribute at least enough to get the full match.
- ☐ Learn the difference between a traditional and a Roth account (tax now or tax later).
- ☐ Consider low-cost, diversified funds, such as index funds, instead of picking single stocks.
- ☐ Check the fees (expense ratio) of every fund before investing.
- ☐ Name a beneficiary on every account.
- ☐ Set up automatic monthly contributions.
- ☐ Review my accounts once or twice a year, not every day.

Questions to ask a professional

- How much risk is right for my age and goals?
- Which accounts should I use first, and why?
- What are all the fees I will pay?
- How are you paid for your advice?

Notes
