



THE BASICS OF INVESTING



CENTRA
FINANCIAL SERVICES

THE BASICS OF RETIREMENT PLANNING

Many people find it a bit challenging to get interested and engaged with investing and the planning and strategy that comes with it. After all, there's a lot to learn and understand. If you do have experience with investing, chances are you consider yourself to be in one of the following categories:

"I prefer to figure it all out myself."

"I just need a little guidance and I'm good."

"Please, can someone just take care of this for me?"

Over time, the way you approach investing can change. No matter where you're at, Centra Financial Services (CFS) can help. We'll talk more about that a little later. This guide is intended to give you some of the basic investing concepts you need to know, along with common best practices. But most of all, it's intended to get you to take action with your financial future through investing. The confidence and sense of empowerment that comes with having a formal investment strategy for your financial goals can be very powerful.



ARE YOU READY TO INVEST?

Investing may seem like an intimidating process, but the sooner you start, the easier it will be to begin building a nest egg for your future. Since investing always includes some risk, it's important to have a solid financial foundation before you begin. Here are some key things to make sure you have covered so you're ready to invest:

- » You have a steady income (sounds obvious, but it's kind of important).
- » You have money left over after meeting your financial obligations.
- » You've considered the effect of upcoming personal changes, such as marriage, children, or divorce, before investing.
- » You've built up your savings, including a 3-6

month emergency fund, before establishing an investment account.

TALKING THE TALK

To jumpstart your investing knowledge, here are a couple of major investing benchmarks you may be familiar with but need to know more about.

The DOW

The Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) is the oldest and best-known of the American stock market indexes. The index began in 1896 and currently consists of 30 blue chip stocks. The stocks are selected by the editors of the Wall Street Journal (which, not so coincidentally, is owned by the parent company Dow Jones & Co.). The companies represented in the index are actually



quite diverse, representing all the major business sectors. You would recognize most if not all of the companies represented, including Johnson & Johnson, Coca Cola, and McDonalds.

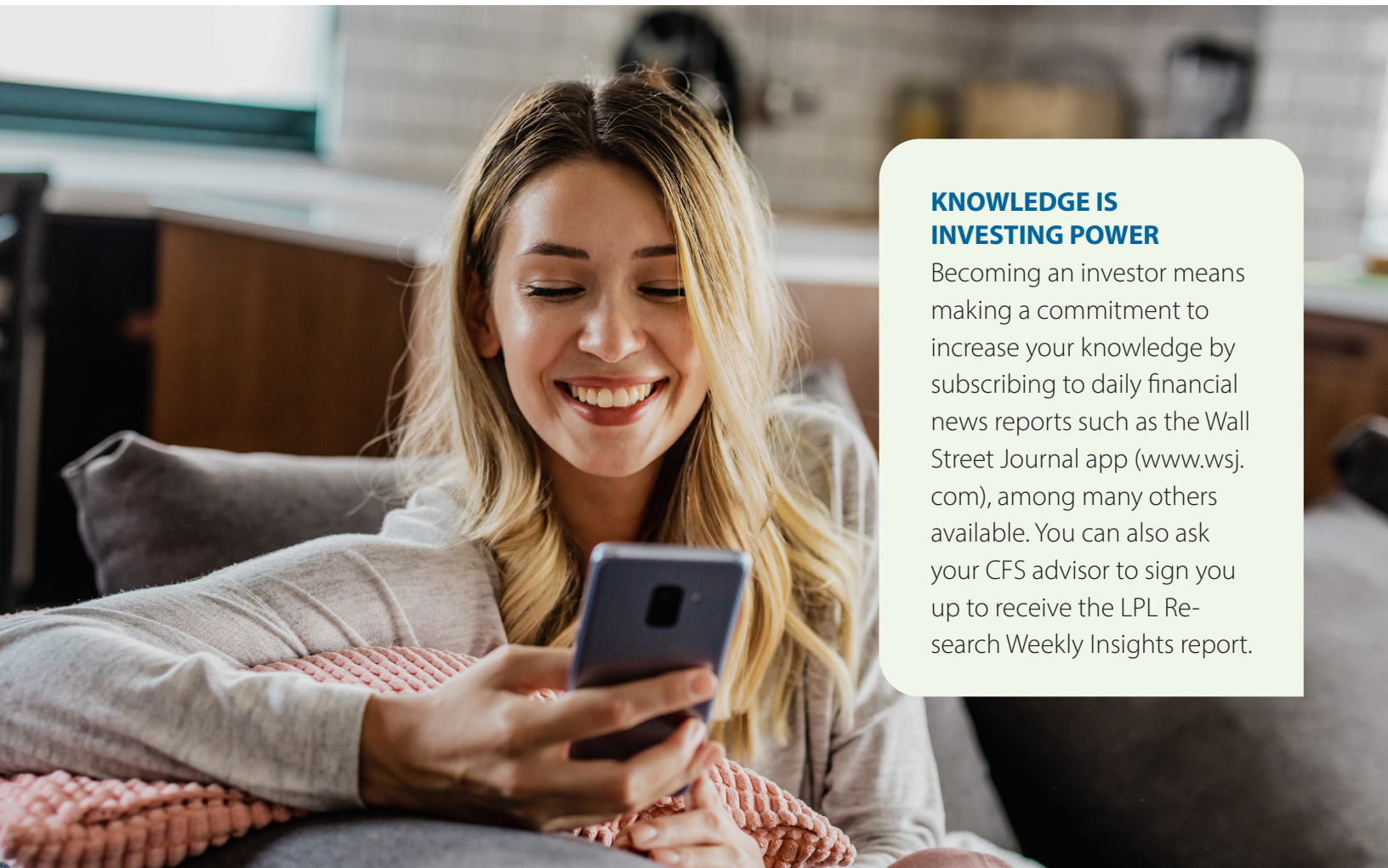
The criteria for a company to get on the Dow is that the companies are leaders in their industry and very large. It takes a significant change in a company for it to be removed from the index. Thus, the DJIA is considered an important and consistent benchmark in evaluating how the stock market in general is performing.

NASDAQ

Most investors are familiar with the New York Stock Exchange, the major marketplace where people go to buy and sell stocks. Perhaps less familiar is another marketplace known as the NASDAQ Exchange. NASDAQ stands for “National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations System,” although in conversation

people just go by the phonetic pronunciation (“naz-dack”). In the last quarter century, NASDAQ has emerged as one of the largest and most popular stock exchanges and was the first exchange to offer online trading. Stocks that are traded on the NASDAQ Exchange tend to be tech companies, like Apple, Facebook, Microsoft, and Google. However, companies on the NASDAQ don’t have to be as huge as those icons. Smaller companies like Angie’s List (the website that offers peer-to-peer reviews of home-repair contractors) and 1-800-Flowers are also listed on the NASDAQ Exchange.

While NASDAQ generally tends to include many tech companies, it also trades some banking companies, airline companies (like Spirit Airlines), and even a few non-tech businesses like Starbucks and shoe company Steve Madden. Amazon is also traded on the NASDAQ.



KNOWLEDGE IS INVESTING POWER

Becoming an investor means making a commitment to increase your knowledge by subscribing to daily financial news reports such as the Wall Street Journal app (www.wsj.com), among many others available. You can also ask your CFS advisor to sign you up to receive the LPL Research Weekly Insights report.

FOUR STEPS TO BECOMING AN INVESTOR

1. LEARN WHICH INVESTMENTS ARE APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR FINANCIAL GOALS

Whether it's saving for retirement, buying a new home, funding a college education, or any other financial goal, here's a quick look at the key types of investments available to help you.

Stocks

A stock (also known as "shares" or "equity") is a type of security that signifies proportionate ownership in the issuing corporation. This entitles the stockholder to that proportion of the corporation's assets and earnings.

Stocks are bought and sold predominantly on stock exchanges and are the foundation of nearly every portfolio. Stocks (and stock mutual funds) have a high return potential, but the potential risk with stocks is also high. For the average investor, they're typically considered as part of a long term investment strategy (such as a 401(k) or Individual Retirement Account) where you have much more time on your side and can afford to be more aggressive and take on more risk. They may not make sense for a short term investment goal where safety and stability are more of a priority.

Bonds

Bonds are used by companies, municipalities, states, and sovereign governments to finance projects and operations. Owners of bonds are debtholders, or creditors, of the issuer. Bond details include the end date when the principal of the loan is due to be paid to the bond owner and usually includes the terms for interest payments made by

the borrower. Historically, bonds (and bond mutual funds) are known for their potential to generate consistent, moderate returns, which may work best in a medium term investment goal (such as a college fund) where you can take on some risk, but not a lot. In addition, as you get closer to retirement (within 10 years in general), bonds and bond funds may also become a bigger part of your retirement account portfolio if you're looking to go less heavy on stocks but still want some growth potential.

Cash Equivalents

Cash equivalent investments are typically money market funds¹ and can include U.S Treasury Bills as well. They're known for consistent, lower returns (but with much lower risk), which may make more sense for a shorter term investment goal (such as saving for a down payment on a house). As you get closer to retirement (within 5-10 years in general), cash equivalents may also become a bigger part of your retirement account portfolio if you are seeking minimal risk at this life stage.

Keeping a historical perspective

History reminds us that the greater the risk, the greater the potential reward. Here's a quick look at historical returns of key asset classes from 1985-2022².

ASSET TYPE	ANNUALIZED RETURN, 1985-2022
Small Stocks	8.00%
Government Bonds	3.00%
Treasury Bills	0.40%
Inflation	2.74%

Source: Callan, LLC 2023 and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

¹An investment in a money market fund is not insured or guaranteed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation or any other government agency. Although the Fund seeks to preserve the value of your investment at \$1.00 per share, it is possible to lose money by investing in the Fund. ²The 90-day T-bill is a short-term debt obligation backed by the Treasury Department of the U.S. government. Bloomberg US Aggregate Bond Index includes U.S. government, corporate, and mortgage-backed securities with maturities of at least one year. Russell 2000 - measures the performance of small capitalization U.S. stocks. The Russell 2000 is a market-value-weighted index of the 2,000 smallest stocks in the broad-market Russell 3000 Index.

2. EMBRACE DIVERSIFICATION

Putting your money into a number of different types of investment options that include different types of asset classes can help manage risk. Generally speaking, if your dollars are invested in materially different types of investments, and market conditions cause one of your investments to not do well, all of your money shouldn't be affected as negatively. There's perhaps no better way to illustrate this than to look to the story of Life Savers candy.

Clarence Crane invented Life Savers in 1912. He manufactured only one flavor of Life Savers: Peppermint. In 1913, Crane was approached by Edward J. Noble. Noble suggested that offering different flavors of Life Savers would attract more customers. Crane wasn't interested in the concept but agreed to sell the Life Savers business to Noble for \$2,900. In his lifetime, Noble went on to develop a billion dollar business manufacturing different flavored Life Savers. By diversifying his product, he appealed to more people and protected his business from the risk of one flavor losing popularity.

Diversification can help with investments, too. Spread the risk to help preserve your potential rewards! Keep in mind, there's no guarantee that a diversified portfolio will enhance overall returns or outperform a non-diversified portfolio. Diversification does not protect against market risk.

3. UNDERSTAND HOW THE ECONOMY AFFECTS YOUR PORTFOLIO

The state of the economy (how a country uses money and resources to produce goods and services) greatly affects stock market activity. Whether the economy is growing, shrinking, or standing still, it influences stock performance. To understand the impact of the economy on your portfolio, it helps to see how a few different economic factors affect stock prices.

With a **bull market**, investor confidence is high and stock prices rise, as most stock holdings will increase in value. With a **bear market**, investors are nervous, stock prices decrease, and many stocks are undervalued. This can also be an opportunity to buy a

stake in good companies at a discount in their stock price if appropriate for your situation.

When there is **inflation**, prices are rising and purchasing power is falling (\$1 buys less than it used to). But when inflation spikes too high, people can't afford to buy as much as they could before, and corporations may start to lose sales, causing stock prices to drop. This can create a drop in investment values. When there is **low inflation**, this can indicate a healthy economy, which can be good for the stock market and stock prices.

When **interest rates** increase, stock prices tend to decrease; when interest rates drop, stock prices usually rise. In 2019, the Federal Reserve (aka "The Fed," the government entity with the responsibility for implementing interest rate strategies to support the economy) decreased interest rates on three separate occasions in an attempt to help offset a potential recession and avoid an economic downturn.

4. SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF YOU NEED IT

While this guide gives you some basics to help you in your investment planning, you should know that professional help is available if and when you need it. Centra Financial Services can give you hands-on personal guidance and advice to help you determine your retirement goals and how you can work toward them. Here's how they can help:

- » Help you understand different types of investments and their place in a balanced investment portfolio.
- » Help you determine your financial goals, such as retirement, buying a home, funding a college education, starting your own business, or just getting better at budgeting and paying down credit card debt.
- » Help you determine an appropriate investment strategy for your financial goals, based on your risk tolerance and time frame.
- » Discuss professionally managed investment strategies that may be of interest to you.
- » Meet with you on a regular basis to track progress and adjust as necessary.

WHAT KIND OF INVESTOR ARE YOU?

Creating an investment mix is how you decide to allocate, or divide, your assets or investment dollars. This guide introduces you to three basic ingredients of any investment mix, helps you understand your feelings about risk, and enables you to review a sample investment mix based on your personal investor profile.

- » When making your investment decisions, you should consider the three factors below:
- » Your risk tolerance – the amount of risk you can accept in order to get the returns you want.
- » Your time horizon – the amount of time your money remains invested.
- » Your investment goal – the amount of money you need to save to make your retirement dream a reality.

The risk tolerance quiz that follows helps you gain a general understanding of your feelings about risk. By determining your risk tolerance level, and considering how long you have to invest, you can begin to create your own personal investment mix.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. How many years do you have until retirement?

- a. Less than five. (1 point)
- b. Five to ten. (2 points)
- c. More than ten. (3 points)

2. When it comes to making investment decisions, which of the following best describes you?

- a. Not very knowledgeable. (1 point)
- b. Very knowledgeable. (3 points)
- c. Somewhat knowledgeable. (2 points)

3. Are you willing to take on more risk in exchange for potentially higher rates of return?

- a. Yes. (3 points)
- b. No. (1 point)
- c. Not sure. (2 points)

4. When making investment decisions, which of the following best describes your philosophy?

- a. I worry about losing my money and lean toward having a more conservative investment mix. (1 point)
- b. I wouldn't hesitate to take on higher risk because I know it's the only way to achieve potentially higher returns. (3 points)
- c. I believe in taking my time and investigating all my options before making a decision. (2 points)

5. Which of the following best describes your current attitude toward investing for retirement?

- a. I'd like the opportunity for my retirement savings to grow, but am only comfortable with a medium amount of risk. (2 points)
- b. I tend to worry that the value of my retirement savings will go down. (1 point)
- c. I'd like the opportunity for my retirement savings to grow as much as possible, and am willing to take on higher risk for potentially higher returns. (3 points)

Total Your Points Here: _____

SCORING SYSTEM

5 – 7: Conservative. You're an investor who seeks stability and safety for your money. Remember, not having enough money when you retire is a big risk too. Keep in mind your time horizon and the impact inflation can have on your investments.

8 – 9: Moderate. You want your money to grow but are more concerned about protecting it. You're cautious but may be willing to diversify to spread out some of your risk, depending on your time horizon.

10 – 11: Moderate Growth. You like to balance lower-risk investments with higher-risk investments. Evaluate your situation at least annually to make sure that this balance con-

tains the right mix of lower-risk and higher-risk investments for your situation.

12 – 13 Growth. You want to increase your savings and are somewhat comfortable riding the ups and downs of the stock market in exchange for the possibility of higher returns over the long term.

14 – 15 Aggressive Growth. You want to maximize the long-term growth of your retirement savings. You're comfortable taking substantial investment risk in exchange for potentially higher returns. Evaluate your situation at least annually and modify your investment strategy as your situation changes.

Based on your score, you are a(n) _____ investor.

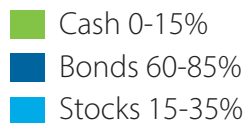
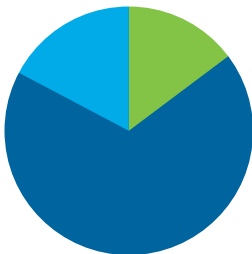


FIND YOUR INVESTMENT MIX

Find the asset allocation model below that matches your investment profile and circle it. You may wish to use this model as a starting point to create your own individual mix.

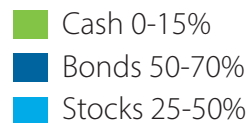
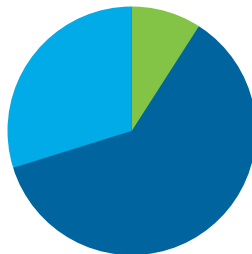
Conservative

5-7 points



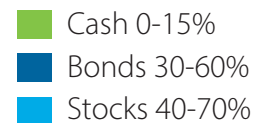
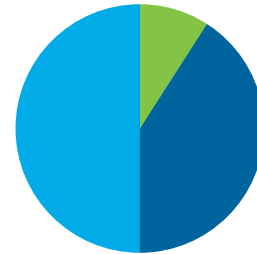
Moderate

8-9 points



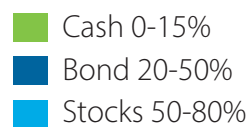
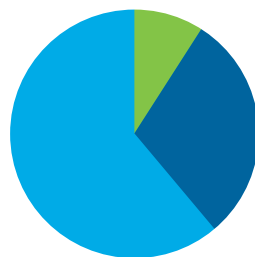
Moderate Growth

10-11 points



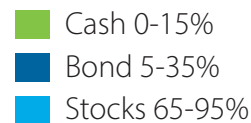
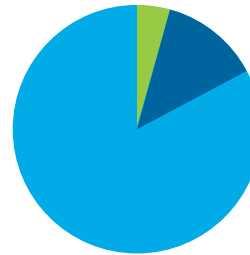
Growth

12-13 points



Aggressive Growth

14-15 points



Allocations are examples only and should not be considered investment advice or as a recommendation of any specific investment product. Please consider your investment choices carefully and obtain and read the appropriate fund prospectuses before investing any money. You should choose your own investments based on your particular objectives and situation. Be sure to review your decisions periodically to make sure they are still consistent with your goals. You may wish to consult a financial professional for more information.

For comprehensive investment assistance based on your own unique situation and outlook, contact Centra Financial Services today!



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