

# Choosing a Bank

## How to Find Banks That Fit Your Needs

By Justin Pritchard, About.com Guide

Choosing the best bank for your needs is easy. First, you have to figure out exactly what you need from a bank. Once you know what to look for, you can quickly evaluate the competition and end up with the best bank account out there. This page offers a guide to choosing the right bank for your needs, and offers some ideas for starting your checklist.

### What Will You Do?

The first question to ask yourself is what you want to do with your bank account. Do you want to put money in there periodically and watch it grow? Will you move money in and out quickly? You need to know what your banking behavior will be like in order to find the right bank.

### How Will You do It?

Next, get an idea of how you prefer to do your banking. If your schedule doesn't work with most bank schedules, the best bank might just be the one that's open at convenient times. If you're a web-savvy customer, look for the banks that make it easy to do your dealings quickly and efficiently with the click of a mouse.

### What's it Worth to You?

Free checking accounts get a lot of hype. They get people in the door. However, free may not always be the best thing for you. If you value certain services or conveniences, you may be willing to pay for them. Once you get ahold of fee schedules from competing banks, consider if it's really going to bother you to pay a few bucks each month for that "gotta have it" feature or service. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.

### Get Opinions

Finally, remember to ask other people for opinions. You can find bank reviews in our Bank Review pages ([http://banking.about.com/od/bankaccountreviews/Bank\\_Account\\_Reviews.htm](http://banking.about.com/od/bankaccountreviews/Bank_Account_Reviews.htm)). Ask your friends where they bank, and how happy they are. When searching online, just remember that negative experiences will be more common than positive ones. People upset at the bank are motivated to spread the word – but happy customers often don't even realize that they're happy.

### Shop Around

Once you know what you want, start shopping and comparing. You can use the list below to start a checklist. Most institutions will have everything you need on their Website. If not, call (or walk

in) and ask – you'll get a preview of the customer service. Look for fee schedules, rate sheets, and hours of operation while you're hunting online.

### **Ideas to Get You Started**

Try the list below to get the process started. For example, if you:

#### **Have a tight schedule...**

Find a bank with convenient location and flexible (or weekend) hours, or that allows ATM Deposits.

#### **Want the highest interest rate on your money...**

Consider an internet bank account. They pay the best interest rates for deposits.

#### **Feel more comfortable face-to-face...**

Search out community banks and credit unions that are easy for you to get to.

#### **Need to get a loan...**

Check the newspaper and bank websites for special offers (like no closing costs on a mortgage). Don't forget to look at local credit unions.

#### **Write lots of checks...**

Get the free checking option where available.

#### **Hate licking envelopes and paying bills...**

Find a bank that offers free online bill pay.

#### **Use ATM's frequently...**

Use a local bank with an extensive ATM network. Or, get into an institution that will rebate foreign ATM fees. Be realistic about the "requirements" for getting this done. Are you really going to provide the bank with ATM receipts?

On the next three pages you will find information from three banks that we randomly selected. We are not suggesting that you select or reject any of them; this is simply an information gathering exercise. Look them over to see the differences between the checking accounts they offer. Do any appeal to you? Why? Which one might best meet your needs? Once you have looked them over, complete the attached handout for your records.

## **Putnam Bank**

### **Classic Checking Account**

Classic Checking is a convenient and affordable checking account with unlimited check writing. The low monthly fee is waived when you maintain a low minimum daily balance of just \$100.00.

- Maintain a daily minimum balance of only \$100.00 to avoid service charges
- Low monthly fee of \$7.00 when balance falls below \$100.00
- FREE Putnam Bank Check Card
- FREE Telephone Banking Service
- FREE introductory order of printed checks
- Minimum to open account is \$20.00
- Account is free of monthly service charges for customers aged 62 and older
- FREE Online Banking
- FREE Online Bill Payment Service\*

\* Note: If registered for Bill Payment and you don't make any bill payments in two consecutive months, a \$5 monthly fee will be assessed to your checking account at the start of the third month.

### **Classic Choice Checking**

Enjoy the benefits of a no minimum balance checking account with unlimited check writing by choosing the convenience of direct deposit.

- No monthly fee or minimum balance required as long as direct deposit is maintained
- FREE Putnam Bank Check Card
- FREE Telephone Banking Service
- Four Fee-Free Foreign ATM transactions per statement cycle
- FREE introductory order of printed checks
- Minimum to open account is \$20.00
- FREE Online Banking
- FREE Online Bill Payment Service\*

\* Note: If registered for Bill Payment and you don't make any bill payments in two consecutive months, a \$5 monthly fee will be assessed to your checking account at the start of the third month.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. I will one day need a checking account to
2. For me, the most important factor(s) in choosing a bank is (are)
3. Of the three banks I have looked at so far, the one that seems best designed for me is \_\_\_\_\_ because
4. Some other banks I want to look into are: