



CA Commission on the Status of Women
www.women.ca.gov



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Always Read the Small Print

Be sure to read the **small print** before you sign a contract and buy a product or service—or you might not understand what you are purchasing! Research and compare pricing and conditions before you fall for the large print!

Good Reasons to Read the Small Print

Small print is controversial because it is often deceptive, designed to make a consumer believe that an offer is great even when it really isn't. You can protect yourself by reading the small print and noticing if something is too good to be true.

Small print is often used to meet disclosure requirements, but frequently contains the details of

(unfavorable) terms or conditions. Though the truth is technically "available," you may have to do careful research to find it.

Small print is a standard advertising practice, commonly used to misrepresent total costs.

Small print is also used to hide important elements, such as when an offer is available under terms and conditions that are nearly impossible to meet, or that a company reserves the right to change provisions of an offer at any time.

Small print often contradicts larger print in ads, such as when an ad says "pre-approved" but the **small print** says "subject to approval." In pharmaceutical



ads, **small print** often contains serious health warnings. **Small print** in television ads is designed to be overlooked, since it is briefly displayed at the bottom of the screen and is difficult to understand.

Insurance

Insurance policies frequently exclude situations that would seem to be legitimate reasons to file a claim. For example, **small print** might disclose that life insurance will not be paid for suspicious deaths, or that homeowners' insurance may not cover arson.

Credit

A credit card may advertise "0% interest", but the **small print** reveals this will apply only for a few months. After the introductory period, the interest rate will steeply increase, and rise even higher if you **ever** make a late payment.

Cell Phones

Cell phone ads may offer a "low monthly cost", but the **small**

print reveals extra fees, taxes, and costly additional services such as texting. Cell phone contracts commonly lock you in for two years and are usually expensive to cancel. The contract may automatically renew if you upgrade phone equipment or don't cancel the contract within a short timeframe.

Warranties

Warranties for many costly items, such as cars or computers, may seem to cover likely malfunctions. But the **small print** reveals that regular maintenance and most common major repairs are excluded.

Ads

Many ads offer a "discounted price" *after rebate*, but the actual purchase price is in **small print**. The customer pays the higher price and then must correctly satisfy complex procedures to get the rebate. In many cases, these requirements are nearly impossible to meet, and most rebates are never collected by consumers.

Free Trials

Free offers and "free trials" are frequently misleading. **Small print** may reveal expensive shipping, handling and processing fees, and that the product will be automatically shipped to you if you do not unsubscribe. Check your bills to make sure you are not charged for products you are not willing to buy.

Vacations

A vacation cruise may advertise "an attractive price", but the **small print** reveals a "per person, double occupancy" for only a few berths. "As low as" may be used to mask hidden fees, taxes, tips, activities charges, and transportation costs to and from the ship.

Timeshares

Timeshares may offer enticing "incentives", such as free weekend getaways if you attend a high-pressure sales presentation. Buyers rarely consider the true cost of the unit, whether it is a good

investment, or if it really fits the family's future vacation needs. **Small print** in the contract may reveal expensive association dues and cleaning fees, complex scheduling, and restrictions on swapping or selling the timeshare.

Positive Advantages

Occasionally, **small print** may disclose positive advantages! A large ticket item purchased with your credit card may have a free extended warranty after the manufacturer's warranty expires.

Magazine subscriptions, gym and museum memberships, and season ticket purchases might provide extra benefits. This may include free or reduced admission to other venues; and discounts at retail stores, restaurants, car rentals, and hotels. However, most consumers never take advantage of these offers.