

Sample 1

From a book on the subprime mortgage crisis – research is completely original since at the time this was written there was no such composite available. Audience is 35-50 year old American males with some college.

Profile: The Subprime Borrower (1300 words)

Subprime loans are used to buy a car, pay for living expenses, remodel a currently owned residence or pay down a high interest credit card. By in large, however, the reasons people borrow money is to purchase a home or refinance their existing mortgage. It may come as a surprise considering the current mess the industry is in but **subprime mortgages account for just 13 percent of all mortgages**. In this section, we're going to have a look at eight factors that make up a borrower's overall mortgage eligibility. While every person and situation is different, it is possible to put together a general profile of the average subprime borrower to better acquaint you with just who exactly makes up that 13 percent.

Down Payment

Generally speaking, the typical subprime borrower does not have a substantial down payment saved. This, combined with less-than-exemplary credit rating, is a major reason why they do not qualify for a prime loan in the first place. Loan To Value Ratio (LTV) is a key part of determining what interest rate the borrower is qualified for. Mortgages for one hundred percent or more of the home's purchase price are possible but attract a premium of up to four percent interest on top of the already inflated subprime rates. Borrowers who have saved even a 5 percent down payment can access loans at a reduced interest rate.

Credit Profile

Most potential borrowers think their credit score is what determines their loan eligibility. While it does allow the lender to quickly get an idea of the risk involved, credit score is not the only determining factor. Because other factors (like down payment and income to debt ratio) are taken into consideration, there is no fixed cutoff point to determine whether a borrower qualifies for a prime or subprime loan. As a general guideline, most subprime borrowers have a credit score of 620 or lower. In 2005, it was estimated that fifteen to fifty percent of subprime loans went to borrowers whose credit scores indicated that they qualified for prime loans. Most likely, the reason these borrowers were not able to access a prime loan is their high income to debt ratio due to a large amount of consumer debt.

Equity

There are two distinctly different types of subprime borrowers: those that are buying a home for the first time and those that are refinancing existing mortgages at a more favourable interest rate. Those that are buying for the first time, have no equity, since they have not yet purchased anything. Borrowers who are refinancing generally have at least some equity although likely not a lot, since a loan near the end of its term is less likely to be refinanced.

Subprime borrowers also commonly gamble with their equity by getting a cash-out refinance, which means they borrow against equity they have already accrued. Basically, it's like using your house as a credit card. In simpler terms, a homeowner who has paid \$50,000 out of his \$150,000 mortgage decides to refinance at a more favourable interest rate with an additional \$20,000 in cash to put in a new kitchen. Doing this reduces his equity to \$30,000, meaning if he were to sell the house immediately, he would only clear \$30,000 from the \$150,000 sale price. Most people refinance to make capital improvements to their property with the hopes of increasing its value when it comes time to sell but this practice can be a slippery slope. Many people get into trouble when they make refinancing a habit because they get used to having more money than their income allows.

Assets

Originally, subprime lending was a way for homeowners to buy a second home or vacation property, so in its original form subprime lenders usually had quite healthy asset portfolios. Over the past ten years, as subprime lending has migrated to the lower income portion of the real estate market, borrowers have tended to have very few assets aside from a car household possessions, also known as chattel.

Income To Debt Ratio

This is an important factor in determining a borrower's prime or subprime status. In terms of Income and Debt Ratio, debt refers to the amount of fixed monthly expenses. This includes credit card payments, car payments and any other financial commitments. The reason this ratio is so important is that banks will generally not authorize a mortgage payment that pushes the total amount of monthly debt (including the mortgage payment) over 38 percent.

Subprime borrowers almost always have an income to debt ratio of more than 38 percent. Lenders that specialize in subprime mortgages allow a much higher ratio, sometimes as high as 64 percent. A high income to debt ratio isn't restricted to borrowers at the lower end of the income scale because it is based on percentage rather than a fixed amount of money. In 2005 credit constrained borrowers with substantial wealth were most likely to finance the purchase of a home by using a subprime mortgage

Type of Property

This is the most difficult of the categories to generalize and really, all that needs to be said is that subprime borrowers don't live in gated communities, condos or mansions on the hilltop. Typically, they live in working class neighbourhoods made up of small, post-war single-family homes or, in more urban areas, row houses and multifamily dwellings. Borrowers with larger homes are usually those who have refinanced an existing mortgage to either get cash out or a lower interest rate. As we discussed in the Assets section, a subprime borrower's house is almost always the only real, non-depreciating asset they have.

Ethnicity

This is a factor that most people would rather not talk about, but the truth is that three times out of four, a subprime borrower will be Hispanic or African-American. In 1999, it was reported that 50 percent of subprime mortgage refinances originated in predominately African-American census tracts, areas that accounted for only ten percent of prime refinance.

Cleveland has become the touchstone city of the mortgage market collapse. The city is primarily working class with an ethnicity split of 51 percent African-American, 41 percent white and seven percent Hispanic. In 2005, nearly 60 percent of loans taken out by African-Americans in Cleveland were classified as high-cost. The percentage of white people who got high-cost loans, was 34.

This correlation holds true even after outside factors such as income, size of loan and property location are taken into consideration. What this means, in real terms, is that if you had two groups of one hundred people equal in every way aside from skin color, 60 members of the African-American group would have taken out high-cost loan while only 34 members of the white group would have done the same.

While subprime borrowers tend to be in a lower income bracket than their prime counterparts, studies have shown that even high-income African-American and Hispanic families were more likely to have taken out a high-cost loan. This discrepancy is not just in Cleveland. Studies have shown similar trends in New York, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston.

This trend became a huge issue when the mortgage market collapse finally became unavoidable in 2006. Stories of predatory lending, brokers targeting known minority neighbourhoods and brokers working in collusion with corrupt building inspectors started to appear in newspapers. Of course, it must be pointed out that there are many other explanations for these figures aside from out and out racism, most of which have to do with discrepancies in education and differences in social customs in various subcultures. This is such a complex issue that it really needs its own book (not to mention a PhD thesis) to do it justice.

Gender

Single women, often with children, are one of the fastest growing groups of homeowners in recent years. In Baltimore, this demographic group accounted for 40 percent of home sales in 2006, twice the national average. Nearly half of these homes were bought with subprime mortgages.

Sample 2

From a book on kindness and philanthropy on the cheap. Client wanted a super sassy sister-friend type of voice. (900 words)

Ah yes...here they come. The excuses. I'm surprised you took this long, to be honest.

I Don't Have Any Money and its evil twin **I Don't Have Time**. These shady characters get in the way of a good deal of philanthropic activity and should really be banned from the English language altogether. Remember that annoying elementary school teacher that kept telling you there is no such word as can't? Well, sorry to break it to you, she got a book writing gig. To people overcome by this sneaky deception I say, does your face work? Can you smile at someone? If the answer is yes, then we'll be able to work together. If not, then I recommend you put this book down immediately. No amount of witty commentary and carefully selected quotation will be able to help you.

For those of you that are on board the Good Ship *Altruisme*¹, get ready to deal with the money excuses. Readers who are independently wealthy but short on time may wish to proceed to the next chapter.

Let's address this whole philanthropy business for a minute. Philanthropy is old, rich people giving loads of money to their pet causes. A bourgeois obligation. People like Andrew Carnegie, JP Morgan, and JD Rockefeller...they were serious philanthropists. "I am neither old nor rich." you say, "I told you I couldn't do it."

Fast breaking news story: *Philanthropy doesn't have anything to do with money. Not a single cent is required. You can put your chequebook away forever and still be a philanthropist.*

"Are you kidding me?", I hear you say. "This no money required business sounds like Greek to me."

¹ No, I didn't just add an extra vowel to the end to make it look exotic. This is an actual French word. It was coined by Frenchman Auguste Comte to describe his theory of positivism, which stated that people have a moral obligation to renounce self-interest and live for others. It also fulfills our bilingual obligations for this book. *Mais oui.*

Interesting that you should express your confusion in this manner. What a convenient way to segue in to this next section describing the Greek origins of the word philanthropy. I couldn't have done it better if I wrote it myself.

The word philanthropy is made up of two Greek words. The first is *phillien*, which means loving, friendly to, fondness for, attraction to; strong tendency toward etc. You may recognize it from such dictionary hits as bibliophile (bookworm), audiophile (music snob) and philosophy (love of wisdom and Birkenstocks).

The second word is *anthropos* meaning mankind (that includes womynkind for those of you with a bra and lighter to hand). Arts undergraduates may have a dim recollections of an 8:30 Intro to Anthropology class that was devoted to studying mankind. Recollections of your own personal study of mankind may be much stronger but that's not so relevant at this particular moment.

If we use our compound word skills, we find that all philanthropy means *is loving, friendly to, fondness for, attraction to; strong tendency toward mankind*. Before you get too carried away, I'm not suggesting that you date all of mankind as a charitable endeavour. All I'm saying is that there are plenty of ways to be kind without spending any money, which is good because that's the whole point of this book.²

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Reciprocity

- *You reap what you sow.*
- *I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine*
- *You get what you give*
- *What goes around comes around*

As Chinese social philosopher Confucius observed, "*there is one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life—reciprocity.*" Of course philosophers don't have anything to do all day except come up with wise little aphorisms such as this, even so, this is still a very astute observation.

While pure altruistic behaviour is engaged in without concern for personal gain, there is no denying that a kindness given usually results in a kindness received. Sometimes the reward comes immediately and other times your turn takes a while to come round. Whatever the timeframe, it does come around eventually.

Attention artists/philosophers/musicians/bohemians of any sort: If that altruism shtick from earlier is working for you and you want to go in for the kill try this one for size. "Idiosyncrasy credits" is the term used by social psychologists to quantify the

² A list of 365 ways to be kind is conveniently located in Section II of this book. There are still plenty of delightfully insightful nuggets of truth in the remaining sections, so reign in your enthusiasm and resist the urge to skip ahead.

favourable impression we make on others. If you can work that into the conversation, you've just mixed smart with sensitive and no girl can resist that.

Another, more popular, word for idiosyncrasy credits is karma. Karma is understood by Buddhists as a way to improve your status in reincarnation. Secular Westerners usually understand karma as more of a good deed bank account. Either way, it refers to the idea that for every event that occurs, there will follow another event whose existence was caused by the first. The second event's pleasance is determined by the pleasance of the first event.

This notion of reciprocity is not a new concept. Greek playwright Sophocles wrote that "*kindness it is that brings forth kindness always.*" Fairly poetic for 447 BC but also right on the money. The idea that one kind deed results in another is quite exciting. You can be the Che Guevara of kindness by baking cookies for your office or cutting your neighbour's grass. No beard growth necessary.

Those of you who are scientists will have to forgive the liberties I'm about to take with a fundamental scientific principle but just stay with me for a minute. Newton's third law of physics states that:

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

While we are dealing more with the spirit than the letter of the law, it illustrates the fundamental nature of reciprocity. In very general terms, this law can be described as push vs pull; up vs down and give vs take. We can extrapolate this idea to our kindness thesis and find that it supports Sophocles' assertion, the idea of karma and Confucius. I'd like to see Boyle's Law do all that.³

Finally, a word from Dr Albert Schweitzer, a 20th century musician, philosopher AND physician (save your swooning ladies, he died in 1965) "*Do something wonderful, people may imitate it.*" These people aren't famous for being thick as bricks, so I'm going to go out on a limb and say that they know what they're talking about. Go on. Live life on the edge. Bake some cookies.⁴

³ Boyle's Law states that the product of the volume and pressure of a fixed quantity of an ideal gas is constant, given constant temperature. You're halfway to a chemistry degree now.

⁴ Homemade is preferable but Pilsbury will do in a pinch. It's the thought that counts after all.

Sample 3

The first section of a continuing education course on Civil Rights. Client wanted a friendly but formal tone for an audience of college-educated adults looking to expand their knowledge base. (1150 words)

What are civil rights and how are they different to human rights?

In a nutshell, the difference is that **human rights are inalienable while civil rights are subject to change**. As we get further into the discussion, you will soon discover that the line between the two is quite blurry, particularly in places like America where human rights are taken for granted. Both ideas accomplish the same end through different means. For example freedom of speech in the United States is both a civil and a human right. In China, this is not the case.

The two terms are often used interchangeably but this is not really correct usage. The differences are subtle but important.

HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INALIENABLE.

- The basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity
- Justified by a moral standard that is above the laws of any individual nation
- Includes but is not limited to health, education, shelter, employment, property, food, freedom of expression and movement.
- An advocate of human rights fights so that the dignity of all people is respected.



In December of 1948, the United Nations created the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document outlining the rights people are entitled to on the basis of their humanity.

Among other things, the Declaration stipulated that:

- Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.
- No one shall be held in slavery.

- No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.
- Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty.
- No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation.
- Everyone has the right to own property.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes seeking, receiving and imparting information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.
- Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family.
- Everyone has the right to education.

192 nations, all known nations except for Taiwan, have signed the Declaration as of 2006. The ideas espoused in the Declaration are more ideological than practical in the sense the many of the United Nations member countries are in violation of one or more its principles. Prosecution is possible but complicated due to the flexibility of the principles and the questionable authority of the International Criminal Court. Prosecution that proceed forward is usually related to large-scale offences like genocide or rather than person-to-person violations.

CIVIL RIGHTS ARE NOT INALIENABLE

- Afforded to a person on the basis of their citizenship as part of a social contract.
- Subject to the laws of the nation. May be withheld if a person violates the contract.
- Includes but is not limited to freedom of speech, press and freedom from discrimination,
- A civil rights advocate works to protect individuals or groups from violation by government or other organizations.

The ideology surrounding civil rights has developed quite differently in the United States than in other countries for several reasons.

The values on which the country was founded are profoundly different than those of the Old Commonwealth and Europe. The principle difference is that the older countries began with the absolute power of a monarchy and eventually moved to a more democratic system whereas the United States was founded by men keen to avoid the privileges linked to the circumstances of birth. They devised a system based on equality and separation of church and state. From this foundation sprang the uniquely American idea that a person can be anything they wish to be if they are willing to work hard enough.

Mentioning the phrase civil rights in an American context immediately brings to mind the struggles of slaves and the subsequent integration of African-Americans into white society. Although there are many issues associated with civil rights in America, race is by far the most important. This is an association that does not exist anywhere else.

The right of the individual to do as he pleases is also an idea more strongly developed in America than Europe. In the UK there aren't any dedicated privacy laws and citizens do not, as a rule, expect this protection. For example, the countryside is covered in miles of footpaths that any member of the public is permitted to use even if the land is privately owned. Farmers who designate their property as private are thought of as spoilsports. Americans don't think twice at the idea of private property. The distinction is not clear-cut however. In regards to personal information, European law requires express permission to be given before any personal information can be shared. In the United States, the First Amendment means that much personal information is publicly available, a development for which private investigators are eternally grateful.

Several pieces of civil rights legislation have been passed in the United States over the last 130 years. We will explore them in more detail in Section III. A general synthesis of what constitutes a civil right is illustrated by the following list from the American Civil Liberties Union:



- Your First Amendment rights—freedom of speech, association and assembly. Freedom of the press, and freedom of religion supported by the strict separation of church and state.
- Your right to equal protection under the law - equal treatment regardless of race, sex, religion or national origin.
- Your right to due process - fair treatment by the government whenever the loss of your liberty or property is at stake.
- Your right to privacy - freedom from unwarranted government intrusion into your personal and private affairs.



A key point about civil rights is that they are subject to change. The government may change the rules at any point if they feel it is in the best interests of the people. In many ways this power is reminiscent of the absolute monarchs of centuries past who had sole deciding power over everyone in the kingdom. There have been many instances where the American government has used its power to limit the civil liberties of its citizens.

- Prohibition 18th Amendment 1919, repealed by 21st Amendment in 1933
- McCarthyism and the House Committee for Un-American Activities 1950-1954
- The Patriot Act 2001



On the other hand, there have been many times when progressive political groups have managed to campaign for new civil liberties to be afforded to marginalized sections of the population.

- Abolition of slavery 13th Amendment 1865
- Women's suffrage 19th Amendment 1920
- Abolition of the Poll Tax 24th Amendment 1964

Civil rights are always a balancing act between the rights of the individual and the best interests of the larger group. This nexus forms the basis of many civil rights cases with the defence usually arguing for the individual and the prosecution for citizens as a group.