# Debt Snowball, Plain

*Smallest debt first. One step at a time.*

## Five loud bills, one quiet order

If you owe money in five different directions, the hard part usually isn't the math. It's that five bills all feel equally loud, so nothing gets your full attention — and a debt that never shrinks is a debt that quietly convinces you nothing works.

The snowball is the plainest fix there is: line your debts up smallest to largest, pay the minimum on everything, and throw every spare dollar at the smallest one until it's gone. Then roll that whole payment into the next one. The wins come early, on purpose — because a person who has killed one debt believes the plan works, and a person who believes keeps going.

## The example — five debts, one order

Here is a real worked example, the same one printed on our Debt Snowball Tracker:

> **1. Store card** — $340 owed, $25 minimum
>
> **2. Visa card** — $860 owed, $30 minimum
>
> **3. Personal loan** — $1,450 owed, $85 minimum
>
> **4. Credit union card** — $2,150 owed, $45 minimum
>
> **5. Car loan** — $6,280 owed, $286 minimum
>
> **Total owed: $11,080.** Minimums all together: **$471 a month**.

Now say there's **$110 extra** a month — found money, from the leftover after a paycheck budget. Every dollar of it goes at the store card, the smallest:

- The store card gets $25 minimum + $110 extra = **$135 a month**. At that pace it's gone in about three months.
- When it dies, its $135 doesn't go back into spending. It rolls onto the Visa: $30 minimum + $135 = **$165 a month**.
- Then the personal loan gets **$250**, the credit union card gets **$295**, and by the time only the car loan is left standing, it's taking **$581 a month** — the same $581 that was always going out the door, just aimed at one target at a time.

Nothing about the household's money changed. The order changed.

## The steps

- **List every debt**, smallest balance to largest. Don't sort by interest rate — that's a different method, and we'll be honest about it below.
- **Pay every minimum, on time.** The snowball only works if nothing falls behind while you aim.
- **Aim all your extra at #1.** Whatever your paycheck leftover gives you, the smallest debt gets it.
- **When a debt dies, roll its whole payment down the list.** This is the step people skip, and it's the whole engine.
- **Mark each one off.** The tracker has a "Paid Off" column for a reason — and the example sheet even carries a reward line: *"Dinner out when #1 is gone!"* Small, planned, and earned beats big and guilty every time.

## The honest part

Paying highest-interest-first (the "avalanche") can cost less interest on paper. That's true, and you should hear it from us. What the snowball buys instead is a finished debt in about three months instead of a slightly cheaper year of feeling stuck — and in real kitchens, the plan people stay on beats the plan that's better in a spreadsheet. If your highest-interest debt is also small, you get both. If it isn't, pick the order you'll still be following in month six.

## The free way

A notebook page works: one line per debt, smallest first, a column for the minimum, a column for what you're actually paying, and a box to check when one dies. Plenty of people snowball on paper and never need anything fancier.

And if you want to *see* it before you start — our free **Debt Payoff Visualizer** runs in your browser: type in your debts, and it shows your debt-free date. Slide the extra payment up and watch the date move closer. No account, no email — the date it shows you is yours to beat.