The Debt Payoff Visualizer: Watch Your Debt-Free Date Move

A debt-free date isn't a guess. It's arithmetic — and once you can see it, you can move it.

Most people carrying debt can't answer a simple question: *when will this actually be over?* Without a date, a debt feels permanent, and a permanent problem gets minimum payments and no plan. The date changes that. The day you can name the month the last debt dies, the debts stop being a fog and become a list with an end.

This lesson works one set of debts three ways — minimums only, a little extra, a little more — so you can watch the date move. You can do the whole job on paper, and we'll teach it that way first. Then we'll show you the same numbers run through our Visualizer, which does the same arithmetic in seconds.

The example — three debts, three finish lines

Here are the sample debts, the same ones the Visualizer opens with:

> **Store card** — $600 owed, 24% interest, $25 minimum
>
> **Credit card** — $1,800 owed, 19% interest, $45 minimum
>
> **Personal loan** — $3,200 owed, 9% interest, $85 minimum

Total owed: **$5,600**. Minimums all together: **$155 a month**.

Minimums only. Pay exactly the minimums and nothing more, and the last debt dies in **November 2030** — 48 months from the start. Worse, **$1,747.72 of what you paid was pure interest**: $7,347.72 out the door to retire $5,600 of debt.

Add $25 extra a month, aimed at the smallest debt first. The finish line jumps to **February 2030** — **nine months sooner** — and the interest drops to $1,271.16. That's **$477 of interest you never pay**, bought with $25 a month.

Make it $50 extra. Now the last debt dies in **August 2029** — **fifteen months sooner** than minimums only — and the interest falls to $1,026.90, a saving of **$721**. And you can watch the order do its work: the store card is gone by August 2027, the credit card by December 2028, then the loan.

Same debts. Same paycheck. The only thing that changed is the plan.

The steps — the paper way

- **List every debt**: what you owe, the interest rate, and the minimum payment. Three columns on a notebook page.

- **Pay every minimum, on time.** Nothing falls behind while you aim.
- **Aim every extra dollar at the smallest debt.** Not the scariest one, not the loudest one — the smallest balance, because it dies first and its payment gets freed up soonest.
- **When a debt dies, roll its whole payment into the next one.** The $25 minimum from the dead store card doesn't go back to spending — it joins the attack on the next debt. This roll is the engine.
- **Count the months.** Work forward debt by debt — balance divided by what you're paying gives you rough months per debt — and write the finish month at the bottom of the page. It's an estimate, and that's fine: a rough date you can see beats an exact fog.

What the tool does with the same numbers

The Visualizer runs that identical plan — smallest first, minimums on everything, extra aimed and rolled — except it does the month-by-month interest arithmetic exactly, for every month, in about a second. Type in the three sample debts and it hands you November 2030 and the $1,747.72 interest bill. Then slide the extra payment to $25 and the date moves to February 2030 while you watch; slide it to $50 and it lands on August 2029, with the payoff order spelled out — store card, then credit card, then the loan.

That slider is the tool's real lesson: your debt-free date isn't fixed. It's a number your plan chooses, and small changes to the plan move it by months.

The honest part

On paper, your date will be approximate — interest accrues monthly and minimums shrink as balances fall, so hand arithmetic drifts a little. For *deciding*, approximate is plenty: the gap between November 2030 and August 2029 is not a rounding error, and you don't need perfect math to see what $50 extra buys. Use the paper way to understand the plan; use a tool when you want the exact month to aim at.

The free way

A notebook page works: one line per debt, smallest first, the minimum beside it, and your extra aimed at the top line. Count the months as best you can and write the finish date where you'll see it. Plenty of people pay off debt with nothing fancier — the plan is the point, not the paper.

And if you want to see your own date before you start — the Visualizer runs free right here on our Teaching Corner: type in your debts and it shows your debt-free date, no account, no email. If you'd like to keep it and run your numbers whenever you like, the ready-made version from this lesson is in our shop: the Debt Payoff Visualizer.