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## **WHY THE BBB DESERVES A FFF**

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Why does everyone insist on making my life more difficult?

I can't just pop a DVD into the player and have it start playing a movie without watching the previews. People don't respond to my e-mails with a message history anymore. And lately, Twitter keeps saying it's "over capacity" and won't let me tweet.

Now the Better Business Bureau (BBB) is getting in on the make-my-life-more-difficult act.

The agency that tracks the behavior of businesses nationally [is sending us all back to school](#) with its decision to give out letter grades.

It used to be so simple -- "unsatisfactory" or "satisfactory" were the only ratings firms got.

But nooo, that was too simple. Now we have to have grades from A+ to F.

Before, if you were a business owner all you had to do was get yourself off the unsatisfactory list and you'd be okay with customers. These days you could get a "D" and then make a good case for yourself with the business bureau and get upgraded to a "C" -- but that doesn't sound that good either, right?

And for consumers, too, it was so clear-cut before. Either a firm was satisfactory or not. If it was unsatisfactory, you didn't deal with the company. Now you have to decide if a "C" grade is bad, or not so bad.

In a press release put out this week, the BBB said it was adopting the new system "to help consumers more easily and quickly identify and compare the reliability of businesses."

I don't know about you, but all this seems way more complicated to me.

The BBB will base the letter grades on a 16-point formula:

1. The type of business and its business model
2. How long the business has been operating
3. Whether the business has appropriate competency licensing
4. Total volume of complaints filed against the business
5. The number of unanswered complaints
6. The number of unresolved complaints
7. The number of serious complaints
8. An overall complaint analysis
9. The number of complaints with delayed resolution
10. Government actions against the business

11. Any advertising issues found by BBB
12. The extent of background information available to BBB for evaluation
13. The extent to which BBB is able to develop a clear understanding of the business
14. Whether the business has honored any mediation/arbitration commitments
15. Whether the business has attained BBB Accredited Business status
16. Whether the business has had its BBB Accreditation revoked

Then the agency's number crunchers take all this information and come up with a grade.

If an entrepreneur doesn't like his or her grade, BBB spokesman Steve Cox stresses the bureau is "more than happy to talk to any business that has any issue with the grading."

"Maybe it's a matter of you fix one thing and improve your grade, but it may not be," he said.

The key thing for consumers, he added, is to look for whether a company has BBB accreditation. To get that, the firm needs a "B" or higher.

I asked Cox if a consumer should do business with a "C" graded firm. His answer: "Maybe."

Jeez, that doesn't help.

What the heck does it mean to get a "C"?

"That's an average grade, just like it was in elementary school," he explained.

I don't know about you, but the last place I want to go back to is elementary school.

What do you all think? Is this a good move for the BBB, or should we be giving the agency an FFF?