



How to Avoid the Worst Sector Mutual Funds

Question: Why are there so many mutual funds?

Answer: mutual fund providers tend to make lots of money on each fund so they create more products to sell.

Get the best fundamental research

The large number of mutual funds has little to do with serving your best interests. Only our research utilizes the superior data and earnings adjustments featured by the Harvard Business School and MIT Sloan paper, "[Core Earnings: New Data and Evidence](#)." We leverage this data to identify three red flags you can use to avoid the worst mutual funds:

1. Inadequate Liquidity

This issue is the easiest to avoid, and our advice is simple. Avoid all mutual funds with less than \$100 million in assets. Low levels of liquidity can lead to a discrepancy between the price of the mutual fund and the underlying value of the securities it holds. Plus, low asset levels tend to mean lower volume in the mutual fund and larger bid-ask spreads.

2. High Fees

Mutual funds should be cheap, but not all of them are. The first step here is to know what is cheap and expensive.

To ensure you are paying at or below average fees, invest only in mutual funds with [total annual costs](#) below 1.99%, which is the average total annual costs of the 695 U.S. equity Sector mutual funds we cover. The weighted average is lower at 1.33%, which highlights how investors tend to put their [money in mutual funds with low fees](#).

Figure 1 shows Saratoga Financial Services Portfolio (SFPAX) is the most expensive sector mutual fund and Vanguard Real Estate II Index Fund (VRTPX) is the least expensive. Saratoga (SFPAX, SBMBX, SFPCX) provides three of the most expensive mutual funds while Vanguard (VRTPX, VUIAX, VINAX) mutual funds are among the cheapest.

Figure 1: 5 Most and Least Expensive Sector Mutual Funds

Ticker	Name	Sector	Total Annual Cost
Most Expensive			
SFPAX	Saratoga Financial Services Portfolio	Financials	6.80%
SBMBX	Saratoga Energy and Basic Materials Portfolio	Energy	6.31%
RYREX	Rydex Series Energy Fund	Energy	5.68%
SFPCX	Saratoga Energy and Basic Materials Portfolio	Energy	5.15%
RYBKX	Rydex Series Banking Fund	Financials	5.14%
Least Expensive			
VRTPX	Vanguard Real Estate II Index Fund	Real Estate	0.09%
FESIX	Fidelity SAI Real Estate Index Fund	Real Estate	0.10%
FSRNK	Fidelity Real Estate Index Fund	Real Estate	0.10%
VUIAX	Vanguard Utilities Index Fund	Utilities	0.12%
VINAX	Vanguard Industrials Index Fund	Industrials	0.12%

Sources: New Constructs, LLC and company filings



Investors need not pay high fees for quality holdings.¹ Vanguard Industrials Index Fund (VINAX) is the best ranked sector mutual fund in Figure 1. VINAX's Neutral [Portfolio Management rating](#) and 0.12% total annual cost earns it an Attractive rating.² Vanguard Financials Index Fund (VFAIX) is the best ranked sector mutual fund overall. VFAIX's Attractive Portfolio Management rating and 0.12% total annual cost earns it a Very Attractive rating.

On the other hand, Fidelity Real Estate Index Fund (FSRX) holds poor stocks and receives our Unattractive rating, yet has low total annual costs of 0.10%. No matter how cheap a mutual fund, if it holds bad stocks, its performance will be bad. The quality of a mutual fund's holdings matters more than its price.

3. Poor Holdings

Avoiding poor holdings is by far the hardest part of avoiding bad mutual funds, but it is also the most important because a mutual fund's performance is determined more by its holdings than its costs. Figure 2 shows the mutual funds within each sector with the worst holdings or [portfolio management ratings](#).

Figure 2: Sector Mutual Funds with the Worst Holdings

Ticker	Name	Sector	Portfolio Management Rating
FSCHX	Fidelity Select Chemicals Portfolio	Basic Materials	Unattractive
FGDMX	Fidelity Select Advisor Communication Services Fund	Consumer Cyclical	Unattractive
FSVAX	Fidelity Select Automotive Portfolio	Consumer Non-cyclical	Neutral
GHAAX	VanEck Global Hard Assets Fund	Energy	Unattractive
SBFAX	1919 Financial Services Fund	Financials	Neutral
PHLAX	PGIM Jennison Health Sciences Fund	Healthcare	Unattractive
RYTSX	Rydex Series Transportation Fund	Industrials	Unattractive
PWREX	Pioneer Real Estate Shares	Real Estate	Unattractive
ADNAX	American Beacon ARK Transformational Innovation	Technology	Unattractive
FTUAX	Fidelity Select Advisor Telecommunications Fund	Telecom Services	Unattractive
GAUAX	Gabelli Utilities Fund	Utilities	Unattractive

Sources: New Constructs, LLC and company filings

Fidelity appears more often than any other provider in Figure 2, which means that it offers the most mutual funds with the worst holdings.

Pioneer Real Estate Shares (PWREX) is the worst rated mutual fund in Figure 2. Gabelli Utilities Fund (GAUAX), Fidelity Select Advisor Telecommunications Fund (FTUAX), Rydex Series Transportation Fund (RYTSX), VanEck Global Hard Assets Fund (GHAAX), PGIM Jennison Health Sciences Fund (PHLAX), and American Beacon ARK Transformational Innovation (ADNAX) also earn a Very Unattractive [predictive overall rating](#), which means not only do they hold poor stocks, they charge high total annual costs.

Our [overall ratings on mutual funds](#) are on our [stock ratings](#) of their holdings and the total annual costs of investing in the fund.

The Danger Within

Buying a mutual fund without analyzing its holdings is like buying a stock without analyzing its business and finances. Put another way, research on mutual fund holdings is necessary due diligence because a mutual fund's performance is only as good as its holdings' performance. Don't just take our word for it, [see what Barron's says](#) on this matter.

¹ This [paper](#) compares our analytics on a mega cap company to other major providers. The Appendix details exactly how we stack up.
² Harvard Business School features the powerful impact of our research automation technology in the case [New Constructs: Disrupting Fundamental Analysis with Robo-Analysts](#).



PERFORMANCE OF MUTUAL FUND'S HOLDINGS = PERFORMANCE OF MUTUAL FUND

Analyzing each holding within funds is no small task. Our [Robo-Analyst technology](#) enables us to perform this diligence with scale and provide the [research needed to fulfill the fiduciary duty of care](#). More of the biggest names in the financial industry (see [At BlackRock, Machines Are Rising Over Managers to Pick Stocks](#)) are now embracing technology to leverage machines in the investment research process. Technology may be the only solution to the dual mandate for research: cut costs and fulfill the fiduciary duty of care. Investors, clients, advisors and analysts deserve the latest in technology to get the diligence required to make prudent investment decisions.

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Disclosure: David Trainer, Kyle Guske II, and Matt Shuler receive no compensation to write about any specific stock, sector, or theme.

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Footnotes adjustments matter. We are the ONLY source.

We provide ratings, models, reports & screeners on U.S. 3,000 stocks, 700 ETFs and 7,000 mutual funds.

HBS & MIT Sloan research reveals that:

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The HBS & MIT Sloan paper, [Core Earnings: New Data and Evidence](#), shows how our superior data drives uniquely comprehensive and independent debt and equity research.

This [paper](#) compares our analytics on a mega cap company to other major providers. The Appendix details exactly how we stack up.

Learn [more](#).

Quotes from HBS & MIT Sloan professors on our research:

Get better research:

“...the NC dataset provides a novel opportunity to study the properties of non-operating items disclosed in 10-Ks, and to examine the extent to which the market impounds their implications.” – page 20

Pick better stocks:

“Trading strategies that exploit cross-sectional differences in firms’ transitory earnings produce abnormal returns of 7-to-10% per year.” – Abstract

Avoid losses from using other firms’ data:

“...many of the income-statement-relevant quantitative disclosures collected by NC do not appear to be easily identifiable in Compustat...” – page 14

Build better models:

“Core Earnings [calculated using New Constructs’ novel dataset] provides predictive power for various measures of one-year-ahead performance...that is incremental to their current-period counterparts.” – page 4

Exploit market inefficiencies:

“These results ... suggest that the adjustments made by analysts and Compustat to better capture core earnings are incomplete. Moreover, the non-core items identified by NC produce a measure of core earnings that is incremental to alternative measures of operating performance in predicting an array of future income measures.” – page 26

Fulfill fiduciary duties:

“An appropriate measure of accounting performance for purposes of forecasting future performance requires detailed analysis of all quantitative performance disclosures detailed in the annual report, including those reported only in the footnotes and in the MD&A.” – page 33-34



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