



How to Avoid the Worst Style Mutual Funds

Question: Why are there so many mutual funds?

Answer: Mutual fund management is profitable, so Wall Street creates more products to sell.

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The large number of mutual funds has little to do with serving your best interests as an investor. More [reliable & proprietary](#) fundamental data, proven in [The Journal of Financial Economics](#), drives our research and analysis of fund holdings and provides investors with a [new source of alpha](#). We leverage this data to identify two red flags you can use to avoid the worst mutual funds:

1. High Fees

Mutual funds should be cheap, but not all of them are. The first step is to benchmark what cheap means.

To ensure you are paying at or below average fees, invest only in mutual funds with [total annual costs](#) below 1.61% – the average total annual cost of the 5,603 U.S. equity Style mutual funds we cover. The weighted average is lower at 1.06%, which highlights how investors tend to put their [money in mutual funds with low fees](#).

Figure 1 shows American Growth Fund Series One (AMRBX) is the most expensive style mutual fund and Vanguard 500 Index Fund (VFFSX) is the least expensive. American Growth Fund provides three of the most expensive mutual funds while Vanguard (VFFSX, VSTSX) and Fidelity (FXAIX, FSKAX) mutual funds are among the cheapest.

Figure 1: 5 Most and Least Expensive Style Mutual Funds

Ticker	Name	Style	Total Annual Cost
Most Expensive			
AMRBX	American Growth Fund Series One	All Cap Blend	8.85%
HROAX	FinTrust Income and Opportunity Fund	All Cap Blend	7.64%
AMRAX	American Growth Fund Series One	All Cap Blend	7.31%
AMRGX	American Growth Fund Series One	All Cap Blend	6.87%
QCGDX	Quantified Common Ground Fund	All Cap Blend	6.58%
Least Expensive			
VFFSX	Vanguard 500 Index Fund	Large Cap Blend	0.02%
VSTSX	Vanguard Total Stock Market Index Fund	All Cap Blend	0.02%
FXAIX	Fidelity 500 Index Fund	Large Cap Blend	0.02%
FSKAX	Fidelity Total Market Index Fund	All Cap Blend	0.02%
SSEYX	State Street Eq 500 Index II Portfolio	Large Cap Blend	0.03%

Sources: New Constructs, LLC and company filings

Investors need not pay high fees for quality holdings.¹ Hennessy Cornerstone Value Fund (HICVX) is the best ranked style mutual fund overall. HICVX's Attractive [Portfolio Management rating](#) and 1.19% total annual cost earns it a Very Attractive rating.²

¹ Three independent studies from respected institutions prove the superiority of our data, models, and ratings. Learn more [here](#).

² Harvard Business School features the powerful impact of our research automation technology in the case [New Constructs: Disrupting Fundamental Analysis with Robo-Analysts](#).



On the other hand, Fidelity Mid Cap Index Fund (FSMDX) holds poor stocks and earns our Unattractive rating, yet has low total annual costs of 0.05%. 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.

2. 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 style with the worst holdings or [portfolio management ratings](#).

Figure 2: Style Mutual Funds with the Worst Holdings

Ticker	Name	Style	Portfolio Management Rating
SMLYX	Multi-Asset Capital Stability Fund	All Cap Blend	Very Unattractive
INVNX	Ultimus Managers Evolutionary Tree Innovators	All Cap Growth	Very Unattractive
ADVGX	North Square Advisory Research Small Cap Value	All Cap Value	Unattractive
APHTX	Artisan Focus Fund	Large Cap Blend	Unattractive
OTPIX	ProFunds NASDAQ-100 ProFund	Large Cap Growth	Unattractive
VSPVX	Vanguard S&P 500 Value Index Fund	Large Cap Value	Unattractive
NEEIX	Needham Growth Fund	Mid Cap Blend	Unattractive
MMCGX	Morgan Stanley Discovery Portfolio	Mid Cap Growth	Unattractive
TRMIX	T. Rowe Price Mid Cap Value Fund	Mid Cap Value	Unattractive
SLPIX	ProFunds Small Cap ProFund	Small Cap Blend	Very Unattractive
AGOZX	Alger Small Cap Focus Fund	Small Cap Growth	Unattractive
PVFIX	Bertolet Pinnacle Value Fund	Small Cap Value	Very Unattractive

Sources: New Constructs, LLC and company filings

ProFunds (OTPIX,SLPIX) appears more often than any other provider in Figure 2, which means that they offer the most mutual funds with the worst holdings.

Bertolet Pinnacle Value Fund (PVFIX) is the worst rated mutual fund in Figure 2 based on our [predictive overall rating](#). Needham Growth Fund (NEEIX), Alger Small Cap Focus Fund (AGOZX), Morgan Stanley Discovery Portfolio (MMCGX), North Square Advisory Research Small Cap Value Fund (ADVGX), Ultimus Evolutionary Tree Innovators Fund (INVNX), ProFunds Small Cap ProFund (SLPIX), T. Rowe Price Mid Cap Value Fund (TRMIX), ProFunds NASDAQ-100 ProFund (OTPIX), Multi-Asset Capital Stability Fund (SMLYX) 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](#) reflects our [stock ratings](#) of their holdings and a measure of 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 model 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. Don’t just take our word for it, [see what Barron’s says](#) on this matter.

PERFORMANCE OF MUTUAL FUND’S HOLDINGS – FEES = 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 technology to get the diligence required to make prudent investment decisions.

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Disclosure: David Trainer, Kyle Guske II, and Italo Mendonça receive no compensation to write about any specific stock, style, or theme.

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Many firms claim their research is superior, but none of them can prove it with independent studies from highly-respected institutions as we can. Three different papers from both the public and private sectors show:

1. Legacy fundamental datasets suffer from significant inaccuracies, omissions and biases.
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Best Fundamental Data in the World

Forthcoming in [The Journal of Financial Economics](#), a top peer-reviewed journal, [Core Earnings: New Data & Evidence](#) proves our Robo-Analyst technology overcomes material shortcomings in legacy firms' data collection processes to provide superior [fundamental data](#), [earnings](#) models, and [research](#). More [details](#).

Key quotes from the paper:

- “[New Constructs’] *Total Adjustments* differs significantly from the items identified and excluded from Compustat’s adjusted earnings measures. For example... 50% to 70% of the variation in *Total Adjustments* is not explained by S&P Global’s (SPGI) *Adjustments* individually.” – pp. 14, 1st para.
- “A final source of differences [between New Constructs’ and S&P Global’s data] is due to data collection oversights...we identified cases where Compustat did not collect information relating to firms’ income that is useful in assessing core earnings.” – pp. 16, 2nd para.

Superior Models

A top accounting firm features the superiority of our ROIC, NOPAT and Invested Capital research to Capital IQ & Bloomberg’s in [Getting ROIC Right](#). See the [Appendix](#) for direct comparison details.

Key quotes from the paper:

- “...an accurate calculation of ROIC requires more diligence than often occurs in some of the common, off-the-shelf ROIC calculations. Only by scouring the footnotes and the MD&A [as New Constructs does] can investors get an accurate calculation of ROIC.” – pp. 8, 5th para.
- “The majority of the difference...comes from New Constructs’ machine learning approach, which leverages technology to calculate ROIC by applying accounting adjustments that may be buried deeply in the footnotes across thousands of companies.” – pp. 4, 2nd para.

Superior Stock Ratings

Robo-Analysts’ stock ratings outperform those from human analysts as shown in this [paper](#) from Indiana’s Kelley School of Business. Bloomberg features the [paper here](#).

Key quotes from the paper:

- “the portfolios formed following the buy recommendations of Robo-Analysts earn abnormal returns that are statistically and economically significant.” – pp. 6, 3rd para.
- “Our results ultimately suggest that Robo-Analysts are a valuable, alternative information intermediary to traditional sell-side analysts.” – pp. 20, 3rd para.

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