INVESTING IN



Laurence G. Taff

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MORTGAGE SECURITIES

Laurence G. Taff, M.S., Ph.D.



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Preface

This is a book about residential mortgage-backed securities and investing in them. Mortgages are financial instruments whose main features are their face amounts and their associated interest rates. In the good old days, the 1950s to 1960s, interest rates were stable and mortgage-backed securities did not exist because there was no need for them. Over the last 30 years interest rates have gone from about 5%/year to roughly 18%/year and back down. The volatility associated with interest rates — that is, a measure of the amplitude of their changes — has gone from a quiet 2% to a raucous 25% at times. This has made all fixed-income instruments, including mortgages and the securities based on them, much more electrifying investment vehicles. Adding further importance, the U.S. housing debt market is now the largest nongovernmental market in the world. Indeed, it is second only to the U.S. federal debt. Today it stands at over four trillion dollars (that is, \$4,000,000,000,000.00 plus). It is far larger than the combination of all the American stock markets. Mortgages and mortgage-backed securities play a very large role in today's investment mix.

This text is more numerical and mathematical than most books on the subject. Mortgages are fixed-income securities that are priced based on their note rates and their cash flows. The latter need to be predicted —or at least understood. These and other market-related factors depend in a quantitative fashion on the other parameters of mortgages and the securities derived from them. When mortgages are packaged together to form a pool of assets backing a mortgage-backed security, the numerical and financial complications only increase and become even more subtle and intricate. To truly understand the nature of the individual whole loan and its many financially engineered investment vehicles, and to truly understand the ways and wherefores of how and why their prices can change, one must become proficient at the basic arithmetical components or elements of fixed-income securities.

The first four chapters of this book allow you the opportunity to master these arithmetical aspects. Many numerical examples are worked through and many more exercises and problems, always with answers, are incorporated. All of the problems can be solved with a standard business calculator. If your interest is not in the quantitative subtleties of these securities, then the material surrounding the mathematical parts of the text is mandatory for understanding fixed- and floating-rate securities, alternative investment possibilities (to evaluate competing places for your funds), how to evaluate what others are telling you about mortgages and mortgage-backed securities, and how and why you should partition your monies among them.

The material covered in the first four chapters includes simple, compound, and continuous interest, the time value of money in the context of present and future value, annuities, and the composition of a nominal interest rate. Also discussed are various types of short- and long-term fixed-income securities and their pricing,

fixed- and adjustable-rate mortgages and their properties (and their less obvious value-related aspects), other common types of mortgages found in the U.S., and a thorough verbal, pictorial, and mathematical exploration of Macaulay duration, modified duration, and convexity. These concepts are absolutely critical to understanding the price risk in mortgages and mortgage-backed securities and to managing a portfolio of mortgage-related securities successfully. Mathematical developments of duration beyond the norm are included at the end of Chapter 3. Finally, a brief overview of automated underwriting ends Chapter 4.

In addition to discussing the financial and numerical aspects of mortgages and mortgage-backed securities, I have tried to place them in their historical setting as the U.S. financial markets have evolved over the last 60 years. The major developments were the creation of government-affiliated institutions, from the FHA and Ginnie Mae to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The special roles that these organizations play, and their overall success at it, have been crucial to the development and growth of the U.S. mortgage markets and their products.

Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to exploring the types of mortgage-backed securities most frequently encountered. These include pass-through, mortgage-backed securities, stripped mortgage-backed securities, and REMICs (formerly CMOs). The more widespread REMIC tranches — classes such as sequential pay, residual interest, accrual or Z, planned amortization, targeted amortization, reverse TACs, support or companion, floating-rate, inverse floating-rate, and about a half-dozen others — are defined and their pricing vulnerabilities explained. Not only are interest rate sensitivity and its relationship to prepayments covered, but also price variability stemming from alterations in the shape of the yield curve. Naturally, option-adjusted spread methodology and other pricing algorithms for mortgages are covered too. Finally, nonconforming, private-label issuances, their credit enhancement mechanisms, and their risks and rewards are thoroughly dealt with relative to their conforming brethren. It becomes more difficult to perform meaningful numerical computations by hand between Chapters 1 to 4 and 5 to 6; therefore, the number of exercises and problems declines rapidly.

The book turns more mathematical in Chapters 7 and 8. These two chapters cover the term structure of interest rates, the yield curve, forward, spot, and short rates, the probabilistic and financial bases for interest rate modeling, binomial lattices, interest rate swaps, floors and caps and their theoretical pricing, portfolio construction and diversification, and the complete mathematics of mean-variance theory for a two-component portfolio. Chapter 7 also contains the only explanation I have ever seen of why an interest rate swap really works to the benefit of both counterparties. Chapter 8 concludes with a unique, concrete suggestion on how to increase profitability without relying on mostly statistical interest-rate prediction concepts. I am expert in the mathematical content of these two chapters; my feelings with regard to the success, or faults, of commonly used methods are plainly expressed. Because it is relatively easy simply to criticize, whenever I can I offer definite suggestions on how to do better with today's knowledge and technology.

Commercial mortgage-backed securities in our country and investment opportunities overseas are two other growing components to the mortgage-backed securities markets. The largest non-U.S. market is in Germany, but the British have made

significant progress too. Commercial mortgage-backed securities, which really deserve their own book, and non-U.S. markets are briefly covered in Chapter 9.

For the mortgage professional, or aspiring mortgage professional, this book provides a solid grounding in the industry. Those of you with a mathematical bent can ponder some very nice examples and extensions of the usual material.

The Author

Laurence G. Taff has an M.S. in Finance from The Johns Hopkins University. He is employed by one of America's leading financial institutions. As an internal business consultant, Dr. Taff's primary expertise is in the mortgage markets, fixed-rate securities, and risk modeling. He has consulted and delivered papers on financial modeling, portfolio management, and interest rate and credit risk analyses nationally and internationally. Dr. Taff specializes in translating theoretical and abstract concepts into actionable, tangible, profitable results. This is his first business textbook.

Prior to his business career, Dr. Taff worked as a highly accomplished astrophysicist (Ph.D. Physics and Astronomy, University of Rochester; M.S., B.S. Physics and Mathematics, City College of New York). His academic appointments include being the principal research scientist at The Johns Hopkins University. Moreover, he worked for several years at both the Space Telescope Science Institute (where he was in charge of pointing the Hubble Space Telescope) and at M.I.T.'s Lincoln Laboratory.

Dr. Taff's computing experience includes decades of software design, development, and the implementation of procedural and object oriented language programs (e.g., FORTRAN, C, C++, Objective C, etc.) De novo, he conceived, coded, and implemented his discipline's first real-time calibration program. He also constructed the largest astrometric catalog (18 million data points), allowing its users a 300% increase in accuracy. Another project involved melding optimal search techniques, real-time analysis, and correlation resulting in an increased capability by 20-fold. His work typically includes the conceptualization, development, and implementation of unique mathematical "tools."

Dr. Taff has published three other books. Two are standards in classical astronomy, the third a text on scientific statistical data adjustment. In addition, he has published over 100 papers in scientific journals and conference proceedings.

Contents

Chapter 1		Interest and the Time Value of Money	1
I.	Basic	c Interest Concepts	1
	A.	What Is Interest?	
		1. Simple Interest and the Time Value of Money	2
		2. Multiple Simple Interest Payments	4
		3. Compound Interest	
		4. Continuous Compounding	
		5. Discounted Interest	
		6. Holding Period Return	
	B.	Fixed-Income Mathematics	
		1. An Example	
		2. The Geometric Mean	
		3. The Arithmetic Average Value or Mean	
	C.	Inflation and Interest Rates	
		1. The Risk-Free Rate	
		2. The Nominal Interest Rate	
	D.	Annuities	
		1. The Formula for the Future Value	
		2. The Geometric Series	
		3. The Fixed-Income Form for Geometric Series	
		4. The Present Value of an Annuity	22
II.	Net	Present Value	
	A.	The Concept	23
		1. Arbitrage-Free Pricing	23
	В.	The Term Structure of Interest Rates: An Introduction	
Proble	ms		25
6 1	•	M. I. I. I. I. O. o. 'ora	20
Chapt	er 2	Money and Bond Market Overview	29
I.	Intro	oduction	29
II.	Sho	rt-Term Securities	
	A.	Notes	30
	B.	Other Short-Term Securities	31
		1. Repurchase Agreements	32
III.	Lon	g-Term Securities and Their Valuation	33
	A.	Definitions	33
		1. Simple Bond Evaluation and Pricing	
		2. More on Yields	
	B.	The Reinvestment Issue and Zero Coupon Bonds	39

		An Alternative Interpretation of a Standard Bond	40
		2. More on the Yield-to-Maturity	
		3. Perpetual or Consol Bonds	
IV.	U.S.	. Government Bills, Notes, and Bonds	
	A.	T-Bills	
		1. Bond-Equivalent Yield	
		2. When-Issued Trading	
	В.	Treasury Notes and Bonds	
		1. Pricing Formula	
		2. Day Count	
	C.	Other Related Topics	
		1. Municipal Bonds	46
		2. Bond Ratings	46
V.	Bon	d Pricing Maxims	47
Proble			
Chap	ter 3	More Advanced Fixed-Income Topics	53
-		•	
I.		ation	
	A.	Macaulay Duration	
		1. Duration and Portfolio Management	
		2. Definitions	
		3. What Duration-Matching Does for You	
	ъ	4. Duration Maxims	
	В.	Modified Duration	
		1. The Formula for Modified Duration	
		2. The Relationship between the Two Durations	
		3. Modified Duration and the Float Toy	
		4. The Duration of a Floating-Rate Security	
ΥT	~	5. Portfolio Duration	
II.		vexity	
	A.	Word Examples of Duration and Convexity	
		1. The U-Haul® Example	
		2. The Airplane Fuel Tank Example	
	ъ	3. What Positive Convexity Really Means	
	В.	The Formal Definition of Convexity	
		1. Price Change Usage	
	~	2. Convexity Maxims	
	C.	Callable Bonds and Negative Convexity	
		1. Definition of an Option	
		2. Callable Bonds	
		3. Calculating the Yield-to-Call	
	ь	4. Negative Convexity	75
	D.	The Option-Adjusted Spread	76
		1. Callable Bond Pricing	76

III.	A P	Portfolio Version of Duration	
	A.	Introduction	
	В.	The Average Discount Rate for a Mortgage	
		1. Mathematical Preliminaries	
		2. The General Solution for a Mortgage	
	C.	The Average Discount Rate for a Bullet Bond	
	D.	Extending the Usefulness of Modified Duration	84
		1. Arbitrary Cash Flows	
Proble	ms		86
Chapt			
I.	The	U.S. Mortgage Markets Today	
	A.	The Components	
		1. What the Secondary Market Does	91
		2. Mortgage-Backed Bonds	92
	B.	Some History	93
		1. Further Developments	
		2. The Federal Home Loan Bank System	95
		3. More Recent History	
		4. More on Amortization	
		5. Default Generalities	
II.	Fixe	ed-Rate Mortgages	
	A.	Fixed-Rate Mortgage Mathematics	
		1. Derivation of the Formulas	
		Macaulay Duration for a Mortgage	
		3. The Negative Convexity of Mortgages	
		4. 50% Tables	
	В.	Bi-Weekly Payment Mortgages	
	υ.	1. The Mathematics	
	C.	Mortgage Valuation Techniques	
	C.	Twelve-Year Average Life	
		2. Static OAS Computation	
III.	Oth	ter Types of Common Mortgages	
ш.	A.	Background	
	А.		
		Adjustable-Rate Mortgages Definitions	
	D	3. Valuation Considerations	
	В.	Adjustable-Rate Mortgage Mathematics	
	C.	Other Common Types of Mortgages in the U.S.	
		1. The Graduated Payment Mortgage	
		2. Growing Equity Mortgages	
		3. Fixed-Rate, Tiered-Payment Mortgages	
		4. Pledged-Asset Mortgages	
		5. Balloon Re-set Mortgages	
		6. Two-Step Mortgage	118

		7. Reverse Mortgages	118
		8. Shared-Appreciation Mortgages	119
		9. Hybrid Mortgages	119
		10. Prepayment Penalty Mortgages	119
		11. Relocation Mortgages	119
IV.	Auto	omated Underwriting	119
- * •	A.	What Is Underwriting?	119
		1. What Is Automated Underwriting?	120
	B.	Important Underwriting Factors	
	ъ.	Credit Scoring	120
		2. Equity	122
		3. Liquid Reserves	122
		4. Debt-to-Income Ratios	122
		5. Loan Purpose	122
			122
		6. Mortgage Type	123
		7. Mortgage Term	123
		8. Property Type	122
n		9. Borrower Employment Category	
Proble	ems		123
Chap	ter 5	Mortgage Securitization in the U.S.	127
I.	Wha	at Is a Mortgage-Backed Security?	127
	Α.	Background	127
		1. Definitions	
		2. Some History	
		3. Why Securitize?	
		4. More on the Benefits of Securitization	
		5. From the Originator to the Conduit	
		6. Private Conduits	
	В.	Operational Issues	
	D .	1. Servicing	
		To-Be-Announced Trading	
	C	4. Dollar Rolls Statistics That Characterize MBSs	
	C.		
		1. The (Gross) Weighted Average Coupon	
		2. The Weighted Average Maturity	
		3. The Weighted Average Loan Age	
		4. WAC Dispersion Effects	
		5. WAM Dispersion Effects	
		6. Bond-Equivalent Yield and Mortgage-Equivalent Yield	
		7. More on Risks and Pricing	
	_	8. GSE Activities	
II.	-	payments	
	Α	Editorial	146

	В.	Overview of Prepayments	
		1. Definition	148
		2. Other Factors	
		3. Does Better Analysis Imply Better Prediction?	150
	C.	Prepayment Mathematics	
		1. The Single Monthly Mortality Rate	
		2. The Conditional Prepayment Rate	
	D.	More Generalities on Prepayments	
		1. Generalities	
		2. More on Prepayments	
		3. Government vs. Conforming MBSs	
		4. 15- and 30-Year MBSs	
III.	Pric	cing MBSs	
	A.	Yield Curve Considerations	
		1. The Main Yield Curve Effects	
		2. More on Yield Curve Implications for MBSs	
	В.	Other Factors	
		1. Seasoned MBS Characteristics	
		2. Higher Coupon MBSs	
		3. ARM Evaluation Considerations	
IV.	Mo	re on MBS Pricing	162
	A.	Simple Methods	
		1. The 12-Year Average Life	
		2. Static Cash Flow Yield	
		3. Static Spread and Zero-Volatility Spread	
	В.	Outline of the Full OAS Method	
		1. More Thoughts on OAS	164
Proble	em		165
Chan	ter 6	More Complicated Mortgage Securities	167
Спар			
I.	His	tory and Definitions	
	A.	Why REMICs?	167
		REMIC Class Prepayment Characteristics	
		2. The History of REMICs	
		3. Structuring a REMIC	
	В.	Stripped Mortgage-Backed Securities	169
		1. IOs and POs	
		2. Valuation Considerations	171
		3. What Is a REMIC?	
	C.	The Basic REMIC Mechanism	
		1. A Simple REMIC	173
		2. Recap	
		3. The R Class	176
		4. Summary	176
		5. CMO Arbitrage	178

	D.	Whole-Loan REMICs	179
	D.	1. The Servicer's Role	
II.	Oth	er Common REMIC Classes	
11.	A.	Planned Amortization Classes	
	A.	PAC Bands and Effective Collars	
		PAC Class Value Considerations	
	В.		
		Support Classes	
	C.	Targeted Amortization Classes	
		1. Reverse TACs	
	Б	2. More on IOs and POs	
	D.	Floating-Rate and Inverse Floating-Rate Classes	
		Duration and Yield Curve Considerations 2. Violation Bill	
	-	2. Yield Curve Risk	
	E.	Other Classes	
		1. VADMs	
		2. Jump Zs and Sticky Jump Zs	
		3. Notional IOs	
	_	4. WAC IOs	
III.		dit Enhancements	
	A.	External Forms of Credit Enhancements	
		1. Pool Insurance	
		2. Bond Insurance	
		3. Other Forms	190
	В.	Internal Credit Enhancements	
		1. Senior/Subordinated Structures	
		2. Reserve Funds	191
		3. Shifting Interest Structure	191
Chapt	ter 7	Interest Rate-Related Topics	103
-			
I.	The	Term Structure of Interest Rates and the Yield Curve	
	A.	Definitions	
		1. The Differences among Them	
		2. Appearance	
		3. "Explanations" for the Curves	
	В.	Types of Interest Rates	196
		1. Spot Rates (Discrete Compounding)	196
		2. Forward Rates (Discrete)	
		3. Short Rates (Discrete)	199
		4. Spot Rates (Continuously Compounded and Continuous)	200
		5. Forward Rates (Continuous)	200
	C.	Constructing the Term Structure	201
		1. Statistical Issues	202
		2. Using Zero Coupon Instruments	202
		3. Using Coupon-Paying Instruments	203

II.	Inter	rest Rate Swaps, Caps, and Floors	204
11.	A.	Interest Rate Swaps.	
	А.	Basic Definitions	
		2. Why Participate in One?	
	ъ	3. Swap Dealers	
	В.	Why an Interest Rate Swap Really Works	
	-	1. The Mathematics	
	C.	More on Interest Rate Swaps, Caps, and Floors	
		1. Forward Rate Agreements	
		2. The Mechanics of a Fixed- for Floating-Interest Rate Swap	
		3. Pricing Considerations for an Interest Rate Swap	
		4. Interest Rate Caps and Floors	
III.	Inter	rest Rate Modeling	
	A.	Basic Probability Ideas	.213
		1. The Normal Distribution	.213
		2. The Log-Normal Distribution	.214
		3. The Volatility Parameters	.215
	B.	Statistical Properties of Financial Securities	.217
		1. The Definition of a Random Walk	.217
		2. The Definition of a Continuous Time Wiener Process	.219
		3. An Ito Process	
	C.	The Relationship among Interest Rates and Statistics	
		1. The Spot-Rate Version	
		2. The Forward-Rate Version	
		3. The Random Interest-Rate Version	
		4. What Is Done in Practice	
		5. Summary	
	D.	Binomial Lattices	
		Parameter Specification	
		2. Trinomial Lattices	
		3. More on the Binomial Lattice	
		4. The CIR Model	
		5. Principal Component Analysis	
	E.	Editorial	
	F.	A Final Review of the OAS Method	
	••	More Details	
		2. Pros and Cons	
		2. Tros and Cons	. 233
Chant	0	Deutf-11: Management	
Chapt		Portfolio Management	
I.	Intro	oduction	
	A.	Asset Allocation	
		1. Model Fixed-Income Portfolios	.238
	B.	Market Timing	
		1. Duration and Portfolios	
		2. Callable Bonds	

	C. Security Selection	242
	C. Security Selection	
	Yield	
	3. On Diversification	
II.	The Mathematics of Portfolio Risk	
11.	A. A Two-Asset Portfolio	
	1. Overview	
	B. The Expected Rate of Return of a Portfolio of Assets	
	The Expected Rate of Return for One Assets 1. The Expected Rate of Return for One Asset	
	2. The Result for a Two-Asset Portfolio	
	3. The Variance of an Asset	
	4. The Minimum Variance Portfolio	
	5. A Risk-Free Asset	
	C. Multiple-Asset Portfolios	
	Only the Covariance Really Matters	
	D. Portfolio Construction Formulas	
III.	A New Strategy for Optimizing Fixed-Income Portfolio Value	
111.	A. The Equity Markets	
	B. The Debt Markets	
	C. The Underlying Problem.	
	D. Current Practice	
	1. The Ideal	
	2. The Essential Mathematics	
	3. So What is New?	
	4. Incorporating Macaulay Duration	
Proble	em	
Chan	ter 9 Other Topics	271
I.	Commercial Mortgage-Backed Securities	
	A. Background	
	1. More on the RTC	
	2. CMBS Format	
	3. Types of Commercial Property	
	4. Key CMBS Financial Ratios	
	5. CMBS Pool Types	
II.		
	A. Overview	
	B. Other North American Markets	
	1. The Tradition of English Law	280
	2. The Canadian Mortgage Market	
	3. The Mexican Mortgage Market	
	B. The Major European Mortgage Markets	
	The German Mortgage Market	
	2. The British Mortgage Market	288
	3. The Irish Mortgage Market	203

	4. The Austrian Mortgage Market	295
	5. The French Mortgage Market	295
	6. The Spanish Mortgage Market	297
	7. The Danish Mortgage Market	
	8. The Swedish Mortgage Market	299
	9. The Luxembourg Mortgage Market	
C.	Other West European Mortgage Markets	300
	1. Belgium	300
	2. Finland	
	3. Greece	300
	4. Italy	300
	5. The Netherlands	300
	6. Norway	301
	7. Switzerland	
D.	East European Mortgage Markets	301
	1. The Czech Republic	301
	2. Hungary	301
	3. Latvia	301
	4. Poland	302
	5. The Slovak Republic	302
E.	Other Foreign Markets	302
	1. The Argentinean Mortgage Market	302
	2. The Australian Mortgage Market	302
Dofomom		207
Keierences	3	307
Index		309

1 Interest and the Time Value of Money

Mortgages in the U.S. are mostly fixed-rate securities. This chapter covers the basics of simple, compound, and continuous interest calculations and their usage in fixed-income securities with (mostly) constant cash flows. Present value, future value, and other aspects of fixed-income mathematics and definitions of key interest rate concepts are dealt with too. When we move on to mortgage-related derivatives, the importance of this and the next two chapters for valuation and portfolio management will become even more apparent. (The first time a financially important concept is mentioned it will appear in italics.)

I. BASIC INTEREST CONCEPTS

A. WHAT IS INTEREST?

"What is interest?" or, more properly put if you are a borrower, "what are interest charges?" is an important question. Interest charges are the cost to you of renting someone else's money. We are so used to being colloquial about it that we tend to refer only to the interest rate, or just the interest, as the cost of renting money. It should not surprise you that a cost is associated with borrowing (renting) money because a cost is associated with renting most things. Alternatively, you could be the lender. Then the question "What is interest?" means "What are the interest payments you will receive for lending out your funds?" Put differently, if you are making an investment by lending money, what will the rate of return on your venture be?

You have some money. You could spend it now on goods or services. Another option is that you could lend it out to someone. Hence, a more sophisticated interpretation for the interest rate you are willing to accept is that the interest you charge is the price for your deferment of immediate consumption. With many tens of thousands of participants in the financial markets, "the" interest rate is the consensus market rate for the suspension of consumption. In reality various interest rates exist, each appropriate to a diverse customer segment (primarily separated by credit or default risk and the time span of the loan).

When you make an investment, your intention is to give up immediate possession of those funds for a larger, future amount. The greater quantity of money will then be available for procurement of goods, use of services, or further investment. It is the expected growth in the amount of money, over time, that induces you to defer expenditures for future consumption, that is, to *invest*. Some rate of exchange must exist between current dollars and future dollars (just as there is some rate of exchange