

FAFSA Completion Tips

(FAFSA: Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

Apply early

The official deadline for submitting a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) varies from state to state. To be safe and to increase your chances of receiving financial aid, be sure to submit your FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible. Funding for need-based financial aid is limited, and most awards are offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Your FAFSA filing date determines your place in line.

Get a PIN – www.pin.ed.gov

Before filing your FAFSA on the Internet, it is recommended that you (and one of your parents) apply for a PIN. With a PIN, you'll be able to:

- Electronically sign your application.
- Make corrections to your submitted application.
- Review your process application data on Student Access on the Web.

Apply Online – www.fafsa.ed.gov

Although you can submit a paper application, there are many advantages to using FAFSA on the Web:

- You'll get your Student Aid Report (SAR) quicker than with the paper form.
- FAFSA on the Web checks your answers before you submit your application, so it will less likely be rejected because of missing/conflicting information.
- You can save application information for transmission at a later time.

Complete a FAFSA on the Web Worksheet

This optional tool can be completed to help gather all the necessary documentation prior to completing the actual FAFSA. The information you'll need to complete this worksheet, as well as the FAFSA, includes:

- Social Security Number
- Driver's license (if any)
- W-2 forms and other records of money earned
- Your Federal Income Tax Return – IRS Form 1040
- Parent's Federal Income Tax Return (if you are a dependent student)
- Untaxed income records, such as Social Security, aid to dependent children, child support, welfare, pensions and veterans benefits.

- Bank and mortgage statements
- Business and investment records, including stocks, bonds, mutual funds and certificates of deposit.
- Alien registration card (if you are not a U.S. Citizen)

Be sure to keep these records handy; you may need them again during the financial aid process.

Estimate, if necessary

The FAFSA requires tax return information. Be sure to file your tax return as soon as possible after January 1 to ensure the accuracy of the application.

However, if you're unable to file your tax returns that quickly, don't wait to submit your FAFSA. Instead, estimate your income as accurately as possible. You'll be able to make corrections via the FAFSA Correction on the web or through your school's financial aid office.

Avoid common mistakes

- Read the instructions carefully. The words "you" and "your" always refer to the student, whereas questions for parents will be specified.
- Don't leave any fields on the FAFSA blank; instead, answer "zero" or "not applicable" if the question does not apply to you.
- Round to the nearest dollar, and do not use commas or decimal points.
- Proofread your application before you submit it. Double check your answers and be sure your responses are legible.
- Make sure you (and your parents, if applicable) sign the FAFSA. If you submit your application electronically, print or save your confirmation for your records.

What happens next?

About four weeks after you file your FAFSA, you and all of the colleges listed on the FAFSA will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR). Carefully review the information on the SAR to make sure it is accurate. If you need to make corrections, submit the changes as instructed on the form.

Reapply each year

- You must reapply for federal aid each year by completing the FAFSA or, if you qualify, the renewal FAFSA