

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FAFSA

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

What is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)?

The FAFSA is used to apply for federal student aid such as grants, work-study, and loans. You may also use the FAFSA to apply for most state and some private aid.

What methods are available for completing the FAFSA?

You can complete the FAFSA electronically by using FAFSA on the Web, or you can fill out and mail a paper FAFSA. Each method is available in both an English and a Spanish version.

In addition, some schools participate in Electronic Data Exchange (contact your school for more information).

You may use any one of these methods to apply for federal student aid, but do not submit more than one application.

Also note the following:

- If you are filing a **2009 income tax return**, we recommend that you complete your tax return before filling out the 2010-2011 FAFSA. Note that you do not have to actually send your tax return to the IRS before filling out the FAFSA. You can submit your FAFSA using estimated income and tax information. However, after you file your tax return, you must correct any income or tax information that is different from what you submitted on your original FAFSA.
- Submit or mail your 2010-2011 FAFSA no earlier than **January 1, 2010** and no later than **June 30, 2011**.
- You should receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) within three weeks. Carefully review all of the information on the SAR to make sure it is correct. Follow directions for making and submitting corrections promptly. If you do not receive a SAR within three weeks, or if you have questions about your SAR, refer to the [Customer Service](#) page.

TIP: You can check the status of your application by selecting [Check Status of a Submitted FAFSA or Print Signature Page](#) under the **FAFSA Follow-Up** section of the home page.

- If you or your family have unusual circumstances (such as loss of employment) that might affect your eligibility for federal student aid, check with the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend.

What records do I need to complete my FAFSA?

In order to successfully complete a FAFSA, you will need information from one or more of the documents listed on the [Documents Needed](#) page.

What do I need to keep in mind when filling out the FAFSA?

- The words "you" and "your" always mean the student.
- The word "school" means a college, university, graduate or professional school, community college, vocational or technical school, or any other school beyond high school.
- Round to the nearest dollar and do not use commas or decimal points.
- For dates, enter numbers that correspond to the month, day, and year. For example, for November 7, 1981, enter **11071981**.
- 2010-2011 FAFSA questions that refer to the "school year" mean the school year from July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011.
- Do not mail tax forms or Worksheets to Federal Student Aid.
- Check with your financial aid administrator if you have unusual circumstances.

What are the deadlines for applying?

Federal student aid deadlines

You should apply as early as possible. Submitting your FAFSA is only the first step in applying for federal student aid.

State student aid deadlines

State deadlines may be earlier than the federal deadlines. Your state may also require an additional form.

School aid deadlines

Schools may have their own deadlines and applications for awarding student aid. Check with your school's financial aid office for information.

For more information on federal, state and school deadlines, select [Application Deadlines](#).

TIP: January 1 is the first date that you are eligible to file the FAFSA. Try to submit the form as close as possible to this date since school, state and private aid deadlines may be earlier than federal deadlines.

Why is it important to submit accurate information?

WARNING: You must fill out this form accurately. The information that you supply can be verified by your school, your state, or by Federal Student Aid.

You may be asked to provide U.S. income tax returns and other information. If you cannot or do not provide these records to your school when asked, you may not get federal student aid.

If you get federal student aid based on incorrect information, you will have to pay it back. You may also have to pay fines and fees. If you purposely give false or misleading information on your application, you may be fined \$20,000, sent to prison, or both.

How do I apply for aid?

- Complete the FAFSA and provide the required signatures.
- Wait 3-5 days while we process your FAFSA and send you a Student Aid Report (SAR).
- Check the SAR carefully. Your SAR will summarize the data you report on your FAFSA.
- Keep a copy of your SAR.
- View your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). If your FAFSA information is complete, an EFC will appear in the upper right corner of your SAR. Your EFC is based on the financial information you provide on the FAFSA.
- Check with your school. Your school will use your EFC to award your financial aid.
- For additional help filling out the FAFSA, select [Completing the FAFSA](#).

How do I answer the tax questions if I (or my parents) don't file a tax return?

If you will not file a tax return:

- Answer “Not going to file” to the “Have you completed a tax return?” question.
- You will then be taken to the "Income earned from work" question.
- Enter any income that you earned from a job that is listed as taxed on a W-2 form.
- Answer only those income questions that apply to you from that point on.

If your parents will not file a tax return:

- Answer “Not going to file” to the “Have your parents filed a tax return?” question.
- You will then be taken to the “income earned from work” question.
- Enter any income that your parents earned from a job that is listed as taxed on a W-2 form.
- Answer only those income questions that apply to your parents from that point on.

I (or my parents) filed a joint tax return in 2009, but now I am (or my parents are) separated, divorced, or widowed. How do I answer the tax questions?

- You: Separate your tax information from your spouse's as if you filed a single return.
- Your parent: Separate your parent's information from his/her spouse's as if he/she filed a single return. Not sure which parent's information to report? [Click here](#).

What if I am unable to provide my parents' information due to special circumstances?

Under Federal law your family is primarily responsible-to the extent they are able-for paying for your college expenses. To determine how much your family can afford to pay towards your college expenses, we must collect your financial information, and, if you are a dependent student, we must also collect your parents' financial information.

Under **very** limited circumstances, an otherwise dependent student may be able to submit the FAFSA without parental information due to special circumstances. Before you proceed to skip the parental section of your FAFSA, consider the following:

Examples of special circumstances where you may be able to submit your FAFSA without providing parental information include:

- Your parents are incarcerated; or
- You have left home due to an abusive family environment; or
- You do not know where your parents are and are unable to contact them (and you have not been adopted).

Not all situations are considered a special circumstance. The following are situations that would **not** be considered a special circumstance:

- Your parents do not want to provide their information on your FAFSA; or
- Your parents refuse to contribute to your college expenses; or
- Your parents do not claim you as a dependent on their income taxes; or
- You do not live with your parents.

If you believe you have a special circumstance and are unable to provide parental information, you should complete information about you and your finances and skip any questions about your parents. You should sign your FAFSA with your PIN and leave your parent's PIN blank. It is important to note:

1. We will allow you to submit your FAFSA without parental information, however **your FAFSA will not be considered complete.**
2. Because your FAFSA is not considered complete, we **will not calculate your Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** which is the index used by colleges to determine how much student aid you are eligible to receive.
3. If you are approaching any deadlines for your state, college, or scholarship aid, you may want to contact your financial aid administrator (FAA) **before** submitting your FAFSA without parental data.
4. **Once you submit your FAFSA without parental data, you must follow up with the FAA at the college you plan to attend, in order to complete your FAFSA and receive an EFC. Also note the following:**
 - **Under Federal law, only your FAA has the authority to decide whether or not you must provide parental information on your FAFSA.**
 - **You will have to provide documentation to verify your situation.** Gather as much written evidence of your situation as you can. Written evidence may include court or law enforcement documents, letters from a clergy member, school counselor or social worker, and/or any other relevant data that explains your special circumstance.
 - After reviewing your circumstances carefully, **your FAA will decide** if you must provide parental information or if your circumstances allow you to proceed without providing parental data. **Your FAA's decision is final** and can not be appealed to Federal Student Aid.

How do I report the financial aid I received last year as part of my income?

Money you or your parents received from student loans, grants, and scholarships should not be listed on your FAFSA, unless you were taxed on them by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). If you or your parents reported financial aid money to the IRS, then you must include that total amount as part of your Adjusted Gross Income and in the appropriate location: Parent or Student Financial information page 2 in an application or in the Additional Financial Information section questions c and d, if making a correction.

I have already submitted a FAFSA for this school year. Can I submit another FAFSA using FAFSA on the Web?

No. If you have already submitted a FAFSA (for instance, your school already submitted an electronic application for you, you submitted a paper FAFSA, or you filed for aid using FAFSA on the Web), do not submit another application.

- If you need to **make corrections** to the FAFSA you filed, click [here](#).
- If you have further questions, refer to the [Customer Service](#) page or select **Check Status of a Submitted FAFSA or Print Signature Page** under the **FAFSA Follow-Up** section of the home page.

I submitted two applications for the same year. What will happen?

We use only the first application we receive. All other applications are deleted from our system.

To make corrections to your application, view your Student Aid Report (SAR). You will receive it either by e-mail or by mail. The SAR includes instructions for making corrections.

You can use [Corrections on the Web](#) to make your changes, or you can make the corrections to your paper SAR and mail it in.

You may also check with the financial aid office at your school to determine if they can make electronic corrections for you.

Can I have someone else fill out my FAFSA for me?

Yes. If you have someone else fill out your FAFSA for you (not including one of your parents or your spouse), you should make sure they list themselves as a “preparer” at the end of your FAFSA.

A preparer should never ask for your PIN, apply for a PIN on your behalf, or sign your FAFSA using your PIN. The security of your PIN is important because it can be used to:

- Electronically sign Federal Student Aid documents,
- Access your personal records, and
- Make binding legal obligations.

Remember, the FAFSA is a completely FREE application. If you need help filling it out, there are many free tools available to help you. **You don't need to pay anyone to help you fill out your FAFSA.**

The best place to look for help filling out your FAFSA is at your school's financial aid office. If you need help with a specific question, click on “NEED HELP?” located at the bottom of every FAFSA page. In addition, Help is available for most of the individual fields on each page of the application. As you progress from one field to the next, new Help and Hints will appear to the right of the form. You can also get one-on-one help from a customer service representative by clicking on “Live Help” at the top of the FAFSA page.