

Home ▶ Apply for Financial Aid ▶ FAFSA® Application ▶ Filling Out the FAFSA® Form

You know you have to fill out the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) form, but maybe you're not sure what to do.

Let's review what to expect.

Filling out the FAFSA® form can be a straightforward and easy process. Select the "Fill Out the FAFSA" button on the home page, and just follow the directions on the screen. Below are some tips to help you along the way.

Ready to fill out your FAFSA® form now? Go for it!

Fill Out the FAFSA®

Prefer a mobile app? The 2020–21 and 2019–20 FAFSA forms are on the myStudentAid app, available on the [App Store](#) (iOS) or on [Google Play](#) (Android).

## FAFSA® Topics

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- ✓ Starting Your FAFSA Form and Providing Your Basic Personal Information
- ✓ Listing Colleges and/or Career Schools
- ✓ Determining Your Dependency Status
- ✓ Reporting Parents' Information
- ✓ Providing Financial Information
  - ✓ What to Do If Your Parents' (or Your) Marital Status Has Changed Since Taxes Were Filed
  - ✓ Automatically Transferring Your Tax Information Using the Internal Revenue Service Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT)
- ✓ Signing and Submitting the FAFSA® Form
- ✓ Taking the Next Steps

### Try This Resource

[The FAFSA Process graphic](#)—Walks through the process of preparing for, completing, and submitting a [FAFSA form](#). Includes info on what happens after the form is submitted.

## Creating an FSA ID

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We strongly recommend you create an FSA ID, a username and password combination that allows you to sign your FAFSA® form electronically. Your FSA ID also can be used to access the myStudentAid app, sign loan contracts, and access certain information online. While you can get your FSA ID as you're completing the FAFSA form online, getting it ahead of time and using it to begin your FAFSA form on [fafsa.gov](#) or on the myStudentAid mobile app cuts down on errors and delays. Find out [how to get an FSA ID](#) and [what to do if you forgot your FSA ID](#).

**Important note:** If you're a dependent student, one of your parents whose information is reported on the FAFSA form will also need an FSA ID so that he or she can sign your application electronically. If your parent doesn't have a Social Security number (SSN), your parent won't be able to create an FSA ID



Creating your FSA ID before you begin the FAFSA® form only takes a few minutes and could prevent processing delays. (Plus, you can't use the myStudentAid mobile app at all without an FSA ID, so you'll need to create it before filling out

the FAFSA form on the app.)

**Tip: Use your FSA ID to start your FAFSA form.**

When you create your FSA ID, be careful to enter your name and Social Security number **exactly** as they appear on your Social Security card. Then, if you go to [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov) to start your application and indicate that you are the student, you will be given the option to enter your FSA ID or to enter your “identifiers” (your name, date of birth, and SSN).

If you log in with your FSA ID, certain information (including your name, Social Security number, and date of birth) will be automatically loaded into your application. **This will prevent you from running into a common error that occurs when your verified FSA ID information doesn't match the information on your FAFSA form.** Additionally, you won't have to provide your FSA ID again to sign your FAFSA form electronically or to use the Internal Revenue Service Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT) if you're eligible.

The student is the one applying for financial aid, so be sure it's the student entering his or her FSA ID in the “I am the student” tab. **Do not start the FAFSA form by supplying the parent's FSA ID.**

## Gathering the Documents Needed to Apply

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out the application:

- Your Social Security number (it's important that you enter it correctly on the FAFSA form!)
- Your parents' Social Security numbers if you are a [dependent student](#)
- Your driver's license number if you have one
- Your Alien Registration number if you are not a U.S. citizen
- Federal tax information or tax returns including IRS W-2 information, for you (and your spouse, if you are married), and for your parents if you are a dependent student:
  - IRS 1040
  - Foreign tax return, IRS 1040NR, or IRS 1040NR-EZ
  - Tax return for Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, or Palau
- Records of your untaxed income, such as child support received, interest income, and veterans noneducation benefits, for you, and for your parents if you are a dependent student
- Information on cash; savings and checking account balances; investments, including stocks and bonds and real estate (but not including the home in which you live); and business and farm assets for you, and for your parents if you are a dependent student

Keep these records! You may need them again. **Do not mail your records to us.**

### Try This Resource

[2020–21 FAFSA on the Web Worksheet](#)—Provides a preview of the questions students and parents may be asked while completing the FAFSA form.



The FAFSA form is FREE, so if a website or mobile app asks you to pay to fill it out, you're not dealing with the official FAFSA site or the official myStudentAid app. Remember, this is a government application, so it's on a .gov website and an official U.S. Department of Education mobile app.

## Getting Help

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If you need help filling out the FAFSA form, use these free tools:

- Select the blue and white question mark icon next to a FAFSA question to view a "tool tip" that provides information about how to answer that question.
- In the online FAFSA form, the tool tip may have a "More Help" link for additional information. You also can select the "Help" button at the bottom of the tool tip to reach the ["FAFSA Help"](#) page, where you can browse FAQs, search for more information, or click on "Contact Us."
- Once you click on "Contact Us," you'll have the option of emailing us with your question or, during business hours, chatting (in English or Spanish) with live technical support staff. (In the myStudentAid mobile app, you can find the contact information via the "hamburger menu"—the three parallel lines at the top right of the screen.)
- Contact the financial aid office at the college or career school you plan to attend.

## Starting Your FAFSA® Form and Providing Your Basic Personal Information

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The FAFSA form is available on Oct. 1 for the next school year. We encourage you to fill it out as soon as possible on or after Oct. 1 to meet [FAFSA deadlines](#).

- Log in at [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov) to apply online or
- Fill out the form in the myStudentAid mobile app, available on the [App Store](#) (iOS) or [Google Play](#) (Android) or
- Complete a [2020-21 FAFSA PDF](#) or a [2019-20 FAFSA PDF](#) (note: you must print out and mail the FAFSA PDF for processing) or
- Request a print-out of the FAFSA PDF by calling us at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) or 334-523-2691 (TTY for the deaf or hard of hearing 1-800-730-8913); then fill out the form and mail it for processing

If you are starting the application for the first time on [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov), select “START HERE.” As you begin, keep the following in mind:

- Your name and Social Security number must match those on your Social Security card. [Follow this tip to avoid getting a notice that your information doesn't match the Social Security Administration's records \(or your FSA ID account\).](#)
- If you're concerned about providing your personal information on the log-in page, choose the virtual keyboard option for additional security.
- To ensure the application functions properly, make sure the pop-up blocker in your browser allows pop-ups from [fafsa.ed.gov](https://fafsa.ed.gov). [Learn how to enable pop-ups in your browser.](#)

If you're starting for the first time on the myStudentAid mobile app, you will select “START HERE” and then be required to enter your FSA ID. You cannot fill out the FAFSA form on the mobile app without an FSA ID.

If you're a male between the ages of 18 and 25 and you haven't registered with the Selective Service System, select “Yes” when you're asked if you would like to be registered. Otherwise, you won't be eligible to receive [federal student aid](#). This requirement applies to any person assigned the sex of male at birth.

The following tips apply whether you're filling out the form online or on the mobile app:

completing the FAFSA in separate locations. (Unlike with the FSA ID, which needs to be kept private, it's okay to tell your parent what your save key is.)

- If you are applying for a summer session, contact the financial aid office at your college to find out which school year you should select when you complete your FAFSA form.

If you filled out a FAFSA form last year and want to renew it, select “LOG IN” on the [FAFSA home page](#), select “I am the student,” enter your FSA ID, and be sure to select “FAFSA RENEWAL” once given the option. That way, many of the (nonfinancial) questions will be prefilled for you. Just be sure to update any information that has changed since last year.

Only the student can start a FAFSA renewal using his or her FSA ID. If you're a dependent student and your parent helps you with your FAFSA form, you should start the FAFSA renewal, save it, and give the [save key](#) to your parent so he or she can access your FAFSA form.

If you're using the mobile app and log in as the student and are eligible for a FAFSA renewal, the renewal will automatically appear for you.

Due to the coronavirus national emergency, processing of the FAFSA PDF may take longer than usual. We recommend filing your FAFSA form electronically to avoid processing delays.

## Listing Colleges and/or Career Schools

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While completing the FAFSA form, you must list at least one school to receive your information. The schools you list will use your FAFSA information to

For purposes of federal student aid, it does not matter in what order you list the schools. However, to be considered for state aid, some states require you to list schools in a particular order (for instance, you might need to list a state school first). [Find out whether your state has a requirement for the order in which you list schools on your FAFSA form](#)

You can list up to 10 schools online or in the mobile app or up to four schools on a FAFSA PDF. (You can [add more schools to your FAFSA form](#) later.) Schools you list on the application will automatically receive your FAFSA results electronically.

Note: Schools will not be able to see which other schools you listed on your FAFSA form.

You should add any school that you plan on applying to, even if you haven't been accepted yet. In most cases, once a school accepts you, they will then work on developing your aid offer.

## Determining Your Dependency Status

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The FAFSA form asks a series of questions that determine whether you are a dependent or independent student for purposes of applying for federal student aid. If you are a dependent student, you must report parent information, as well as your own information, on your application. If you're curious, you can [find out now whether you're a dependent student](#).

## Reporting Parents' Information

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information.



Your FAFSA information is safe with us! Is it safe with you? Read [\*Federal Student Aid and Identity Theft\*](#) to learn how we safeguard the personal information you report on fafsa.gov. We've also included some tips on what you can do (at home, online, or in the dorm) to keep your identity from being stolen.

## Providing Financial Information

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The FAFSA form asks for financial information, including information from tax forms and balances of savings and checking accounts.

- The 2020–21 FAFSA form asks for 2018 tax information.
- If you're filling out the 2019–20 FAFSA form, you'll need your 2017 tax information.

**Note:** If your family's financial situation has changed dramatically since you and/or your parents filed taxes, complete the FAFSA questions as required, submit the FAFSA form, then contact the school you plan to attend and discuss your situation with the financial aid office.

### What to Do If Your Parents' (or Your) Marital Status Has Changed Since Taxes Were Filed

Here are some tips for this type of situation using the example of the 2020–21 FAFSA form:

- Similarly, if the student or parent filed 2018 taxes as married but is no longer married when filling out the FAFSA form, the spouse's income will need to be subtracted.
- And if the student or parent was married when filing 2018 taxes, then got divorced and is now married to someone else, there's a bit more math to do: Subtract the ex's income, then add the new spouse's income.

The FAFSA help text covers all these situations in more detail as you're filling out the application.

## Automatically Transferring Your Tax Information Using the Internal Revenue Service Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT)

The IRS DRT automatically transfers tax information into the FAFSA form. Be sure to consider this option if it's offered to you. (If you got an extension on filing your taxes and didn't file until September or October, [find out when your tax return information will likely be available using the IRS DRT.](#))

### Try This Resource

[\*Simple Steps to Transfer Tax Information Into Your FAFSA® Form graphic\*](#)—Explains how to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to transfer tax information into the FAFSA form.

Here's how the IRS DRT process works, assuming your tax information is available:

1. The IRS DRT takes you to the IRS website, where you'll need to provide your name and other information exactly as you provided it on your tax return. Some information will be prepopulated from your FAFSA form.
2. At the IRS site, you'll see a page that indicates that your tax information is available. (For security and privacy protections, you won't see the actual information.) You can choose to import your information into the FAFSA form, or you can cancel your request and return to the FAFSA site.
3. If you choose to import your information into the FAFSA form, you'll find that on the FAFSA site, instead of your tax information being displayed, you'll see

- You don't have to find your tax records.
- You don't have to worry about making mistakes entering your tax information on your FAFSA® form.
- You may not need to provide an IRS tax transcript or a signed copy of your income tax return if you're selected for [verification](#).

### Can I change the tax return information that I transfer into the FAFSA® form via the IRS DRT?

No. Information you transfer via the IRS DRT can't be changed. Remember, the information transferred is coming from your filed tax return, so it shouldn't need to be changed. If your financial situation has changed or you filed a 1040X amended return, contact your school's financial aid office to discuss whether it would be appropriate for the school to adjust the information on your FAFSA form.

### If I've transferred my tax return information into the FAFSA® form via the IRS DRT, and then decide I want to enter the information manually instead, can I clear the information that was transferred via the DRT?

We strongly discourage clearing the information. The IRS DRT remains the fastest, most accurate way to input your tax return information into the FAFSA form. Additionally, using the IRS DRT to enter your tax information into the FAFSA form may reduce the amount of paperwork you need to provide to your school later.

If, despite this, you still want to clear the information transferred via the IRS DRT and enter your tax information manually—and you haven't submitted the application or correction yet—you can select the “Reset FAFSA” button at the top of the page (or in the menu at the upper right of the mobile app screen). Just know that by doing so, the entire application or correction will be cleared, and you will have to start the entire application or correction over again.

### If I enter my tax information manually, will I be able to see it?

## Signing and Submitting the FAFSA® Form

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Before your FAFSA form can be processed, you'll need to sign and submit the application. Here are some tips as you finish your FAFSA form:

- To ensure the application functions properly, make sure the pop-up blocker in your browser allows pop-ups from [fafsa.ed.gov](https://fafsa.ed.gov). [Learn how to enable pop-ups in your browser.](#)
- Be sure to sign with your FSA ID (your username and password) so your FAFSA form will be processed as quickly as possible. (If you log in to the form by providing your FSA ID, you won't be asked for it again when it's time to sign. However, if you're providing parent information, one of your parents will be required to sign your application.)
- While your online FAFSA form will be processed much quicker if you (and your parent if you're a dependent student) sign your FAFSA form with your FSA ID, you have the option to print out, sign, and mail in a signature page to the address listed on the page. [Learn more about printing a signature page.](#)
- Once you see your confirmation page, you'll know you've successfully submitted your FAFSA form. If you provided an email address on the form, you'll automatically receive the confirmation page by email. There are a few differences between the emailed confirmation and the one you'll see in the FAFSA form before exiting the application, so consider printing or saving your confirmation page before you exit. For example, the emailed confirmation won't include the college graduation, retention, and transfer rates for schools you listed on your FAFSA form.
- There are some states that have a partnership with our office that allows you to transfer your information directly into your state aid form (for example, New York residents can use this interface to link directly to the application for the Tuition Assistance Program [TAP]). When you fill out the FAFSA form, you'll have the option to apply with certain state financial aid forms. So, if you see a link from your FAFSA confirmation page to your state financial aid form, you should select it. The link will only appear on the confirmation page within the FAFSA form, so be sure to take advantage of it while you're still in the application.
- Your confirmation page offers the option for the parent information in your FAFSA form to be transferred automatically into another student's application. So if you have a sibling who needs to fill out a FAFSA form, be sure to use this option

### Top FAFSA® Tips

1. Read all questions and instructions carefully.
2. Meet deadlines.
3. Check your email (including spam) regularly for any messages from Federal Student Aid or your college.

## Taking the Next Steps

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Once you've completed your FAFSA form, there are more steps you have to take before you receive financial aid. Make sure you know [what happens after you submit your FAFSA form](#).

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