

The FAFSA Form

What is the FAFSA?

The FAFSA (*Free Application for Federal Student Aid*) is the first step in the financial aid process. Use it to apply for federal student financial aid, such as Pell grant, student loans, and college work-study. In addition, most states and schools use FAFSA information to award their financial aid. For a wealth of printable information on how to complete the FAFSA, financial aid, FSA ID, etc. visit <https://studentaid.ed.gov/resources#complete> There are videos on there as well. Don't think you'll qualify for aid? Our advice is to apply anyway... you might be surprised.

Note that the FAFSA must be renewed each year, as aid is awarded a single year at a time.

Why so Many Questions?

Your FAFSA responses are entered into a formula (known as the Federal Methodology), which is required by the amended Higher Education Act of 1965. The result is your Expected Family Contribution, or EFC, for that year. The EFC is a number that measures your family's financial strength. It is subtracted from the Cost of Attendance at the school(s) you plan to attend which determines your eligibility for federal student aid. Your state, and the school(s) you list, may use all or some of your responses. They will determine if you are also eligible for school or state aid.

How do I find out what my EFC is?

You will receive a report, called a *Student Aid Report (SAR)* by email or by postal mail depending on the addresses on file for you. The SAR lists the information you reported on your FAFSA, and will tell you your EFC. Reviewing your SAR is important to ensure all of your information is correct. Make any necessary changes or provide additional information.

How much aid do I get?

The schools use your EFC to prepare a financial aid package (grants, loans, and/or work-study) to help you meet your financial need. Financial need is the difference between your EFC and your school's cost of attendance (which can include living expenses), as determined by the school. If you or your family have special circumstances that impact your financial situation, contact your school's financial aid office. Some examples include: unusual medical or dental expenses, or a large change in income from last year to this year.

When will I get the aid?

Your financial aid will be paid to you through your school. Typically, your school will first use the aid to pay tuition, fees, and room and board (if provided by the school). Any remaining aid is returned to you for your other expenses.

Where can I get more information on student aid?

The financial aid office at the school you plan to attend is best place to get information about federal, state, school and other sources of student financial aid. You can also check out these resources:

- www.studentaid.ed.gov

- Your high school counselor's office

Aid and scholarships are available from other sources besides the federal government. Check with local foundations, religious organizations, community organizations, and civic groups, as well as organizations related to your field of interest, such as the American Medical Association or American Bar Association. Check with your parents' employers or unions to see if they award scholarships or have tuition payment plans. There is lots of information online, but use caution when paying for any scholarship assistance! (there are scams out there)

Getting Ready for the FAFSA

It helps to get organized with everything you'll need for the FAFSA before starting. Keep these records! You may need them again. Do not mail your original records.

Using the FAFSA Worksheet

Before you start actually filling out the FAFSA on-line, it's wise to print the worksheet first. Be sure to visit <https://studentaid.ed.gov/resources#fafsa> for the worksheet and forms for the appropriate school year. You will need financial information from the prior year, basically your tax return. (Note: Effective with the 2017-18 year FAFSA filing, you will be able to use an earlier tax return. See the chart toward the end of this manual).

The FSA ID

The FSA ID replaced the FSA Pin in 2015. The FSA ID is the username and password that you will use when you visit certain US Department of Education (USDE) websites. You will also use it to sign forms when required. You will use your ID to sign, submit, check the status of your FAFSA application on fafsa.gov. You can also use it to review what federal aid you've received (studentaid.gov/login) and to sign federal loan documents.

What You'll Need to Obtain your FSA ID

To obtain your FSA ID, you will need your social security number (SSN), your full name as it appears on your social security card, and your date of birth. You will also be able to provide an email address in case you forget your password. When ready, go to <https://fsaid.ed.gov/> to learn more and to create your ID.

FSA ID Tips

- Don't share your ID with anyone. Remember, it's your signature and you need to protect it!
- Set up your own, and don't do anyone else's for them.
- Be sure to have a way to remember it, yet keep it secure. You'll use it at least once a year.
- If you had a PIN, you can link it with your FSA ID and use the new ID immediately. If not, it will take a few days for you to be able to use it.

How Long Will it Take to Fill Out the FAFSA?

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that for first-time users, FAFSA on the Web will take you less than one hour to complete. It takes less time to complete a Renewal FAFSA on the Web and Corrections on the Web.

Time-Saving Tips

- **Plan ahead** – Gather the information required (see list at the beginning of this manual)
- **Use the Worksheet**
- **Fill out the application one step at a time** - Save the FAFSA you're working on whenever you want; complete and submit it later at your convenience. The information you save will be secure and available for you to retrieve and edit for 45 days or until the federal application/correction deadline date has passed since the application was saved. Saved applications are erased after 45 days or after the federal application/correction deadline date. Select Application Deadlines on the home page to determine if the federal application/correction deadline date has passed.

FAFSA Deadlines

The FAFSA may also be used to apply for aid from other sources, such as your state or school. The deadlines for your state or schools may be different from the federal deadlines and you may be required to complete additional forms. Check with your high school guidance counselor or a financial aid administrator at your school about state and school sources of student aid.

The School Year is July 1st - June 30th

- FAFSA on the Web and Renewal FAFSA on the Web applications must be submitted by midnight Central Daylight time, June 30 of any year.
- For 2016-17, corrections on the Web forms must be submitted by midnight Central Daylight time, September 23, 2017.
- Note: Your college must have your complete and correct information by your last day of enrollment in the school year.

It is important to note the type of deadline you are up against. If not crystal clear, ask your school about their definition of an application deadline, whether it is the receipt date and time or the process date and time of the application. The Department of Education considers an application's receipt date and time to be when the application/correction has been successfully submitted. The last page of the online application/correction submission process is therefore called the "Confirmation Page". It contains a 30 character long "Confirmation Number". This number contains the exact date and time (Central Standard Time) the form was received. There is also a DRN number. DRN stands for Data Release Number. It is a 4-digit number listed on the FAFSA filing confirmation page, in addition to the longer Filing Confirmation Number. The DRN is also listed on the Student Aid Report (SAR). If you call the Department of Education's Federal Student Aid office about a FAFSA application that has already been filed, they may require you to provide your DRN number. We recommend that you print your confirmation page.

Note: Transactions must be completed and accepted by midnight to meet the deadline. If transmissions are started before midnight but are not completed until after midnight, those transmissions will not meet the deadline. In addition, any transmission picked up on the deadline date that gets rejected may not be able to be reprocessed because the deadline will have passed by the time the user gets the information notifying him/her of the reject.

Beware

Be wary of organizations that charge a fee to submit your application, or to find you money for school. Some are legitimate and some are scams. Generally, any help that you pay for can be received free from your school or the U.S. Department of Education.

My FAFSA is Submitted – Now What?

- The Department of Education will process your application and send you a Student Aid Report (SAR).
- An electronic copy of your SAR is also made available to the schools you've listed on your FAFSA. NOTE: The foreign schools may or may not be able to receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) electronically. Check with the school selected on the FAFSA to see if they will need a paper copy of the SAR.

Your SAR will contain your EFC, which is the Expected Family Contribution. The EFC is a preliminary estimate based on the information you provided on your application. It is subject to change based upon your school's verification of information you provided. The EFC is used to determine your eligibility for federal student aid. Many schools have their own methodology to determine your family contribution and financial need. You will receive an official EFC on your Student Aid Report (SAR) based on the processing results of your FAFSA. NOTE: The EFC is for a single year only. You must renew each year.

For more information about the EFC see "Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid" at:

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/resources#funding>

FAFSA Filing Changes

On Sept. 14, 2015, President Obama announced significant changes to the FAFSA process that will impact millions of students. Students will be able to do the following:

- **Submit a FAFSA® Earlier:** *Students will be able to file a 2017–18 FAFSA as early as Oct. 1, 2016, rather than beginning on Jan. 1, 2017. The earlier submission date will be a permanent change, enabling students to complete and submit a FAFSA as early as October 1 every year. (There is NO CHANGE to the 2016–17 schedule, when the FAFSA will become available January 1 as in previous years.)*
- **Use Earlier Income Information:** *Beginning with the 2017–18 FAFSA, students will report income information from an earlier tax year. For example, on the 2017–18 FAFSA, students (and parents, as appropriate) will report their 2015 income information, rather than their 2016 income information.*

The following table provides a summary of key dates as we transition to using the early FAFSA submission timeframe and earlier tax information.

** = first year of change

When a Student Is Attending College (School Year)	When a Student Can Submit a FAFSA	Which Year's Income Information Is Required
July 1, 2016–June 30, 2017	January 1, 2016–June 30, 2017	2015
** July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018	October 1, 2016–June 30, 2018	2015
July 1, 2018–June 30, 2019	October 1, 2017–June 30, 2019	2016

This earlier start date and using earlier income information will benefit students. Benefits include

- (a) the financial aid application process may be more aligned with the college admission process
- (b) applicants will not need to estimate income or taxes paid
- (c) more time for students and parents to explore and understand financial aid options and apply for aid before state deadlines

Final Strategy and Tips for the FAFSA

- 1) Fill out the FAFSA as soon as possible after the earliest day permitted (see paragraph above - was January 1, but is changing to October 1 of the prior year for the 2017-18 filing). Some colleges have financial aid deadlines so check with each and don't be late—doing so can literally cost you.
- 2) You will need a tax return, but with the new changes you will not have to estimate. You can use an earlier return effective with the 2017-18 filing. (see chart above)
- 3) The aid you will receive is related to your Adjusted Gross Income (AGI). The lower the AGI the better, so look for legitimate ways to reduce it, such as maximizing retirement plan contributions, deducting all qualifying expenses, etc.
- 4) Cash on hand works against you as well. So, where possible, make necessary purchases prior to filing the FAFSA to reduce cash.
- 5) These things don't count as assets, so they are good things to spend money on: the mortgage on your primary home, life insurance, retirement plans, and prepaid tuition. Investment losses also work to offset gains, so it might be wise to sell of bad ones. (see your tax advisor for specific recommendations)
- 6) Don't put assets in your child's name. They are assessed at 35% whereas those in parents' names are assessed at about 6%.
- 7) Be careful when filling out the form. Check it and recheck it, and don't leave any blanks unless specifically told to do so. Use 0 (zero) or NA when something is zero or not applicable. Errors can be costly.
- 8) Remember, there are other forms of financial aid not governed by the FAFSA, so don't forget to do other free scholarship searches and talk to your high school and future college(s) as well. Also, some schools require the CSS Profile form.

Important Note: The real website is .gov, not .com – not to be confused with www.fafsa.com which is a business and not affiliated with the Department of Education.