

FAFSA FILING TIME

Students

You must complete and submit the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) to apply for federal student aid—that's government money for college or trade school. Financial aid offices use information from the FAFSA to determine whether you are eligible to receive federal grants, loans, or work-study funds. States and schools also use the information from the FAFSA to determine whether you qualify for additional aid. In fact, some schools won't consider a student for the school's merit scholarships until the student has submitted a FAFSA. So be sure to fill out a FAFSA even if you think you won't qualify for federal aid.

DEADLINES

If you want to be considered for aid from your state or college, you must meet its FAFSA deadline. If you plan to go to college in the fall, your state financial aid deadline is probably going to be between March and May; and your college financial aid deadline could be as early as February. The FAFSA site at www.fafsa.ed.gov lists many state deadlines and tells you how to find yours if it's not listed. For a college's FAFSA deadline, check the school's Web site or contact its financial aid office.

To Do:

- Get free information and help from your school counselor, the financial aid office at the college or career school you plan to attend, or the U.S. Department of Education at www.fafsa.ed.gov or **1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)**. Free help is available anytime during the application process. You should never have to pay for help.
- Get a personal identification number called a Federal Student Aid PIN at www.pin.ed.gov. Your PIN lets you "sign" your online FAFSA, access and make corrections to your application information, and more—so keep it safe!

- Collect the documents needed to apply, including income tax returns and W-2 forms (and other records of income). Tax return not completed at the time you apply? Estimate the tax information, apply, and finalize information later. The important thing is to meet the earliest deadline. Here are some items you might need:
 - Your Social Security number and your parents' Social Security numbers if you are providing parent information.
 - Your Alien Registration Number if you are not a U.S. citizen.
 - Federal tax information or tax returns, including W-2 information, for yourself, for your spouse if you are married, and for your parents if you are providing parent information, using income records for the year prior to the academic year for which you are applying.
 - Information on savings, investments, and business assets for yourself (and for your parents if you are providing parent information).

- Submit the FAFSA in time to meet school and state aid deadlines. Here are the ways you can complete the FAFSA:
 - Apply online (the fastest and easiest way) by going to **www.fafsa.ed.gov**.
 - Download a PDF version of the FAFSA at the "Forms" section of **www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov/pubs**. Fill out the PDF and mail it to the address on the form.
 - Ask the financial aid staff at the college you plan to attend whether you may fill out the FAFSA with their help and have them submit it for you.
 - Call **1-800-4-FED-AID** and request a paper FAFSA.



- Review your *Student Aid Report (SAR)*—the result of your FAFSA. You will receive your SAR by e-mail or by mail. If necessary, make changes or corrections and submit your SAR for reprocessing. Your complete, correct SAR will contain your Expected Family Contribution (EFC)—the number used to determine your federal student aid eligibility. If you do not receive your SAR within three weeks of submitting your FAFSA, go to **www.fafsa.ed.gov** and select "Check Status of a Submitted FAFSA;" or you may call **1-800-4-FED-AID**.
- Your school might request additional information from you. Be sure to respond by any deadlines, or you might not receive federal student aid.
 - All applicants: Contact the financial aid office if you have any questions about the aid being offered.
 - First-time applicants: Review award letters from schools to compare amounts and types of aid being offered. Decide which school to attend based on a combination of (a) how well the school suits your needs and (b) its affordability after all aid is taken into account.
- Keep in touch with the school you've chosen to find out when tuition and fees are due, whether your financial aid will cover those expenses completely, and how much (if any) extra financial aid will come directly to you once your tuition and fees are paid.
- Pay special attention to letters or e-mails from schools, and contact the financial aid office if you do not understand what the school is offering you.
- Follow all directions on the FAFSA and on any communications from your school.

Parents

To Do:

- Get your own Federal Student Aid PIN at www.pin.ed.gov. Your PIN will act as your electronic signature on your child's online FAFSA.
- File taxes as early as possible, but don't delay the FAFSA due to your taxes not being done. It's okay to estimate your financial information on the FAFSA; you just need to finalize it later.
- Complete the "Students: To Do" list above with your child. If possible, file the FAFSA online—it's much faster and easier, and your information is safe because it's encrypted (i.e., we use a mathematical formula to scramble the data).
- Examine the bill from the school your child chooses and make sure you understand all the fees and how they will be paid (e.g., through scholarships, student loans, etc.).



This document is an excerpt from the College Preparation Checklist, available at www.studentaid.ed.gov/collprep. View a PDF of this excerpt at www.studentaid.ed.gov/pubs.