

# Filing the FAFSA®

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## 2023-2024

### A Simple Guide for Students



A step-by-step  
guide on  
completing the free  
application for  
federal student aid



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## What is the FAFSA®

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the most important financial aid application. It's used to apply for financial aid from the federal student aid program which is offered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid. However, many state governments, and most colleges and universities use the information provided on the FAFSA to also award financial aid from their own programs.

The federal student aid programs offer accessibility to federal grants, federal loans, and federal work-study. All other aid offered through other sources (like your state or school) will vary but may also include grant and loan opportunities. You don't need to wait until you decide on which school you will be attending; your information can be sent to multiple schools and you can update your school list at anytime.

## The FAFSA Calculates Your Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

### What is the EFC?

The information you input in your FAFSA will be used to calculate your EFC. The EFC is calculated by the U.S. Department of Education using a formula which is established by law.

This is the number calculated by the U.S. Department of Education. Overtime the EFC and what it means has shifted quite a bit. Your EFC is more of an index used by your college to determine how much financial aid you would receive if you were to attend their school.

Many think this is the amount of money your family will need to pay out of pocket, but it's not. And yes, we can hear relief from some of you! It is a great goal number for your family to contribute, but it is not required that your family pay this amount. Now for the tough news, you may owe more than your EFC depending on that amount of financial aid your school offers you.

**Even if you don't believe you are eligible for financial aid, you should complete the FAFSA. It's a myth that all financial aid is need-based.**



## What Impacts Your EFC?

- Student's dependency status for FAFSA purposes
- Household income
- Reportable assets
- Household size
- Number of students in college,
- And other demographic information like, marital status

## Way to File the FAFSA

1. Online at <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>
2. Paper FAFSA (download at [www.studentaid.gov](http://www.studentaid.gov), or request a PDF print-out by calling 1-800-4-FED-AID, 1-800-4-433-3243)

\*You may have applied using the myStudentAid mobile application last year, the mobile app has been discontinued. However, you can always apply through the web browser on your phone or tablet.

## FAFSA Deadlines

[3 Deadlines](#) to Know:

1. State Deadline
2. School Deadline
3. Federal Deadline

Rule of Thumb  


**\*THE MOST IMPORTANT  
DEADLINE IS THE ONE  
THAT COMES FIRST!\***

## When to File the FAFSA

**An Important date to remember: October 1st**

The FAFSA should be filed as soon as possible on or after October 1 of the senior year in high school and each subsequent year in college. Each state uses information from the FAFSA to determine how to award state aid. State financial aid deadlines may not align with the federal deadline, so it is important to know the [deadline for your state](#).



## Complete the FAFSA Every Year

Most colleges and universities will require the student to re-apply for financial aid by completing the FAFSA every year they are enrolled in school. A student’s eligibility for financial aid can differ from year-to-year. Even small changes may have a big impact on the amount and types of financial aid the student will receive. Examples include changes in income, student assets, the number of children enrolled in college at the same time as well as changes to the financial aid formulas.

## Which FAFSA Should You File?

Federal student aid has an award year that runs from July 1 to June 30. The FAFSA has a 21-month application cycle that begins on October 1, nine months before the start of the award year, and ends on June 30, the last day of the award year. Because of the way the application cycle works, there is an overlap of a few months, so you may see a choice between two FAFSA applications when you [log in](#).

Here's how to determine which FAFSA to file:

### Which FAFSA® Do You Need to File?

Follow these steps to make sure you file the right one, with the right tax information.

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**WHEN ARE YOU STARTING YOUR NEXT ACADEMIC YEAR?**  
In other words, which term/academic year do you need financial aid?

	July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024	FILE THIS FAFSA	2023-2024	When?	Oct. 1 2022- June 30, 2024*	Report Tax Year	2021
*By Midnight Central Time							
	July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023	FILE THIS FAFSA	2022-2023	When?	Oct. 1 2021- June 30, 2023*	Report Tax Year	2020

\*\*If you are unsure about which FAFSA you need to complete, please contact your college\*\*



## General Federal Financial Aid Eligibility

There are some eligibility criteria you will need to meet in order to be eligible for federal financial aid.

- Complete the FAFSA and agree to use federal student aid for educational purposes.
- Be a U.S. Citizen or [eligible non-citizen](#).
- Have a valid Social Security number (with the exception of students from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, or the Republic of Palau).
- Be enrolled, or accepted for enrollment, as a regular student in an eligible degree or certificate program at a college or university that participates in federal student aid.
- Have a high school diploma, the recognized equivalent of a high school diploma\*\* (including a General Educational Development (GED) certificate), or have completed a high school curriculum in a home school setting that satisfies the state's requirements for home schooling.
  - \*\*Students who first enrolled in an accredited college or career school before July 1, 2012, or are enrolled in an eligible career pathway program, may qualify by satisfying alternate criteria, such as passing an approved ability-to-benefit test or completing six credit hours or equivalent course work toward a degree or certificate.
- Not be in default on a federal student loan.
- Not owe a refund on a federal student grant or loan overpayment.
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress.
- [Students with intellectual difficulties may still be eligible for federal student aid](#). You need to be enrolled in a comprehensive transition and postsecondary (CTP) program, meet all basic eligibility requirements, except for the requirement of a high school diploma or GED, and you aren't required to pursue a degree or certificate.

\*For males, your registration status with the [Selective Service](#) no longer affects your eligibility. The 2023-2024 FAFSA will no longer allow you to register for selective service using the FAFSA form.

Drug convictions no longer will affect your financial aid eligibility and will not appear on the 2023-2024 FAFSA application.



## **Federal Student Loan Eligibility**

In addition to the basic eligibility requirements, federal student loans require you to be enrolled in your program at least half-time. [The Direct Subsidized and Direct Unsubsidized Loan program has loan limits](#) for the total you can borrow each year, and total aggregate (overall) limits. If you've reached annual or aggregate borrowing limits in the federal program, you may need to consider [private student loan options](#).

## **Federal Pell Grant Limits**

Under the Federal Pell Grant program, you will be limited to the equivalent of six years of Pell Grant funds, or 600% lifetime eligibility. What does this mean? Well, if you are Pell Grant eligible your school will determine your total award amount for the year. That total amount is considered 100% of your eligibility for that year. The actual amount you receive throughout the year will be used to determine your use. For example, if you are awarded \$5,000 for an award year. Your school will give you \$2,500 for your fall semester, and \$2,500 for your spring semester. You attend during the fall and receive your \$2,500 award. You are then unable to attend spring semester, and do not receive financial aid. You would have only used 50% of your Pell lifetime eligibility.



## Filling Out the FAFSA - Step-by-Step

Let's jump into what you need to complete the FAFSA.

### Create an FSA ID

You can set up your FSA ID at <https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id>. You can create an FSA ID ahead of time, you don't need to wait until you are ready to complete the FAFSA.

No matter which way you decide to file, it's always wise to create an FSA ID. Think of your FSA ID as a username and password, because that's what it is. Your FSA ID allows you to file the FAFSA online, and log into view your federal student loan and grant history. You can also use it to electronically sign your FAFSA, and it is your personal legal signature.

It is strongly recommended that everyone create their own FSA ID to avoid issues later. If you forget your FSA ID, or it's not working, you will have the option to click "Forgot My Username" or "Forgot My Password". If you need more help getting into your account, you can always call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243), for TTY for the deaf or hard of hearing 1-800-730-8913.

Pro tip: Use a personal email you expect to have for several years. Using a school issued email address is not recommended because you may lose access to that account after you graduate.

### FSA ID Parent

Each person who needs to provide information for a FAFSA will need their own FSA ID—this means, not only students but parents may need their own FSA ID as well. An FSA ID will be associated with the social security number of the account holder.

You will need a social security number, and a mobile phone number and/or email address. If you don't have a social security number, you will not be able to create an FSA ID. Parents can still provide their child with the necessary information they will need to complete the FAFSA application electronically. Although you won't be able to electronically sign the document without an FSA ID, you can print the signature page and mail it in.





## Documents Needed for FAFSA

1. Your FSA ID if you are completing your FAFSA online or through the mobile application.
2. [Your 2021 Tax Records for the 2023-2024 FAFSA](#)
3. [Records of Untaxed Income, including, child support received, interest income, and veterans non-education benefits](#)
4. [Records of Your Assets](#)
5. A List of Schools You Are Considering
6. Your Driver's License (if you have one)
7. College/University School List

## FAFSA Change School

It's okay if you're applying to more than 10 college. Pick 10 to list first. Wait for your FAFSA to be processed, it could take a bit of time. The best way to confirm, contact a school you listed and ask them if they received your FAFSA information. Once they have confirmed, [log back into your FAFSA application and update your school list.](#)

## Logging In

The login process for the online application is easy. Type in your FSA ID username and password. Once you are in, the application will ask if you to create a **"save key"**. The save key is allows you to leave the application or share your application with your parent(s), to complete the application later.

Also, it's important to note that the application will be referencing "you" as the student. If you're a parent logging in, unless the question specifically asks for parent information, the reference to "you" or "your" will be the student, i.e., the owner of the application. And for parents with more than one student attending college, each student will need to complete their own FAFSA.

## Student and Parent Demographic Information

The first few questions you will see will be regarding the student's demographic information—parents, your demographic questions will show up a bit later. When completing the online application, some of this information will be pre-filled from your FSA ID profile.



## Social Security Number

Your social security number will automatically populate if you logged in with your FSA ID. There could be a few scenarios where you, as the student, may not have a social security number but you are eligible for federal student aid. For example, you are an eligible non-citizen, or you a citizen of the Freely Associated States (the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, or the Federated States of Micronesia).

In some scenarios you will be able to continue with the online application, however, there also could be a scenario where you need to complete a paper application.

- If you are a resident of the Freely Associated States (the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, or the Federated States of Micronesia), and this is your first FAFSA application, enter “666” as your first three digits. The federal processor will assign the remaining six digits when your FAFSA application is processed. Once you are assigned a number you can use it for future FAFSA applications.
- If you do not have an SSN, but you are an eligible non-citizen, you will enter your Alien Registration Number.
- For those with a “work-only” SSN issued through the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy or a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN), then you are not eligible for federal financial aid. You should check with your school to see which financial aid applications they would like you to complete. Your school may ask you to still complete the FAFSA in order to award you other types of financial aid.

If your parent does not have a social security number, you can still complete your FAFSA application online. Your parent(s) will need to enter “000-00-0000”. If your parent has an ITIN, **do not use this number as the social security number**. If your parent does not have an SSN, this will not affect your eligibility for aid. When it’s time to sign and submit the electronic application, your parent will need to print their signature page, sign it and mail it to the address indicated on the signature page.



## **Permanent Mailing Address**

When you're asked to provide your permanent mailing address, you want to make sure you use the address for your legal documents, like your tax returns, voter registration, etc. For most students, this is likely not your school residence address, unless you have gone through the steps to change your address.

If you don't have an address (if you are homeless or living in a transitional housing situation), then you should contact your financial aid advisor at your college for assistance.

If your mailing address is in Mexico, Canada, a military installation or U.S. territory, you should enter and use '00000' as the zip code.

## **Household Size**

Household size is an important factor in determining your financial aid eligibility. The online and mobile app will auto-populate information based on assumptions. (e.g., if you are dependent and your FAFSA® parent is married, it will assume a household size of 3 - your FAFSA parent, your FAFSA parent's spouse, and yourself). Don't forget to add additional household members when necessary!

In this section you will also indicate the number of household members in college for the FAFSA award year, July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. You will include yourself, and others in your household who are enrolled at least half-time in 2023-2024, in a program which leads to a college degree or certificate.

Read through this question carefully, you will not include your parents, or any household member who is a student in an U.S. service academy.



## College Search/School List

You don't need to know exactly where you want to go yet, and you can even make changes later. But you should pull together a list of all the schools you are interested in, even if you have yet to apply.

The FAFSA gives you an opportunity to easily list 10 colleges at a time on the web (the paper application will only allow you to list four). Your school list will not be shared with the schools listed.

You have the options to search for a school by:

- State (required), City (optional), School Name (optional); or
- Federal School Code

For each selected school, you can indicate your housing plan for that school. For example, will you be living: On Campus, With Parent, or Off campus. This will help your school determine the best [Cost of Attendance](#) (or student budget) for you.

## FAFSA School Selection Order

For federal student aid it doesn't matter in what order you list your schools. However, for state aid it might. [Double check you state requirements and decide the best way to order your school list.](#)

## Dependency Status

Next, the FAFSA will ask you a series of questions to determine your dependency status. For the FAFSA® you are either considered a dependent or independent student. Your dependency status is a classification used specifically for the FAFSA to determine how much financial aid you are eligible for. If you are considered a dependent student, you will have to provide your [parental demographic and financial information on your FAFSA application](#). Independent students, you will provide your own financial information. And if you're married, your spouse's information is also required.

Your FAFSA dependency status is for FAFSA purposes, only. It is not related to how you or your parents file taxes. The determination is how the questions are answered on the FAFSA.



**FAFSA  
Dependent**



**IRS  
Dependent**

## Dependency Status Questions for 2023-2024 FAFSA

- Were you born before Jan. 1, 2000?
- As of today, are you married? (Also answer “Yes” if you are separated but not divorced.) **\*This really means as of “today” – the day you are completing the FAFSA. This does not take into consideration future plans.\***
- At the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, will you be working on a master’s degree or doctorate program (such as a MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, graduate certificate, etc.)?
- Do you have, or will you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you, between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024?
- Do you have dependents, other than your children or spouse, who will receive more than half of their support from you, between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024?
- Are you currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces of purposes other than training?
- Are you a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces?
- At any time since you turned 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?
- As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you an emancipated minor?
- Does someone other than your parent or stepparent have legal guardianship of you, as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?
- At any time on or after July 1, 2022, did you receive a determination that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless, or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?



## Why does FAFSA consider me dependent?

If you answer 'no' to all these questions, you are going to be considered a dependent student for FAFSA purposes. In most cases, if you are an undergraduate student, under the age of 24, single with no children, you will likely be classified as a dependent student for FAFSA purposes.

If you are required to provide parental information, but there are reasons why you can't provide it, you will be given the [opportunity to indicate this](#).

## Who is considered a parent on the FAFSA?

If you are considered a dependent student for FAFSA purposes, you will need to provide parental information. For some families, it may not be entirely clear which parent's information to provide.

## Here is how to determine your FAFSA parent(s)

**Parents are living together.** You will provide the information for both of your parents on the FAFSA. It does not matter if your parents have never been married, are a same-sex couple, separated, or divorced. If they live together include both of them.

**Your parents do not live together.** You will need to take some steps to determine which parent is your FAFSA parent. If your parents are married (and not separated) you will need to provide information for both parents. If your parents are not married, you will need to go through the next few steps to determine who is your FAFSA parents. This will also apply if your parents are separated, but not yet legally divorced, and do not live together, you will need to follow these steps as well.

You will provide the information for your parent:

1. With whom you lived with the most during the past 12 months. Was your time split equally? Then...
2. Who provided you with the most financial support for the last 12 months when you received support? Still equal? Then...
3. It's time to talk to your financial aid office. They will help you make the determination.

**You have a stepparent** if your FAFSA parent has remarried, you will need to provide their information along with their married spouse.



## **FAFSA Divorced Parents**

Situations of divorce can make it a bit confusing. If your parents are not living together, you will follow the [steps above](#) to determine your FAFSA parent. Although you are only providing information for your FAFSA parent (and their spouse, if applicable), your non-FAFSA parent can still help you pay for college. They can borrow a Direct PLUS loan or private parent loan to help you cover costs if they choose.

## **FAFSA Parent Died, Do I Report My Stepparent's Information?**

If your parent has died, and your stepparent has not legally adopted you, you would not report your stepparent on your FAFSA. If you were determined to be a dependent student, you want to go back and review how you answered your [dependency status questions](#). If you are having trouble completing your FAFSA, it would be best to contact your school for assistance.

If your FAFSA parent has died since you completed your FAFSA, reach out to your school's financial aid office to explain your situation. You may be eligible for a [dependency override](#).

## **FAFSA Legal Guardian, and Other Guardian Situations**

For FAFSA purposes, legal guardians, and other guardians (like a grandparent, aunt, foster parent, siblings, etc.) are not considered your parent(s) when filing the FAFSA unless they have legally adopted you.

If you are in a guardianship arrangement, you want to make sure you answered your [dependency questions](#) accurately. If you answered the questions correctly and the FAFSA has classified you as a dependent student, you will need to provide parental information. If you needed to make an adjustment to the way you answered your dependency status questions, and the FAFSA has classified you as an independent student, you will not be required to provide parental information.

Click here if you need help determining your [FAFSA parent](#).

If your parent is refusing to provide information, we have some tips to help you in the [FAQ section](#).



## Income and Assets

You (and the parent listed on your FAFSA, if needed) will be providing financial information for your 2023–2024 FAFSA®. The FAFSA will ask questions regarding your income for the 2021 tax year. It will also ask about assets from calendar year 2022. The information input will be used to calculate your expected family contribution (EFC).

Student income and assets are assessed differently than parent income and assets.

### Here's what you need to know.

- [Dependent students](#) will need to provide financial information of their FAFSA parent(s). You will complete two FAFSA financial information sections—one for you (the student), and one for your FAFSA parent.
- Independent students, if married, will need to provide their spouse's financial information. This will be reported in the student's financial section.
- Single, independent students will need to only provide their own information.

## FAFSA Tax Year

You may be wondering which tax year the FAFSA uses. The 2023–2024 FAFSA will be asking for your 2021 tax information. You will have three options when it comes to identifying your tax filing status for tax year 2021:

- Already completed
- Will file
- Not going to file

If you have indicated "Will file" or "Not going to file," you will not be eligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to import your financial information into the FAFSA. But that's okay, the FAFSA will provide you detailed instructions to help you complete the required financial information.





**If you completed your tax filing, you may be eligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to import your financial information into the FAFSA. Using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool is optional, you can always choose to manually input your information. Having to complete the income section manually is relatively easy if you have the [necessary forms ready to go](#). All versions of the FAFSA will provide you with detailed instructions for the information being asked, even the paper application.**

## **IRS Data Retrieval Tool**

The IRS Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT) will import relevant information from your filed tax return from the IRS to your FAFSA. Using the IRS DRT does make it easier to complete the financial section of the FAFSA, but it doesn't provide answers for all financial questions.

For security reasons, the information you import using the IRS DRT will be masked. If you believe there are any issues or concerns with the information reported, you will need to work with your Financial Aid Office. Bring copies of your tax returns so they can complete a review.

For the most part, if you filed an IRS 1040 with a social security number (not an ITIN), and have an FSA ID, you will be eligible to use the IRS DRT. Using the IRS DRT is optional for both you and your FAFSA parent.

### **You (student and/or parent) can't use the IRS DRT if:**

- You did not file your taxes, or you are not planning to file taxes
- You filed a foreign tax return, IRS 1040NR, or IRS 1040NR-EZ
- You filed a tax return with a Puerto Rico, U.S. territory or Freely Associated State address
- You filed your taxes with an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) because you don't have a social security number
- You are married and filed as Married Filing Separately
- You are married and filed as Head of Household
- For parents specifically, your marital status is "Unmarried and both legal parents living together"
- If you filed electronically within the last three weeks, or through the mail within the last 11 weeks—the information may not be available to transfer yet—you can either manually input your information or wait until your information is ready to transfer
- If you filed a 1040X amended tax return, you may need to work with your Financial Aid Office to determine your information is correct.



## **Schedule 1 - FAFSA**

The 2023-2024 FAFSA will transfer appropriate information from filed Schedule 1 forms using IRS DRT. If you use the IRS DRT, you will not be prompted to answer the question if you filed a Schedule 1.

If you are not using the IRS DRT, and you filed a Schedule 1, you want to make sure you correctly indicate this on your FAFSA. Reporting a Schedule 1 form is extremely important for low-income families, it can help qualify eligible students for an automatic zero EFC (expected family contribution). Make sure to only include the information being asked.

## **FAFSA Untaxed Income**

Along with taxed income, you will also be asked questions about certain types of untaxed income.

### **Here is what you need to report:**

- Child support received for all children. Do not include foster care or adoption payments.
- Housing, food, and other living allowances paid to members of the military, clergy, and other (including cash payments and cash value of benefits). Does not include the value of on-base military housing or the value of a basic military allowance for housing.
- Payments to tax-deferred pension and retirement savings plans
- Veterans non-education benefits such as Disability, Death Pension, or Dependency & Indemnity Compensation (DIC), and/or VA Educational Work-Study allowances.
- Other untaxed income not reported, such as workers' compensation, disability benefits, etc.
- For you, the student only (not included in the FAFSA parent's section), money received or paid on your behalf (e.g., bills) not reported elsewhere on this form. This includes money that you received from a parent or other person whose financial information is not reported on this form and that is not part of a legal child support agreement.

**Untaxed income you don't need to report:**

Carefully read what is being asked of you, and don't include unnecessary untaxed income.

**Don't include the following:**

- Foster care benefits
- Student financial aid
- Earned income credit
- Child tax credit
- Welfare payments/benefits
- Untaxed Social Security benefits
- Supplemental Security Income
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act educational benefits
- On-base military housing or a military housing allowance
- Combat pay
- Benefits from a flexible spending arrangement
- Foreign income exclusion
- Credit for federal tax on special fuels
- Non-elective pension plan and retirement plan contributions, for example, required employee contributions to public employee retirement systems (Iowa IPERS, Kansas (KPERs), etc.)
  - Note: Voluntary contributions made to your 401(k), 403(b), IRA, or federal employee TSP accounts will need to be reported as untaxed income on the FAFSA. Any employer contributions are not counted as untaxed income.

**Excluded Income:** The FAFSA will ask you to identify certain types of income that can be excluded from the FAFSA calculation. Some of these amounts are automatically included in your adjusted gross income.

- Income earned from Federal Work-Study and need-based employment portions of fellowships and assistantships
- Earnings from a Cooperative Education Program offered by a college
- Child support paid because of a divorce, separation, or legal requirement



## FAFSA Income Protection Allowance

FAFSA income protection allowance is something that can help you; especially when there is a lot of concern about how income can hurt you in financial aid formulas. Basically, income protection allowance is an amount of income that doesn't get counted when figuring out your financial aid. If you are an independent student without dependents other than a spouse that is:

- Single, divorced, or widowed, your income protection allowance is \$11,820.
- Married with a spouse who is enrolled at least half time, your income protection allowance is \$11,820.
- Married with a spouse who is not enrolled at least half time, your income protection allowance is \$18,960.

If you are an independent student with dependents other than a spouse, your income protection allowance will vary depending on how many people are in your household and how many of them are in college. For a family of four with one student in college, the income protection allowance will be \$46,040.

If you are a dependent student, the student income protection allowance is \$7,600 – meaning there is nothing counted toward your contribution if you have \$7,600 or less in yearly taxable and untaxable income.

The parent income protection allowance will vary depending on how many people are in your household and how many of them are in college. For a family of four with one student in college, the income protection allowance will be \$32,610.

Income above those income protection allowances is considered your “discretionary” income – and that’s what counts toward your contribution. A student contribution for discretionary income is calculated at a flat 50%. While a parent contribution from discretionary income is on a sliding scale, from 22-47%.



**What does that all mean? Well, student income above the income protection allowance will be assessed at a higher percentage than parent income above their income protection allowance.**

### **FAFSA Assets**

One of the most popular FAFSA topics is the impact of reporting assets on your FAFSA. Not everyone will be required to answer questions about assets. You'll get a pass if you are below the income threshold for the year and file certain types of tax forms. Certain states do require you to answer questions about assets to determine eligibility for state aid, even if you aren't required to answer those questions for federal aid.

### **What are considered assets on the FAFSA?**

**Reportable assets** (you are required to list these on your FAFSA):

- Your cash on hand – this includes whatever you have in your checking and savings account(s) as of the date you file the FAFSA.
- Other financial assets/investments, such as brokerage accounts, certificates of deposit (CDs), stocks, bonds, mutual funds, money market accounts, commodities, precious metals, the vested portions of stock options and restricted stock units, exchange-traded funds (ETF), hedge funds, trust funds, private equity, and other investments.
- Real estate (other than the family's principal place of residence), real estate investment trusts (REIT), loans held, installment contracts, trust funds, private equity, and other investments.
- Uniform Gift to Minors Act (UGMA) and Uniform Transfer to Minors Act (UTMA) accounts, are reported as assets of the account owner (you, the student), not the custodian.
- College savings plans (529 college savings plans, prepaid tuition plans, and Coverdell education savings accounts) are reported as an asset of the account owner, not the beneficiary.



**Non-reportable assets (you are not required to list these on your FAFSA):**

- The net worth of your family's principal place of residence (the family home).
- The net worth of a family farm (if it is the family's principal place of residence and you and/or your parents materially participate in the farming operation).
- Any small businesses owned and controlled by your family (if it has less than 100 full-time or full-time equivalent employees).
- Qualified retirement plans such as 401(k) plans, 403(b) plans, pension plans, annuities, traditional IRAs, Roth IRAs, Keogh, SEP and SIMPLE plans.
- Life insurance policies, including cash value and whole life insurance policies.
- Personal possessions, such as clothing, furniture, books, cars, boats, computer equipment and software, television and stereo equipment, music collections, jewelry, coin, stamp, art, and wine collections.

Note: Some of these assets do have to be reported on the [CSS Profile™](#), including the net worth of the family home, the family farm, and small businesses owned by the student or parents.



## **How to calculate net worth for FAFSA**

Net worth, for FAFSA purposes, is the total of your reportable assets. The FAFSA will determine the net worth for you and your parents separately.

### **FAFSA Asset protection allowance**

Parent assets have an asset protection allowance which is based on the age of the oldest parent living in the student's household. Parent net worth is assessed at 12% for reportable assets above the asset protection allowance.

Dependent student assets are assessed at a flat 20% rate, so \$10,000 in the student's name will reduce eligibility for need-based financial aid by \$2,000.

Independent student assets have an asset protection allowance which is based on marital status and age of the student. The net worth of an independent student without dependents other than a spouse is assessed at 20% over the asset protection allowance. The net worth of an independent student with dependents other than a spouse is assessed at 7% over the asset protection allowance.

### **Does FAFSA look at savings account?**

Yes, the FAFSA does factor in your savings account. The FAFSA will ask you to report all cash on hand. This means you will need to report the balance (on the day you are completing your FAFSA) of all your bank accounts, including your saving account.

### **Do FAFSA investments include retirement accounts**

Yes, and no. The yes part. The FAFSA will ask you to report untaxed income (for the respective tax year), which includes voluntary contributions to your retirement accounts. This includes the amounts you voluntarily contributed to your retirement accounts, like a 401(k), 403(b), IRA, or TSP plan. It doesn't include any mandatory contributions, or contributions made by your employer.

The no part. Your retirement account balance is not reported as an asset on the FAFSA.



## FAFSA Summary

You got through the tough stuff! Now it's time to review. You want to confirm the information you provided online is accurate. You can always go back and make edits not before you submit. While it's not impossible to make changes after you submit, not all changes can be handled by you. So take this time to review the provided information.

If you used the IRS DRT, you **will not** see the imported information. Sometimes that can deter students and parents from using the tool, since you cannot verify. If you work with your school's financial aid office, you can ask them to confirm the information provided, but they may not want to share the information with the student and/or the parent directly. If you're not comfortable using the IRS DRT because you want to confirm your income information is correct, it's best that you manually import the income information into the FAFSA.

## FAFSA Sign and Submit

Once you complete your application, it's time to sign and submit your application. If you have an FSA ID, you can sign and submit your application online or through the mobile app. Likewise, parents can also sign and submit the FAFSA if they have an FSA ID. If your parent was unable to get an FSA ID, that's okay. Print your parent's signature page, have them sign and mail in the signature page to the address provided.

## FAFSA Confirmation Page

If you were able to sign and submit electronically, you will be directed to a Confirmation Page. Print or save a copy just in case. The Confirmation Page will also show the student's Expected Family Contribution (EFC), estimated Federal Pell Grant and Federal Stafford Loan eligibility, as well as the list of schools scheduled to receive FAFSA data.





## Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

The information you input in your FAFSA will be used to calculate your EFC. The EFC is calculated by the U.S. Department of Education using a formula which is established by law.

This is the number calculated by the U.S. Department of Education. Overtime the EFC and what it means has shifted quite a bit. Your EFC is more of an index used by your college to determine how much financial aid you would receive if you were to attend their school.

Many think this is the amount of money your family will need to pay out of pocket, but it's not. And yes, we can hear relief from some of you! It is a great goal number for your family to contribute, but it is not required that your family pay this amount. Now for the tough news, you may owe more than your EFC depending on that amount of financial aid your [school offers you](#).

## What Do You Receive After You Submit the FAFSA?

In the coming days, or weeks depending on how you submitted your FAFSA, you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) which will summarize the information you provided. Your SAR will be emailed to you if you provided an email address, if you didn't, expect a copy in the mail within three weeks.

If you don't get one, you want to reach out to the U.S. Department of Education 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243), for TTY for the deaf or hard of hearing 1-800-730-8913 or log into your federal student aid account to check the status of your FAFSA.

You want to review your SAR to make sure all the information provided is correct. If there are any errors, you may need to make an update or correction.

After submitting, If you realize there is an error in your SAR, don't panic. There are steps you can take to correct the information.



## FAFSA Corrections

You can go back into your electronic application to make a correction, update, or an adjustment. You can make some corrections and updates on your own. However, if you need an adjustment you will need the help of your Financial Aid Office.

If you are unable to login to make corrections, you can make corrections on your SAR and mail them in. You want to confirm with the U.S. Department of Education that you are making corrections on the correct document, so make sure to give them a call to help you through the process: 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243), for TTY for the deaf or hard of hearing 1-800-730-8913.

### Common types of FAFSA correction:

- Updating an email address, mailing address, or other contact information
- Fixing visible typos - except for issues with your social security number and name matching. That may require the help of your Financial Aid Office.
- Adding or removing college

### What Happens After I Submit My FAFSA?

The information you provided on the FAFSA will be sent to the schools you listed on your FAFSA. They will take that information to determine your financial aid offer.

If you've been accepted to multiple schools, it's not time to start reviewing your financial aid offers from each school. You want to determine the type of financial aid you're being offered, and how much you would have to pay out of pocket to attend each school.

### FAFSA Verification

If you've been selected for FAFSA Verification, you should expect to hear from your school. Your school will ask you to verify certain information you reported on the FAFSA. **Do not ignore your schools request!** If you fail to provide the requested verification information, your financial aid could be delayed.



# FAFSA FAQ's

## **What Do I Do if My Parents Won't Fill Out the FAFSA?**

If the FAFSA determined you're a dependent undergraduate student, then you will be asked to provide parental information on your FAFSA. However, the FAFSA does give you an opportunity to indicate that you are unable to provide information from your parents, which will help determine if you are eligible for a dependency override or professional judgement review. [Here are the steps you need to follow to help you complete the FAFSA without required parental information.](#)

## **FAFSA for Graduate School Parent Information**

All graduate level students and above will be classified as independent students for FAFSA purposes. However, you may be given the opportunity to provide parental information. If you decide to provide parental information, it will not affect your federal student aid package. Some [graduate schools](#) may ask for this information to award institutional financial aid.

## **Can You Change Your Parent on FAFSA?**

If you've already submitted your FAFSA, then you need to reach out to the Financial Aid Office to help you. If you attempt to update or correct the FAFSA by changing the parent listed on the form, it will trigger verification. Your school would up be reaching out to you for additional documentation anyway, so it's best to be proactive and ask for their assistance.

## **Lying About Custodial Parent on FAFSA**

The very act of providing any intentionally misleading information on your FAFSA could lead to serious consequences. Committing fraud may result in fines of up to \$20,000 and up to five years in prison.

*It's always best to tell the truth.*



# FAFSA FAQ's

## **How do you fill out the FAFSA without parents?**

Don't panic if you are unable to provide the required parental information. The FAFSA will ask you questions to see if you're eligible for a dependency override.

## **FAFSA dependency override**

If you indicate that you are unable to provide parental information, the FAFSA will display a list of special circumstances. If one of these applies, you will be able to complete your FAFSA without providing parental information. This means you've qualified for a dependency override and will be treated as an independent undergraduate student.

If you don't qualify for one of the listed special circumstances, you won't be able to complete the FAFSA. It will be considered 'rejected'. However, you need to contact your school as soon as possible to explain your situation. In some instances, they may decide your situation qualifies for a dependency override. If not, they will determine if you qualify for a FAFSA professional judgment review.

## **What is FAFSA Professional Judgement Review?**

Your parent is refusing to help you is not enough to be considered an independent student. But your school could determine that you can complete the application without parental information. The only financial aid you will be able to receive is [Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan](#) funds from the federal student aid program. There could be other types of institutional aid your school may be willing to offer you. However, this will be at the discretion of your school, even your eligibility for unsubsidized loan funds.



# FAFSA FAQ's

## Who can I claim as a dependent on the FAFSA?

You don't claim "dependents" on the FAFSA. The FAFSA will ask you to verify household size and the rules for who is in your household are far different than the tax rules used by the IRS to determine a dependent for tax purposes.

## What is the income limit for FAFSA

There is no income limit to complete the FAFSA. If your family makes a certain level of income, you may be correct to assume that you may not qualify for much, if any, need-based aid. But you don't want to rule yourself out. Not all financial aid programs will have the same income criteria to qualify. And not all financial aid is need-based.

The FAFSA is also used to help you apply for certain types of non-need-based aid. For example, Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan funds are non-need-based loans. And some colleges may require you to complete the FAFSA to receive any type of aid, including merit aid.

Here's the bottom line, unless you are planning on paying directly out of pocket, you should complete the FAFSA.

## Do I Need to Report Parent Financial Information?

- If you are a dependent undergraduate student: Yes, you will need to report parent financial information for your [FAFSA parent\(s\)](#).
- If you are an independent undergraduate student: No, you are not required to report parent financial information.
- If you are a graduate student: No, you are not required to report parent financial information.



# FAFSA FAQ's

## FAFSA Guardian Income

If you are asking about reporting financial or income information of a legal guardian, or other guardian (like a grandparent, aunt, foster parent, sibling, etc.), they are not considered your FAFSA parent and you would not report their financial information.

If you are in a legal guardianship, you want to make sure you answered your [dependency status questions](#) accurately. If you did answer the questions correctly, and the FAFSA has classified you as a dependent student, you will need to provide parental information. You will then need to determine who your FAFSA parent is and determine if they are willing to help you complete your FAFSA.

If they are not willing to provide you with information, or there are other reasons you are not able to contact them, you will be able to note that in your FAFSA. Your application will be flagged and you will need to provide additional information to your financial aid office.

## Why Did I Not Qualify for Financial Aid?

Remember, schools classify student loans as financial aid. Depending on your school's [cost of attendance](#) and your [EFC](#), you may not be eligible for need-based financial aid.

However, if you're not seeing any federal student aid (like [Direct Subsidized Loans](#), [Direct Unsubsidized Loans](#)) on your financial aid offer, you may want to reach out to Financial Aid Office. You want to confirm they received your FAFSA information and you completed all necessary steps to receive financial aid.



# FAFSA FAQ's

## **I Didn't Get Enough Financial Aid**

After you completed all required financial aid forms you realize you still need more financial aid, all hope is not lost. You want to look into filing a financial aid appeal with your school. There are several reasons why someone may ask for additional financial aid. [We break down this process to help you file a financial aid appeal with your school.](#)

## **What Happens if You File the FAFSA Late?**

You don't want to [miss any deadlines](#). If your state awards financial aid on a first-come, first-served basis from the FAFSA release date, then you want to file it as soon as possible.

## **Can I Still Submit My FAFSA After the Deadline**

If you've missed a [school or state deadline](#), you can still file the FAFSA. You may be out of the running for state and school financial aid, but you will still be eligible for federal student aid. If you've missed the federal deadline, then you won't be able to file the FAFSA for that award year. Talk to your Financial Aid Office if you are getting close to the federal deadline.

## **FAFSA Head of Household**

If you (or your FAFSA parent) filed your taxes as Head of Household and you indicate that on FAFSA, then you can expect to have your FAFSA flagged by your Financial Aid Office. You will be asked to provide proof that you (or your parents) meet the qualification of Head of Household. If it turns out you do not qualify for Head of Household, you may be required to file an amended federal income tax return with the IRS and correct the necessary information on your FAFSA.

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