

FAFSA: Step By Step

Basic FAFSA Facts

What is it?

FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The federal government uses this form to determine your eligibility for financial aid, which includes: grants, work-study, scholarships and loans.

Why fill it out?

The FAFSA is used to determine how much aid you will receive. Think of it this way:

FAFSA → EFC → Financial Need → Financial Aid

EFC is Expected Family Contribution, which is the amount of money your family can be expected to contribute each year to your college costs.

What type of aid can I expect to receive?

Your school will try to meet your financial need through aid made up of funds from federal, state, school and private sources, as well as loans, grants and student employment.

Step 1: Get the FAFSA

You can get a copy of the FAFSA one of four ways:

1. Get a paper version from your college financial aid office or local library
2. Complete FAFSA on the Web: www.fafsa.ed.gov
3. Call **1-800-4-FED-AID** to ask for a copy
4. If you completed the FAFSA last year, you may receive a Renewal FAFSA through regular mail or a link via e-mail, which should arrive in early January.

Step 2: Fill out the FAFSA

Keep a completed copy for your records. For the 2005-2006 school year, use info from 2004. You'll need the following to fill out the form:

- Social security number
- 2004 W2 forms and other record of money earned
- Driver's license (if any)
- 2004 federal income tax return
- Parents' 2004 income tax return (if a dependent)
- 2004 untaxed income records (if any)
- Current bank statements
- Current mortgage and investment records (if any)
- Alien registration card (if not a U.S. citizen)

FAFSA Tips

- Fill out the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1. Early submission maximizes chances of receiving aid.
- Don't leave a field blank. If a question doesn't apply, enter "0."
- Fill out a FAFSA every year you are in college, even if you don't think you'll qualify for aid.
- Review your data every year. Your eligibility may change from year to year.
- If you completed a FAFSA last year, you may qualify for a Renewal FAFSA, a shorter version of the form. Not sure whether you qualify? Ask your college financial aid office or call 1-800-4-FED-AID.
- Sign the application. If you are filing as a dependent, make sure your parents sign too.
- Report ALL required sources of untaxed income (e.g., Social Security or child support).

* Remember that the FAFSA is FREE! If you need help, ask your financial aid office or call the FAFSA Help Desk at: 1-800-4-FED-AID.

Step 3: Review your Student Aid Report (SAR)

The SAR is proof that your FAFSA was received. Review it carefully. If you filed electronically, you should receive your SAR in 2-3 weeks (4-5 weeks if you filed a paper FAFSA).

What if I find errors on my SAR?

Report them immediately to your financial aid office and ask how you should make corrections. Unresolved errors could delay your aid.

What if I don't receive my SAR?

Call **1-800-433-3243 (1-800-4-FED-AID)** if you do not receive your SAR in 4-5 weeks. Provide your name, Social Security number and date of birth for verification.

Why is there an asterisk after my EFC?

It means your SAR has been selected for verification (happens to about 1 in 3 SARs). It means your college will compare your SAR with other documents to verify your financial status. If asked for verification, submit the information requested to your college's financial aid office ASAP.

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Questions? Concerns? Contact your school's financial aid office and/or call 1-800-4-FED-AID!

FAFSA on the Web: What You Need to Know

Basic FAFSA on the Web Facts

What is it?

FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The federal government uses this form to determine your eligibility for aid, including: grants, work-study, scholarships and loans. FAFSA on the Web is the online version of a paper FAFSA.

Why would I want to complete my FAFSA on the Web instead of on paper?

- The federal processor can do an "edit check" of your information and alert you of mistakes before you submit.
- The process is quicker. Receive your SAR in 2-3 weeks (or 3-5 days if you include an e-mail address) vs. 4-5 weeks if you fill out the paper version.
- Eliminate postal service problems or delays.

How do I get started?

Visit www.fafsa.ed.gov and click "Before Beginning a FAFSA" to get started.

FAFSA Renewal

If you filled out the complete FAFSA in a previous year, you may qualify for a Renewal FAFSA, a shorter version of the regular FAFSA form. Ask your college financial aid office or call 1-800-4-FED-AID to find out if you qualify.

FAFSA Web Tips

Fill out a sample FAFSA worksheet: Click "Before Beginning a FAFSA," then "Print a Pre-Application Worksheet." Use the print-out as a guide before committing answers online.

DO NOT enter online answers directly from the paper FAFSA! Web vs paper FAFSA questions are in a different order!

Save your FAFSA online if you can't finish it in one session: Click the "Save" button at the bottom of each step to save info for 45 days. Use a password (which you select at the start of the process) to retrieve your information later.

Fill out the FAFSA each year you're in college: Changes in your financial situation could translate to additional aid.

Review all data on the FAFSA every year: If you fill out the Renewal FAFSA, your eligibility may change from year to year, depending on your family's circumstances.

Your college may have other financial aid forms: Check your financial aid office for more information. If you have any questions, contact your school or call 1-800-4-FED-AID.

Signing the FAFSA

Whether you complete a paper or electronic FAFSA, you will have to provide your signature (and parent's signature if you are a dependent student). Here are three ways:

1. Use your 4-digit PIN (see below) issued by the U.S. Department of Education to electronically sign your FAFSA. (Your parents will also need their own PINs to electronically sign your FAFSA.)
2. Print the signature page, get the required signatures and mail the form to the address listed on your signature page.
3. The third option is the slowest and is not recommended. Wait until you receive your Student Aid Report (SAR), get the required signature(s) and return it through the U.S. Postal Service via certified mail.

Remember that the FAFSA is FREE! If you need help, ask your college's financial aid office or call the FAFSA Help Desk at: 1-800-4-FED-AID.

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PIN: Your Key to Online Identification

The Personal Identification Number (PIN) is the code that the U.S. Department of Education uses to identify you online. A PIN allows you to:

- Electronically sign your FAFSA to speed up the process
- Check the status of your FAFSA
- Make corrections to your personal information online
- Fill out an online Renewal FAFSA next year

To obtain a PIN, eligible students and parents can visit www.pin.ed.gov. Click on "Apply for PIN" at the bottom of the page. You can choose to receive your PIN via e-mail or regular mail. You must submit your name, date of birth and social security number to receive a PIN. It takes about three business days to receive a PIN electronically.

Do not reveal your PIN to anyone. The PIN allows anyone to electronically sign federal documents and access confidential information.

FAFSA on the Web: www.fafsa.ed.gov
More about your PIN: www.pin.ed.gov

FastTip: Keep a completed copy of the FAFSA for your records.