

Applying for Federal Student Aid

Financial aid is a fact of life when it comes to higher education. Here are some tips provided by the U.S. Department of Education to make applying for federal student aid using the Department's financial aid form, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), easier to decipher.

1. Planning Ahead

- Plan Ahead. In most cases, before filling the FAFSA out online you'll first need your own personal "PIN" number. Go to www.pin.ed.gov and follow the instructions. It will take 3-5 days for your PIN to become active.
- PIN Benefits. Your PIN number offers several benefits—it serves as your legally binding, online signature; it helps protect your privacy; and it allows you to make changes to your application.

2. Gathering Facts for the Application Form

- While awaiting your PIN number confirmation, collect and prepare the information you'll need to fill out the application. This includes your most recent income tax return and W-2 forms. If you haven't completed this year's taxes, don't worry, just estimate the information now and update it later.
- Other documents you will need may include:
 - ✓ Your driver's license
 - ✓ Proof of citizenship or legal status
 - ✓ Any Social Security or welfare benefits received or paid (if applicable)
 - ✓ You and your family's net worth, including savings and checking account balances, investments and assets
 - ✓ The Federal School Code of the school(s) to which you've applied or been accepted. You can look up the federal school code list at www.fafsa.ed.gov
 - ✓ Your student enrollment status (full-time or part-time)
 - ✓ Your housing plans as a student
 - ✓ The name, Social Security number and signature of anyone (other than a spouse or parents) who helped you prepare the application

3. Filling Out the Form

- You have your PIN in hand and have done a practice run. Now you're ready to fill out your financial aid form. Go to www.fafsa.ed.gov. Take your time. If you need to take a break, go ahead and close out—your information will be saved. Submit your application online, and a confirmation page will appear.
- You can expect your Student Aid Report (SAR), which summarizes your application, within 72 hours. This is your official record, and should be kept when applying for financial aid or scholarships from another public or private source. Please note that receipt of your SAR is not proof that you have been approved for financial aid. The school(s) that you have selected will notify you of your eligibility for federal, state, and institutional aid. In the meantime, if you want to check on your application's status or make changes to it, no problem—just return to www.fafsa.ed.gov and type in your PIN number.

Practice Worksheet

To do a practice run on paper, download the FAFSA worksheet at: <http://studentaid.ed.gov/worksheet>—especially if you are going to file online.

Source: The U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid information at www.ed.gov/students/college/aid/paying.html

Still Have Questions?

- Call 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)
- Visit Frequently Asked Questions at <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/faqs.jsp>
- Visit the Department of Education's "Student Aid on the Web" site at www.studentaid.ed.gov
- Contact your financial aid administrator