

10 FAFSA Mistakes that Affect Financial Aid

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Avoid these 10 common FAFSA mistakes and boost your financial aid potential.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), is a Department of Education managed form required by federal and state governments. Colleges also require FAFSA information from students that wish to qualify for financial aid, federal work-study, and other financial aid programs, such as the TEACH Grant. In addition to scholarships, financial aid is a helpful way to pay for school. College students use the money to pay for tuition and fees. Financial aid applications ask questions about a student's personal and family financial circumstances in order to determine how much they can pay for college. The results of your FAFSA are sent to the college(s) you chosen. Next, the college(s) will create a student aid report based upon the information you included in your FAFSA.

A mistake on your FAFSA can delay the processing of your application for financial aid. If your FAFSA is verified and contains errors, it can cost you.

Avoid the Most Common FAFSA Mistakes:

1. Leaving a field blank.

If the answer is zero or the question does not apply to you, write in a zero. If you leave a question blank, the processor will assume that you forgot to answer.

2. Not using the 1040 federal tax return for income reporting and reporting taxes paid.

If you use your W-2 and 1099 forms, compare them with the prior year's income tax return to make sure you did not overlook any source of income. The IRS Data Retrieval Tool(IRS DRT) is also helpful in preventing errors. It can be used to copy the answers to some FAFSA questions directly from your federal income tax return.

3. Forgetting to report all the required sources of untaxed income.

These include veterans' noneducation benefits, child support and workers compensation or disability income.

4. Not reporting total household income if your parent has remarried.

Your stepparent, if married to the legal parent whose information you're reporting, must report their financial information in addition to the financial information for your custodial parent.

5. Excluding yourself from household size.

Even if you didn't live there during the previous year, you should always include yourself as part of your parent's household.

6. Forgetting to sign the application.

If you're filing as a dependent, both you and your parents must sign. If you file online, you and your parents can sign the form electronically using your FSA ID.

7. Waiting until the last minute or submitting your FAFSA late.

Remember to submit your FAFSA on time. The sooner you can submit or renew your FAFSA from the Oct. 1 release date, the better. Priority for programs with limited funds is often given to students filing the FAFSA as soon as possible. The FAFSA has a 21-month application cycle. Meaning the 2023-2024 FAFSA deadline is June 30, 2023, to qualify for federal student aid. This form will be available for students and parents on October 1, 2022.

8. Not knowing your state's financial aid deadline.

State deadlines for financial aid and grants vary; some states award their grants on a first-come, first-served basis. In order to get the most financial aid you can, be sure to get your FAFSA submitted in the fall—as close to the Oct. 1 FAFSA release date as you can. Doing this will move your FAFSA to the top of your state's FAFSAs-received list!

9. Skimming questions or dismissing directions.

Read the instructions and questions carefully. If you're unclear about a question or are having trouble filling out the FAFSA, check the FAQ section on the FAFSA website. You can also contact your financial aid office.

10. Failing to create your FSA ID before you start the form.

You need this to complete the federal student aid FAFSA form, make corrections and to electronically sign. Students and parents need their own separate FSA IDs to officially complete the FAFSA.

To avoid FAFSA mistakes, get started early and use the online version of the FAFSA. As you start the form, use the FAFSA checklist to ensure you've gathered all the necessary

information. A correct FAFSA form can be your best asset in securing financial aid to pay for college, in addition to college scholarships.