PRO TIPS FOR THE FAFSA FORM

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the first and most important step in accessing financial aid for college, trade school, or other postsecondary education. The FAFSA typically opens each year on **October 1**, though recent updates may shift that date slightly, be sure to check StudentAid.gov for the most current information. Even if you're unsure whether you'll qualify for aid, it's still important to complete the FAFSA. Many scholarships, grants, and colleges require it for awarding any type of financial assistance, including merit-based aid. Submitting the FAFSA ensures you're considered for the maximum amount of aid available, and you can always decline any offer you don't need. **If you need help at any point in the process, the College & Career Center is here to support you and answer any questions.**

TIPS FOR PREPARING TO FILL OUT THE FAFSA® FORM:

Get a StudentAid.gov account before filling out the FAFSA® form.

Before starting the FAFSA form, you'll need to create a StudentAid.gov account. Your contributors—anyone (your spouse, your biological or adoptive parent, or your parent's spouse) required to provide information on your FAFSA form—will each need their own StudentAid.gov account too, which should be created before they enter the FAFSA form.

As a student, you'll be required to enter your Social Security number (SSN) to create a StudentAid.gov account unless you're a citizen of the Freely Associated States. However, your contributors who don't have an SSN can create a StudentAid.gov account to complete their section of your FAFSA form.

If a contributor has an SSN, you're required to provide this number when inviting them to contribute to your FAFSA form. Do not indicate that a contributor doesn't have an SSN simply because you don't know the number. If they do have an SSN, indicating that they don't will cause delays when they try to create an account and contribute the required information on your form.

Learn more about creating a StudentAid.gov account. We recommend printing a copy—or taking a screenshot—of the information your contributor enters on the "Personal Information" page when they create their StudentAid.gov account. You will need to enter this same information exactly as entered when inviting the contributor to your FAFSA form. Differences as small as a missing period or using "Road" instead of "Rd" when entering an address lead to errors that will prevent the contributor from entering your FAFSA form.

HAVE YOUR DOCUMENTS READY:

Be prepared so you can complete your form in one session. You might need the following documents as you fill out the form:

-Tax returns*

-Records of child support received

-Current balances of cash, savings, and checking accounts

-Net worth of investments, businesses, and farms

*You'll be able to provide consent and approval to have most of your financial information imported directly from the IRS, but you should keep your tax returns handy for additional questions.

Learn more about what you need to fill out your FAFSA form. If you gather these things in advance, you'll be able to complete and submit your form quickly. Any contributors you invite to your form will need to provide the same information for themselves.

HAVE YOUR CONTRIBUTOR INFORMATION READY:

To invite contributors to your FAFSA form, you'll be asked to provide their:

-first and last name;

-SSN (if they have one);

-date of birth;

-email address (and mailing address, if they don't have an SSN).

To avoid issues with your FAFSA form, list contributor information exactly as it appears on their Social Security card or legal identification card. Avoid using numbers or extra spaces when entering their name. If the contributor has a suffix in their name (e.g., John Paul Jr., or John Paul III), leave that out of the invitation. Also, if they have a StudentAid.gov account, make sure the personal information you enter exactly matches the information they provided when creating their account.

When you fill out the FAFSA form, you'll answer questions that will determine who needs to be a contributor on your form. However, you may be able to identify your contributors now to get a head start on collecting the information you'll need to invite them to your form.

To find out if your parent(s) will be a contributor on your FAFSA form, check out the Is My Parent a Contributor When I Fill Out My FAFSA® Form? infographic or the Who's My FAFSA Parent? wizard.

TIPS FOR FILLING OUT THE FAFSA® FORM:

You (the student) should complete your section of the form first. We strongly recommend that you (the student) start the form and complete your section first to save time and prevent errors.

When you fill out the student section, you'll answer questions to determine your dependency status and if anyone else, such as your parent(s), must contribute to your form. If you don't start the form first, or if you and your contributors are working in your form at the same time, your contributors may have more difficulty completing their section or may even spend time providing information that's not required.

Starting the form first will also prevent data entry mistakes, such as your parent accidentally entering their own information when they should be entering yours. Once you've completed your section, be sure to sign the form before saving and exiting.

To avoid errors, only one person at a time should be logged in to the FAFSA form. Each person should complete their entire section and sign the form before another contributor logs in to start their section.

READ QUESTIONS AND DEFINITIONS CAREFULLY:

When filling out your form, read each question and definition carefully. Dependent vs. Independent, Parent, Number of Family Members (Family Size), Unusual Circumstances, Direct Unsubsidized Loan Only, Net Worth of Investments, Net Worth of Businesses and Investment Farms.

CONSULT IN-FORM RESOURCES IF YOU NEED HELP:

Use the help text and help articles (accessible via the question mark icon) embedded in the form if you're not sure how to answer a question. Visit the FAFSA Help Center to find answers to frequently asked questions, help articles, and resources.

CLEAR YOUR CACHE IF YOU ENVOUNTER AN UNKNOWN ERROR:

If you receive an "unknown error" message while completing the FAFSA form, you may be able to bypass the error by completing the following steps:

-Log out of the form.

-Clear your internet browser's cache.

-Log back in to the form.

Learn more about how to clear your browser's cache. If you continue to experience issues after clearing your cache, contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center for assistance.

DON'T FORGET TO REVIEW, SIGN, AND SUBMIT THE FORM!

Review your answers prior to submission. Protect against form glitches or typos by reviewing all of your answers prior to submission. You can review all of the answers you provided in your section on the review page, which you'll see before you provide your signature. You can view all of the responses by selecting "Expand All" or expand each section individually. To edit a response, select the question's hyperlink.

Monitor your form's status, and don't forget to submit the FAFSA form after all of your contributors have signed and all sections are completed. If you've been notified that all of your contributors have signed and completed their sections, and your student section is also complete, you should check the sections of your form to ensure that all questions are answered.

-Log in to StudentAid.gov using your account username and password.

-Navigate to your account Dashboard.

-Select your FAFSA form from the "My Activity" page

-Once you've accessed your form, review the information submitted in each section.

-If all sections are complete and all of your contributors have signed, follow the prompts to submit your form.

Once your application is submitted, you can view all of the information entered on your form, along with a summary of who contributed to your form, on the Summary page (accessed from the "My Activity" page of the account Dashboard).

REMEMBER THAT IF YOU MAKE A MISTAKE, YOU CAN CORRECT IT:

If you make a mistake when submitting your FAFSA form—for instance, if you submit your form without required contributor information or without your signature—you can correct it after your form is processed. Learn about how to make FAFSA corrections.

Not sure if your form has been processed? Check the status of your form on StudentAid.gov:

-Log in using your account username and password.

-Navigate to your account Dashboard.

-Select your FAFSA Form from the "My Activity" section of the page.

Content adapted from Federal Student Aid, U.S. Department of Education: *Tips for Preparing to Fill Out the FAFSA® Form*
https://studentaid.gov/articles/tips-to-fill-out-fafsa-form/