

# FAFSA Cheat Sheet



**Keep these tips and tricks handy when filling out your FAFSA to save time and avoid mistakes**

## BE PREPARED

- Make sure you're on the right website: [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov). There are a lot of copycat sites that will charge a fee. FAFSA is free to file.
- Select the right school year for your application. If you're graduating in 2020, you should complete the 2020-2021 application (it refers to the year the student will be in college or career school).
- Students and parents must **both** have an FSA ID in order to electronically begin and sign the application. Students and parents must also each have an accessible, working email address for them to send verification. If you have a FAFSA PIN from a previous year filing FAFSA, you must still create an FSA ID this year.

## FORM TIPS

- Where applicable, enter "0" for financial information instead of leaving a box blank.
- The IRS Data Retrieval Tool can import your tax return information directly from the IRS. It prevents errors and avoids a request for a tax transcript. If that's not available for you to use, manually enter parental tax return information and pay close attention to the directions.
- High school seniors: make sure to select "Never attended college/1st year" for grade level, even if you are in dual-enrollment (it's still considered high school for FAFSA purposes).
- Select that you have received a high school diploma, if it is expected by the end of the school year.
- Use the "Next" and "Previous" buttons on the webpage, not the back and forward arrows on your web browser. Back and forward arrows will log out the user and you could lose information entered on previous web pages.
- Keep an eye out for color-coded sections to indicate which questions are for parents and which are for students to answer.
- When selecting the type of housing planned for each school you're listing, choose either "On Campus" or "Off Campus." If you select "With Parents," you may not get as much financial aid offered. If that is your decided housing arrangement, select "Off Campus."
- For male students, ages 18-25, you must be registered with Selective Service to receive financial aid. If the male has not yet registered, or are unsure, check "Yes, Register Me."

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## HELPFUL HINTS

- Not sure about work-study? The best answer is to select “Yes” and you’ll have more time to decide. It doesn’t obligate you to accept work, and you’ll still be responsible to find the work-study once on campus if you decide to pursue it.
- It’s not required for students to enter their driver’s license information.
- Household size and exemptions are not necessarily the same. Exemptions are counting the previous year, and household size refers to the school year which you’re applying for financial aid. Household size includes parent (and if married, the spouse); the number of children (even if they do not live at home) who will receive more than half of their support from the parent between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020.
- Only include information from parent, stepparent or adoptive parents. Do not include information from legal guardians, grandparents, siblings, aunts or uncles unless the student has been legally adopted. If parents are divorced, include income from parent the student lives with the majority of the time or who provides the majority of the financial support.
- You are limited to listing 10 College Codes, so select schools that you are most interested in attending. If you want your FAFSA to go to more than 10 schools:
  - Give the Date Release Number (DRN) to school(s) not listed on the FAFSA (it will be listed on the confirmation page of your FAFSA application);
  - List 10 schools, wait for the Student Aid Report (SAR) to arrive, then correct the SAR by replacing some or all of the original schools with other schools;
  - Call 1-800-433-3243 and provide the DRN to request a change to the SAR; or
  - Use your FSA ID to login to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) and click “make FAFSA corrections.” NOTE: any changes/corrections to FAFSA will only go to your second set of listed schools.

## COMMON ERRORS

- Your name doesn’t match your Social Security card exactly. If a parent’s or student’s name has a suffix, such as Jr. or III, include a space between the last name and the suffix.
- Do not enter the same amount for your adjusted gross income and income tax paid. On your tax return, the AGI is on the first page of the 1040 at the bottom (line 37) and income tax paid is on the second page of the 1040 toward middle of page under “other tax.” It will say “total tax.” Yes, it can sometimes be “0.”
- Forget to submit FAFSA. Once you’ve agreed to the terms and electronically signed your FAFSA, it is crucial to click “Submit” and receive a confirmation message.
- Not entering the exact same name, address and filing status that is on the income tax forms (1040). If you don’t, the online form won’t allow use of the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to transfer info. This means if your tax return has “Street” written out; do not use the “St.” abbreviation. Also, do not type over or correct any info that is electronically transferred.