

How do you **apply**?

There are seven steps.

1 Collect your information

- **Your Social Security number.** You'll need it to apply for most federal and state aid. If you don't have one, apply at your local Post Office or Social Security office. If you're a dependent student, you'll also need your parents' Social Security numbers. (If your parents don't have Social Security numbers, enter all zeros when asked for them on the FAFSA.) To learn more, go to www.ssa.gov or call 800.772.1213 (TTY 800.325.0778).

- **Your Federal Student Aid PIN, and one of your parents' PINs, if you're a dependent student.** Go to www.pin.ed.gov to get your Federal Student Aid personal identification number, or PIN, in real time. You can even select your own PIN.

Your PIN can be used to e-sign your FAFSA, make corrections to it, add another school, and more. You can use it each year to apply for aid. It's important not to share your PIN with anyone.

- **Your financial records.** This includes your W-2 forms or other records of money earned, current bank statements, business and investment records, and records of untaxed income (for example, veteran benefits, Social Security, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or General Assistance) as well as your or your parents' 2009 federal tax return, if you file one.
- **An e-mail address.** If you provide one, you'll receive your FAFSA results sooner.
- **Your driver's license number,** if you have one.
- **Your Alien Registration number,** if you're not a U.S. citizen.

2 Fill out the FAFSA on the Web Worksheet

That way, you'll have all the information you need in front of you when you're ready to complete the FAFSA. The FAFSA on the Web Worksheet lists all the questions in the same order as they appear on the online FAFSA. English and Spanish versions are available starting in November or December from your school or at www.fafsa.ed.gov. You can also order a Braille version of the worksheet by calling 800.433.3243.



There's plenty of **Free Help**—you should never have to pay for the FAFSA or to have it completed for you. Attend a free workshop! Go to www.californiacashforcollege.org.



Taxes not filed yet?

Don't wait until you or your parents have filed a tax return to submit the FAFSA. Instead, get your FAFSA in early using estimated income figures based on last year's return or payroll stubs. (If your estimates are significantly higher or lower than your actual numbers, your EFC may change and your financial aid offers may be revised.)

Your assets and financial aid

The FAFSA asks for information about the value of certain assets, as of the day you fill out the form, including:

- savings
- stocks
- bonds
- mutual funds
- money market funds
- real estate investments
- trusts
- education savings accounts owned by your parents (or you, if you're an independent student), including Coverdell savings accounts, 529 college savings plans and the refund value of 529 prepaid tuition plans

The FAFSA doesn't count the value of:

- your family home or farm
- annuities
- life insurance plans
- any non-education IRAs, 401(k), Keogh or other retirement plans (though you must report contributions for 2009 to any tax-deferred pension or savings plan)

Are you dependent or independent?

Whether you're a dependent or an independent student will determine whose financial information you'll need to report on the FAFSA, and the types and amounts of financial aid you may be eligible to receive.

You're considered an independent student if at least one of the following situations describes you—not whether you live on your own, or if your parents no longer list you as a dependent on their tax return or feel it's not their responsibility to help you pay for college:

- You were born before January 1, 1987.
- You'll be working on a master's or doctorate degree or a graduate certificate in the fall of 2010.
- You're married as of the date you complete the FAFSA.
- You have children who receive more than half their support from you.
- You have dependents other than your spouse or children who live with you and who receive more than half their support from you.
- At any time since you turned age 13, you were in foster care or were a dependent or ward of the court.
- You had no living parent (biological or adoptive) when you were age 13, even if you are now adopted.
- You're an emancipated minor or are in legal guardianship as determined by the court in your state of legal residence.
- You are a self-supporting, unaccompanied youth who is homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- You're a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces (or will be a veteran as of June 30, 2011), or you attended a service academy and were released under a condition other than dishonorable.
- You're currently serving on active duty (other than training) in the U.S. Armed Forces.

If none of these apply to you, but you believe your situation makes you independent, contact the financial aid office at the college you hope to attend and ask about a "dependency override."

Which parent's financial information should you use on your FAFSA?

It doesn't matter who claimed you as a tax exemption.

- For divorced or separated parents, give answers for the parent you lived with more during the past 12 months. (If you didn't live with one parent more than the other, then answer for the parent who provided more support during the past 12 months.)
- If your parent is widowed or single, answer the questions about that parent.
- If your parent has remarried as of the day you complete the FAFSA, answer the questions about that parent and the person your parent married (your stepparent).

If you don't know where your parents are or if you left home due to irreconcilable differences, let your high school counselor or college financial aid office know.

For the FAFSA, the following people are not your parents unless they've adopted you:

- grandparents
- foster parents
- legal guardians
- older brothers or sisters

(For the education-level question only, answer for your biological or adoptive parents.)

California state aid and domestic partnerships

When determining eligibility for state financial aid, California recognizes domestic partnerships.

- If your parents are in a registered domestic partnership, you'll be considered the same as a student with married parents, including financial and residency requirements.
- If you're in a registered domestic partnership, you'll be considered the same as a married student.

After receiving your California Aid Report, go to www.csac.ca.gov/pubs/forms/grnt_frm/g-37.pdf to complete the Registered Domestic Partnership Reporting Form so that the California Student Aid Commission can further evaluate your eligibility for California state aid. For more on registered domestic partnerships, visit www.sos.ca.gov/dpregistry.

The federal government does not recognize domestic partnerships.

- When completing your FAFSA, provide information only for the parent who provided more than half of your support.
- If you're an independent student in a domestic partnership, provide only your information.