

## FAFSA Basics

Whether you're still in high school or pursuing a postgraduate degree or somewhere in between, the first step in determining your potential financial aid is to fill out the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA). The amount of aid—which can take the form of loans, grants, or work study—is determined after the government receives and processes your application. Timing is critical: You should apply as soon as possible after Jan. 1 of the year you plan to start school

As with most things, some preparation will make the application process much smoother. Assemble these documents before starting your application (some might not apply to you):

- Social Security card
- Driver's license
- Permanent resident card
- W-2 forms and other previous year records of money earned
- Income tax return for previous year
- Records of child support paid
- Records of taxable earnings from Federal Work-Study or other need-based work programs
- Records of student grant, scholarship and fellowship aid, including AmeriCorps awards you (or your parents) included in your adjusted gross income on your tax return
- Current stock, bond, and other investment records
- Current business and farm records
- Current bank statements

The easiest way to submit your FAFSA application is online at [fafsa.ed.gov](https://fafsa.ed.gov). If you're more comfortable with hard copy, you can print a copy from the FAFSA site or pick one up at a library.

The online version has a description and instructions to the right of each question. For the paper version, there are step-by-step instructions in a PDF at [studentaid.ed.gov](https://studentaid.ed.gov). If the instructions are unclear, there are a variety of contact options to ask questions, including online chat, email, or phone support.