

Tips for Completing the FAFSA

Most errors on the FAFSA are made because students and/or parents fail to read the instructions or don't fully understand the instructions. Please read ALL of the FAFSA instructions carefully. If you are still unclear, contact your college financial aid office or any of the following offices for assistance:

1 (800) 433-3243	General questions about financial aid, completing the FAFSA, duplicate Student Aid Reports, application status
1 (800) 730-8913	TDD version of the above
(651) 642-0567	MN Office of Higher Education - FAFSA assistance, questions about Minnesota state financial aid
1 (800) 657-3866	MN Office of Higher Education - Toll-free number
1 (800) 627-3529	MN Office of Higher Education - TDD number

- You can now complete your FAFSA on the Web as early as October 1, at www.fafsa.gov. Try to submit the FAFSA as early as possible in order to maximize your chances for college scholarships. The FAFSA will now be using income information from two years prior, so you will not have to wait for your taxes to be filed.
- The FAFSA on the Web allows families to transfer information provided on federal tax returns from the IRS database to the FAFSA on the Web. Transferring tax information from the IRS to your FAFSA will cut down the amount of time the college needs to verify the information supplied on your FAFSA.
- If you and/or your parents would like to attend a workshop where a presenter helps families complete the FAFSA and learn about how to pay for college, check for locations here: www.mafaa.org (click on Students and Parents) or at www.minnesotacollegegoal.org.
- When there is no monetary value to report for an item, use -0- (zero). Do NOT leave the item blank unless you are instructed to skip a section. Blank responses can delay the application because the processor sometimes assumes you overlooked the item.
- Be very careful when reporting your social security number and name. An error in either of these can cause significant delays. Make sure you report your name on the FAFSA as it appears on your Social Security card. If the name on your social security card needs to be updated, do that before you complete the FAFSA. If you do report the wrong social security number on the FAFSA, it is best to complete a new FAFSA using the correct number rather than correcting the number on your original FAFSA.
- Be careful when reporting your date of birth. This information is used for several database checks, and an error can create delays. A common mistake is to report the current year instead of your year of birth.
- If you are a male between the ages of 18 and 25, be sure to register with the Selective Service. You can do so within the FAFSA on the Web, or directly with the Selective Service at www.sss.gov. In most cases, failure to register with the Selective Service will make you ineligible for federal financial aid.
- Students sometimes answer questions about degrees and grade levels incorrectly. Common errors include reporting a professional degree when the student is pursuing a vocational program at a technical school. "Professional" generally means an advanced degree to practice medicine, dentistry, or law. Another common error is for high school seniors to report their grade level as 5th year, when their college grade level should be reported as first year undergraduate. High school seniors sometimes mistakenly report having a degree, when that item refers to a bachelor's degree earned by college students and not a high school diploma.
- When completing the dependency determination section, you will have to provide parental information on the FAFSA if you answer "no" to all items in that section. If there are unusual circumstances that would prevent you from reporting parental information on your application, you should submit the FAFSA on the Web without parental data and then contact your college financial aid office to inquire about a dependency override.

- If your biological/adoptive parents are married, provide information about both parents on the FAFSA. If your biological/adoptive parents are separated/divorced, you will only have to provide information about the parent you lived with the most in the last year. If you lived with both separated/divorced parents for an equal amount of time in the last year, provide information about the parent who provided the most financial support to you. Once the correct separated/divorced parent is selected, you will also have to provide information about a stepparent if the selected parent has remarried. If your biological/adoptive parents never married, but are living together, report information for both parents on the FAFSA. This includes same-sex parents whether they are married or unmarried if they are both your biological and/or adoptive parents.
- If you (the student) are legally married, you should apply as independent and include information about your spouse. This includes same-sex couples who were married in a state that allows same-sex marriages, regardless of where you now live. If you are living with your opposite or same-sex partner, but are not married, you must apply as unmarried.
- When completing items about household size, be sure to read the instructions for that item on the FAFSA. Also, make sure you do NOT include parents in the number of people in your parents' household who will be college students.
- If your family has unusual circumstances (such as divorce, death of a parent, loss of employment, loss of income or benefits, homelessness, unusually high medical expenses, active military service, natural disaster, foster care placement, etc.) that might affect your need for student financial aid, please be sure to consult with the financial aid office at the college you plan to attend. The financial aid director may be able to use professional judgment to adjust your financial aid eligibility.
- Sign the FAFSA and have at least one parent whose information is provided on the form sign the FAFSA. You and your parent can apply for a FSA ID while completing the FAFSA on the Web so you can sign the form electronically. Missing signatures cause delays in processing. (Note: There are special exceptions for parents unable to sign due to active military duty or natural disaster. Your high school counselor may sign for your parents if they are not in the U.S. and can't be contacted, their address is unknown or they are physically/mentally unable to sign. This will require printing a paper signature page for FAFSA on the Web and mailing it to the FAFSA processor.)
- Before you submit your FAFSA on the Web, carefully review the information on the summary page to make sure it is correct. Once it is submitted, you will not be able to access it to make corrections until it has been processed, which takes two to three days.
- After you submit FAFSA on the Web, you will see a confirmation page with a link to the web page for Minnesota's financial aid application. Be sure to click on the link and complete the student eligibility questionnaire used for state financial aid programs. If you miss this link on the FAFSA on the Web page, you will receive a follow-up email from the MN Office of Higher Education with a link to the state questionnaire if you are attending a Minnesota college that requires its students to complete the questionnaire.
- After the FAFSA is submitted, you should receive an output document called the Student Aid Report, or SAR. If you provided an email address on the FAFSA, you will receive an email with a link to this information within three to five days. The SAR will indicate your family's Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and tell you if you are eligible for a Federal Pell Grant. Carefully review the SAR to look for any errors. If corrections need to be made, you can make corrections on-line at www.fafsa.gov.

If you would like more information about financial aid or would like to use a calculator to estimate your EFC and eligibility for financial aid, please visit our Agency web site at www.ohe.state.mn.us.