

## 14 Tips for Completing the FAFSA

- 1 Get an early start. Pick up a paper FAFSA or go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) to get an idea of the questions you need to answer.
- 2 Apply for a PIN in the fall at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) to e-sign your FAFSA on the Web. Your parents can also get a PIN.
- 3 Gather these materials beforehand:
  - the FAFSA, if filing on paper
  - your PIN, if filing online
  - your driver's license, if you have one
  - your Social Security number and your parents' numbers. If you don't have a number, apply for one in the fall at your local post office or Social Security office. To learn more, go to [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) or call 800.772.1213 (TTY 800.325.0778).
  - your federal income tax return, with all schedules
  - current bank statements, mortgage information, business, farm or investment records
  - records of untaxed income—welfare, Social Security and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits
  - your Alien Registration Card, if you're not a U.S. citizen
- 4 Read the instructions thoroughly. Work through each step carefully to avoid mistakes. Careless errors can cause processing delays, which could mean missed deadlines and dollars.
- 5 Complete the Pre-Application Worksheet at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov), if you're filing online and prefer to fill something out in writing first. It lists the FAFSA questions and provides boxes for your answers. The order of the questions follows that of the online FAFSA, which differs from the paper FAFSA.
- 6 Spell your name as it appears on your Social Security card. Using a nickname or other name will delay processing. (If your name has changed, you'll need to update your records with the Social Security Administration.)
- 7 Be sure to provide your parents' income information if you're a dependent student (you answered no to all questions in step three).
- 8 Use estimates if you don't have a completed tax return. It's easier to fill out the FAFSA if you have a completed return, but if you don't, you can use estimates rather than missing a deadline. Estimates can be corrected later on your SAR. (Keep in mind that if your estimates are significantly higher or lower than your actual numbers, your financial aid offer will not be accurate.)
- 9 Don't skip the drug question. A drug conviction doesn't necessarily make you ineligible for federal aid, but colleges are not allowed to provide federal aid to

students who don't answer this question. Students with convictions will receive a worksheet with their SAR to determine if their conviction affects their eligibility for federal aid. Those ineligible for federal aid may still be eligible for state, college or private aid and can regain their eligibility early by completing a drug rehabilitation program or having their conviction reversed or set aside.

- 10** Avoid peak hours if you're filing online—you'll find faster response times at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) after 8 p.m. Pacific Time.
- 11** Use only Title IV codes for colleges, available from your high school counselor or college financial aid administrator or at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). If you use any other type of school code or abbreviate the names of colleges, your FAFSA information won't be forwarded.
- 12** Be sure you and at least one parent sign the FAFSA, if you're a dependent student. Unsigned forms will not be processed.
- 13** Keep a photocopy or printout of your FAFSA. Also keep copies of all the worksheets and financial records you used to complete the FAFSA. Your college may ask to see them.
- 14** Don't mail your FAFSA before January 1. If you do, it will be returned unprocessed and you'll need to file again.

**TIP**

You may find Web sites that offer help filing the FAFSA for a fee. These sites aren't affiliated with or endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education. You shouldn't pay these sites for assistance that's provided for free at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) or by calling toll free 800.433.3243.