

# Frequently Asked Uncommon FAFSA Questions

## **Q. Where can I go to get assistance if I have questions while I am completing the FAFSA?**

**A.** Go to [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov) and select the “Help” icon at the top of any page of the application. The “Help” page lists all of the available options for getting additional assistance, including a live help option that is available through a secure online chat session with one of our customer service representatives. You can call us at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). TTY users can call 1-800-730-8913. Lastly, you also can e-mail us with any technical issues you may have while you are completing the application. The address is [FederalStudentAidCustomerService@ed.gov](mailto:FederalStudentAidCustomerService@ed.gov).

## **Q. I don’t have a computer with Internet access. What do I do?**

**A.** You can usually find Internet access at your local library, high school, or a financial aid office at a nearby campus. Over 99 percent of FAFSA filers apply online. See *How Do I Complete the FAFSA* on page 5 to find out more about the benefits of completing your application online.

## **Q. Why does ED ask for income information from the prior, prior year?**

**A.** This year, the FAFSA will be using 2015 tax income which will allow more students and families to complete their FAFSA using income information imported electronically from the IRS, using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT), rather than submitting applications with income estimates that may need correcting, or worse, waiting until the previous year’s tax return has been filed. Recent research and the Department of Education’s own data suggest that using earlier income information will benefit students in that applicants will not need to estimate income or taxes paid and they will be able to submit their FAFSA earlier.

## **Q. What should I (the student) do if my family has unusual circumstances not mentioned in the application?**

**A.** If you or your family has unusual circumstances (such as a loss of employment, loss of benefits, death, or divorce), complete the FAFSA to the extent that you can and submit it as instructed. Then talk to the financial aid administrator (FAA) at the school you plan to attend. If your family’s circumstances have changed from the tax year 2015, the FAA may decide on a case-by-case basis to adjust data elements used to calculate your EFC. Any adjustment the FAA makes must relate only to your individual circumstances at the school you are currently attending and not to any conditions that exist for a whole class of students. Students can’t carry over circumstances from school to school. The FAA’s decision is final and cannot be appealed to ED.

**Q. What should I (the student) do if I have a special circumstance and cannot get my parent's data to report on the FAFSA?**

**A.** If you are considered a dependent student, have no contact with your parents, and are unable to provide your parents' data on the FAFSA, you may have a special circumstance. If you are completing the FAFSA online, answer the questions regarding special circumstances and the remaining student questions. Sign and submit the form for processing. If you are completing a paper application, complete as much of the form as you can, sign, and submit it for processing. Your application will be incomplete with on EFC calculated. However, the financial aid offices at the schools listed on your FAFSA will still receive your data. Contact those schools listed on your FAFSA for further assistance to complete your application. Examples of special circumstances are: your parent or parents are incarcerated or you had to leave home because of an abusive situation.

**Tip:** Not living with your parents because you are self-supporting or the fact that your parents do not want to provide their information on your FAFSA, are not considered special circumstances. If you are in either situation, you should still submit the incomplete FAFSA and contact the financial aid office at the schools listed on your FAFSA for information about applying for unsubsidized loans only. You do not have to demonstrate financial need to borrow an unsubsidized loan, but you will be responsible for paying interest on the loan during all in-school, grace, deferment, and forbearance periods.

**Q. If I live with an aunt, uncle, or grandparent, should I include that relative's income on my FAFSA?**

**A.** You can only report your birth parents' or adoptive parents' income on your FAFSA. Only if a relative has adopted you and is now your adoptive parent can you report that person's information on your FAFSA. However, you must report for questions 45(j) any cash support given by relative except food and housing.

**Q. I'm not sure if I am interested in work-study during the school year. What should I enter for the question asking if I am interested in work-study?**

**A.** Some schools use the answer about work-study on the FAFSA to construct a financial aid package for you. Answering "Yes" to this question does not obligate you to accept a work-study position. It usually just means that the school will consider offering you a work-study job as part of your financial aid package. If you do indicate on the application that you are interested in work-study, you can change your mind and not accept the work-study job later. Keep in mind that if you answer "No" to the work-study question when you apply—and subsequently change your mind—a work-study job may not be available if the school awarded all of the work-study funds to other students.

**Q. What if I live with a girlfriend or boyfriend who pays the rent?**

**A.** You should not report any information for a friend or roommate unless the two of you are actually married or have a common-law marriage under state law. You must report in question 45(j) any cash support given by the friend, except food and housing. You would have to report the rent the roommate paid on your behalf.

**Q. What’s the difference between cash support and in-kind support?**

**A.** Cash support is support given either in the form of money or money that is paid on your (the student’s) behalf. You must report cash support as untaxed income. Thus, if a friend or relative gives you grocery money, you must report it as untaxed income in question 45(j). If the friend or relative pays your electric bill or part of your rent, you must also report those payments.

Examples of in-kind support are free food or housing that a family receives, usually in exchange for work or services. You usually don’t report such support.

However, the application does require you to report the value of housing a family receives as compensation for a job. The most common example is free housing or a housing allowance provided to military personnel or members of the clergy, which is required to be reported in questions 45(g).

**Q. When is student aid considered income?**

**A.** Generally, grants and scholarships that do not exceed tuition, fees, books, and required supplies are not considered income. If you have an ROTC scholarship, a private scholarship, or any other type of grant or scholarship, that grant or scholarship may be considered as taxable income if it exceeds tuition, fees, books, and required supplies. That grant or scholarship will be considered as an available resource by the financial aid office when packaging aid.

You should report grants and scholarship you reported on your tax return. You should then report these items as exclusions from income in question 44(d): Student’s 2015 Additional Financial Information. These amounts will be treated as exclusions from your income. For more information on amounts to be excluded from income, see chapter I of IRS Publication 970 (Tax Benefits for Education) at [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf).

**Q. I am now a U.S. citizen, but have an Alien Registration Number (A-Number). How do I indicate this on the application?**

**A.** Indicate that you are a U.S. citizen; do not provide your A-Number.

**Q. I’m going to get married this summer. How do I answer the question that asks if I am married?**

**A.** You must answer question 47 based on your marital status on the day you complete and sign your FAFSA. Answer “Yes” if you are married on the day you complete and sign your FAFSA, otherwise, answer “No.” If your marital status changes after the date you first signed your FAFSA, you may be able to update that information. First, check with your financial aid office. They will determine if the update more accurately reflects your financial situation.

**Q. If I’m an emancipated minor, am I now independent?**

**A.** If you can provide a copy of a court’s decision that you are or were an emancipated minor as determined by a court in your state of legal residence, you may meet the definition of an independent student. You would answer “Yes” to question 54 if you are currently an emancipated minor. You would also answer “Yes” if you were an emancipated minor immediately before you reached the age of being an adult in your state. The court must be located in your state of legal residence at the time of the court’s decision. You may be asked to provide a copy of the court’s decision.



Hawaii's goal to have 55% earn a college degree by year 2025

**Q. What if I am in legal guardianship, am I now independent?**

**A.** If you can provide a copy of a court's decision that you are or were in a legal guardianship as determined by a court in your state of legal residence, you may meet the definition of an independent student. You would answer "Yes" to question 55 if you are currently in legal guardianship. You would also answer "Yes" if you were in legal guardianship immediately before you reached the age of being an adult in your state. The court must be located in your state of legal residence at the time of the court's decision. You may be asked to provide a copy of the court's decision.

**Tip:** The definition of legal guardianship does not include your parents, even if a court appointed them as your guardian. You are also not considered a legal guardian of yourself.

**Q. If I was a National Guard or Reserve enlistee called to active duty or was an active duty military member, am I considered a veteran for purposes of completing the FAFSA?**

**A.** If you were a member of the National Guard or Reserve enlistee called to active duty for other than state or training purposes, and were released under a condition other than dishonorable, you are considered a veteran for FAFSA purposes.

**Q. If I am currently serving in the National Guard or as a Reserve enlistee and am called to active duty, am I considered an independent student for purposes of completing the FAFSA?**

**A.** If you are currently serving in the National Guard or as a Reserve enlistee and are called to active duty for other than state or training purposes, you would answer "Yes" to question 49 and would then be considered an independent student.

**Q. If my parents are divorced, whose information do I need?**

**A.** Report the information of the parent with whom you lived the most during the 12 months preceding the date you completed the FAFSA. It does not make a difference which parent claims you as a dependent for tax purposes. If you did not live with either parent or lived equally with each parent, provide the parental information for the parent from whom you received the most financial support during the preceding 12 months or the parent from whom you received the most support the last time support was given. If your legal parents are divorced but living together, select "Unmarried and both parents living together."

**Q. I am entering financial information for my mother and stepfather on the FAFSA. Should I give my father's Social Security number (SSN) and last name, or my stepfather's?**

**A.** You should provide the SSN and last name of the same person or people for whom you are reporting financial information. In this case, provide the SSNs and names of your mother and stepfather.

**Q. What should I do if my parent with whom I live has remarried and my stepparent refuses to supply information?**

**A.** If you are a dependent student and your parent has remarried, the stepparent's information must be included or you will not be considered for federal student aid. If you believe that your situation is unique or unusual other than the stepparent's refusal to provide the requested information, you should discuss the matter further with your financial aid administrator.

**Q. How do you know who should be counted in the household size?**

**A.** If you are a dependent student, your household will include you, your parents, your siblings (in many cases), and other persons who live with and are supported by your parents. For cases where a dependent student's parents are separated, not living together, or where stepparents are involved, the FAFSA instructions will help guide you in determining who your parent is. If you are an independent student, your household will include you, your spouse (if you are married), your children (if you have any—and in most cases), and other persons who live with you and receive more than 50 percent of their support from you. However, see the instructions for question 73 (dependent students) and questions 95 (independent students) for the exact rules on who counts in your household size.

Household size and tax exemptions are not necessarily the same. Exemptions look at the previous year or tax year and household size refers to the school year for which the student is applying for aid.

**Q. My parents separated four months ago. I live with my mother. My parents filed a joint tax return and claimed me as an exemption. Do I report income for both parents, or for just my mother?**

**A.** Report only your mother's income and asset information because you lived with her the most during the past 12 months. Use a W-2 Form or other record(s) to determine her share of the income reported and taxes paid on the tax return. If your legal parents are separated but living together, select "Married or remarried," not "Divorced or separated" as their marital status.

**Q. If I (the student) am separated but filed a joint tax return, how do I report the information?**

**A.** You should give only your portion of the exemptions, income, and taxes paid.

**Q. Who qualifies to be counted in the number in school?**

**A.** Count any person (other than your parents) in the household who is attending any term of the academic year on at least a half-time basis. The person must be working toward a degree or certificate leading to a recognized education credential at a postsecondary school eligible to participate in the federal student aid programs. You (the student) need not be enrolled half-time to be counted in the number in school. Do not include students at a U.S. service academy because most of their primary educational expenses are paid for by the federal government.

**Q. Should I list my school codes in a specific order on the application?**

**A.** For purposes of federal student aid, it does not matter in what order you list the schools. However, to be considered for state aid, some states require your schools in a specified order. Click on the name of your state at [StudentAid.gov/afsa/filling-out/school-list#order](https://StudentAid.gov/afsa/filling-out/school-list#order) to find your state's guidance for listing schools on your FAFSA.

**Q. When does my school have to receive the results from my application?**

**A.** Your school must have your information by your last day of enrollment in 2016-17, or by mid-September, 2017, whichever comes first. If your school has not received your application information electronically, you must submit your paper Student Aid Report (SAR) to the school by the deadline. However, do not wait until the deadline date so you have plenty of time to submit your information and make any necessary corrections. Either the electronic record, the Institutional Student Information Record (ISIR), or the paper SAR that has been processed by ED must have an official EFC. If you make corrections electronically, you will be prompted to save those corrections and to sign and submit them so they can be processed. Once the school receives your information, it will use your EFC to determine your eligibility for federal student aid. The FAA will send you a financial aid award letter explaining the aid the school is offering.

**Q. What if I don't get a Student Aid Report (SAR) or SAR Acknowledgement, or I need another copy of that form?**

**A.** If you do not receive an e-mail with a link to your SAR (if you provided an e-mail address on your FAFSA), or your paper SAR or SAR Acknowledgement in the mail with two-to-three weeks after submitting your application, call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). If you have a touch-tone phone, you can use the automated system to find out whether your application has been processed or to request a duplicate copy of your SAR. You will need to provide your Social Security number and the first two letters of your last name. You can also check the status of your FAFSA and print a copy of your SAR at [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov).

If you apply online, you will receive a confirmation page with a confirmation number after you select "Submit My FAFSA Now." This confirmation guarantees that ED has received your application, and the Federal Student Aid Information Center can use your confirmation number to track your application if necessary. For more information on the SAR and SAR Acknowledgement, see "The Application Process."

**Q. What if I think somebody is misusing federal student aid funds?**

**A.** If you have reason to suspect fraud, waste or abuse involving federal student aid funds, you should call ED's Office of Inspector General toll-free hotline at 1-800-MIS-USED (1-800-647-8733).