



MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN FILING THE FAFSA

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The FAFSA can be confusing, but for students who will be relying on financial aid, it's also really, REALLY important. Don't be intimidated! We've got your back.

We've assembled a list of common errors people make when filing the FAFSA. Keep an eye out for these mistakes, which can be easily overlooked.

1. Filing the wrong year's FAFSA.

Make sure you have the form for the correct academic year.

2. Failing to use your legal name.

Even if you've gone by your middle name since birth, when it comes to filing the FAFSA, you have to use your name as it appears on your social security card.

3. Failing to register with Selective Service.

If you are a male between the ages of 18 – 25, you must register with Selective Service. If you do not, you will be ineligible for federal student aid.

4. Missing financial aid deadlines.

The FAFSA is important for federal and state aid, as well as aid from the college you plan to attend. All three may have different deadlines. Err on the side of caution by filing early. You do not need to know what college you are attending in order to apply.

5. Transposing digits in numbers and dollar amounts, or inserting extra digits.

Double check your reported income, social security number, and any other figures you may need to enter on the FAFSA.

6. Using an incorrect social security number or date of birth.

If a parent doesn't have a social security number, enter zeros in the standard format: 000-00-0000. DO NOT LEAVE THE SPACES BLANK.

7. Reporting the wrong student or parent marital status.

List marital status as of the day the FAFSA was completed.

8. Submitting the wrong parent's financial information.

If parents are divorced or separated, be sure to use the information of the custodial parent in the FAFSA. If time is split equally, use the information for the parent who provided more financial support for you. (See "Who Is Considered a Parent for the FAFSA?" for more details.)

9. Not including a stepparent's income and assets.

In certain instances, a stepparent's income and assets must be included on the FAFSA. (See "Who Is Considered a Parent for the FAFSA?" for more details.)

10. Incorrectly claiming head of household status.

This filing status is often incorrect. If there is an error, the school will require an amended tax return be filed before any financial aid is disbursed.

11. Including retirement plans and/or the net worth of the primary home as investments on the FAFSA.

Do not report an IRA, 401(k), 403(b), or pension plan as an investment on the FAFSA. (Brokerage accounts do need to be reported.) The primary home in which you live should also not be reported.

12. Not telling the financial aid office about unusual circumstances.

The school has the authority to adjust a student's financial aid package in cases involving unusual circumstances through a process known as professional judgement.



FUN FACT

"Roughly a quarter (25.7%) of students accepted to their first-choice institution chose to enroll elsewhere because they were not offered aid by their first-choice campus."

Source: <https://heri.ucla.edu/briefs/TheAmericanFreshman2013-Brief.pdf>