

Common Errors Made on the FAFSA Financial Aid Application

Making a mistake on the FAFSA can delay the processing of your application, because it takes an additional 2-3 weeks to process a corrected application.

Most mistakes on the FAFSA could have been avoided by carefully reading the instructions and questions. If you don't understand a question or are having trouble filling out the form, call the helpline at [1/800/433-3243](tel:18004333243) (paper application) or [1/800/801-0576](tel:18008010576) (on-line application). Colleges' financial aid personnel are also willing to help.

You can also find the answers to many of your questions on the following website:
www.finaid.org

Some of the more common errors include:

1. The number one mistake people make is leaving a field blank. All income questions must be completed. If the answer is zero or the question does not apply to you, write in a 0. Do not use dashes or leave the question blank. If you leave an income or asset question blank, the clearinghouse will assume that you forgot to answer the question.
2. Pay strict attention to the State Aid Deadlines listed on the front page of the FAFSA form.
3. Read the questions carefully. The words "you" and "your" on the FAFSA, always refer to the student, not the parents.
4. Be careful to write Social Security numbers and dates of birth accurately and clearly. Such errors will cause processing delays.
5. For "Mi", do not use the roman numeral I.
6. Driver's license. Do not use license plate number.
7. In the question that asks about your interest in different types of aid (e.g., work-study and loans), answer "yes" to each question. Answering "yes" does not obligate you to accept them if offered.
8. The question that asks whether you were born before January 1 is confusing. If you answer to this question does not agree with your date of birth, it will cause processing delays.
9. Remember to count the student as one of the family members who will be in college during the award year.
10. Prepaid tuition plans (MET, etc.), retirement plans, and life insurance products (annuities, cash value, etc.) are not counted as assets on the FAFSA.

11. Worksheets A, B and C. All fields should be completed even if an answer is \$0. If the colleges request you to verify your forms (1/3 are verified), they will ask for copies of your tax returns and a copy of the Worksheets.
12. Worksheets A and B asks you to include “untaxed income”, while Worksheet C will exclude certain items which were included on your tax forms.
13. If your parents are divorced or separated, the parent you lived with the most during the recent calendar year is the parent responsible for filling out the FAFSA. The noncustodial parent’s income and assets are not considered. If the custodial parent responsible for filling out the FAFSA remarries, the step-parent must report his/her income and assets, even if they weren’t married during the previous year. Prenuptial agreements have no bearing on this requirement.
14. The Earned Income Credit is considered “untaxed income” on the FAFSA. Other types of untaxed income include retirement plan contributions made during the year, and military food and housing allowances.
15. Even if you qualify for the simplified needs test (your adjusted gross income is less than \$50,000 and you are eligible to complete the 1040EZ or 1040A tax forms), you should still complete the asset information section of the FAFSA. Some colleges and states will use this information for computing their own financial aid awards.
16. Do not include anything with the form when you mail it. If there are unusual family financial circumstances, write a letter of explanation to the college’s financial aid administrator. Any enclosures with the FAFSA forms will be destroyed. Likewise, do not write comments or notes on the margins of the form.
17. Make a copy of the FAFSA form before mailing.