

Myth vs. Fact



The facts about filling out your FAFSA

Myth: It takes too long to complete the application.

Fact: Most people finish filling out their FAFSA in less than one hour. Sixty minutes of your time can pay off in a big way – free money for college! If it's a renewal or you're an independent student who doesn't need to provide parents' information, it can take even less time.

Myth: The FAFSA form costs money to complete.

Fact: No, no, no. The FAFSA form is free. The quickest and best way to fill it out is on studentaid.gov. Don't complete your FAFSA form on websites that charge fees.

Myth: I only have to fill out the FAFSA once.

Fact: You need to fill it out every year that you are in school to receive financial aid.

Myth: I should wait until I am accepted to a college prior to filling out the FAFSA form.

Fact: No, do not wait. You can list up to 20 schools that you are interested in attending.

Myth: FAFSA only affects federal student aid.

Fact: While it's true that filling out the FAFSA is the only way you'll be able to receive federal student aid, most schools also use the application to assess your eligibility for their own non-federal aid programs. Private and state organizations that award scholarships and grants often use the FAFSA to help determine your eligibility. In fact, some schools won't even consider you for any of their scholarships (including academic scholarships) until you've submitted a FAFSA. Here's the bottom line: FAFSA is the first step you have to take to get access to federal, state and local financial aid and grants.

Myth: You can't submit FAFSA until your tax return is filed.

Fact: You can submit your 2025-26 FAFSA starting December 1st, 2024, and you can do so using your 2023 tax return information. This all makes it easier for you to complete your FAFSA since your 2023 tax return has already been filed. Contributors will consent to transfer tax information through the IRS Data Direct Exchange (DDX). This will reduce the number of financial questions that most families will see on the FAFSA and help reduce errors.

Myth: Only students with good grades get financial aid.

Fact: A high GPA is important and will help qualify a student for certain schools and academic scholarships. However, most student aid programs do not take a student's grades into consideration. What matters most for receiving those aid packages is that students maintain satisfactory academic progress in their program of study once they begin college or career school.

Myth: Your family makes too much money, so you'll only get loan offers and won't qualify for financial aid.

Fact: In past years, Florida high school seniors have left behind more than \$3 million dollars in Pell Grants (a.k.a. free money) – each year – all because students did not apply or assumed they would not receive grant money. There is no income cutoff to qualify for federal student aid.

Even if you only qualify for loans, federal student loans offer many benefits over private loans. Payments won't have to be made until the student is no longer in school, the loan will have a fixed interest rate, there are several repayments plans available, and students even have the possibility to have some loans forgiven later on. Bottom line: You won't know if you don't try.

Myth: My parents need to have social security numbers so that I can complete the FAFSA.

Fact: Your parents' citizenship doesn't affect your ability to complete the FAFSA form. The ability to create an FSA ID has historically been limited only to parents who can be verified with a Social Security Number (SSN) by the Social Security Administration. However, starting the 24-25 FAFSA, all parent and spouse contributors without a SSN may now create one to be able to provide consent and approval on the FAFSA form, using the Department of Education's newly developed system to validate their identity against credit bureau data.

Myth: If I live on my own and am self-supporting, my parent's information and income does not need to be included and counted.

Fact: Incorrect, you are considered a dependent until you turn 24 (by December 31st of the school year for which you applied) and will need to report your parent(s) income, unless you meet criteria to one or more of the personal circumstances questions to be considered an independent student. Learn more about Dependency Status here <https://studentaid.gov/apply-for-aid/fafsa/filling-out/dependency>

Myth: A contributor included on my FAFSA means they are financially responsible for the student's educational costs.

Fact: Contributor is a new term introduced starting the 2024-25 FAFSA form. It refers to anyone asked to provide information on a student's FAFSA form. A contributor is the student, the student's spouse, biological or adoptive parent(s), and the parent's spouse (stepparent). A Contributor is NOT a grandparent, foster parents, legal guardian, brother or sister, aunt or uncle, even if they helped provide for or raise the student.

Note: If any contributors refuse to give consent on the FAFSA form, the student won't be eligible for federal and state financial aid.

Myth: I should contact the U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid to find out how much financial aid I'm getting and when.

Fact: No, the financial aid office at your school is the source for that information. The U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid is always available to help, but they don't award or disburse your aid. Remember—each school awards financial aid on its own schedule.

Myth: I can finish my FAFSA form any time after I start it.

Fact: All student and parent/spouse contributors are only allowed 45 days of inactivity on any incomplete section of the FAFSA before the FAFSA will be deleted. Once deleted, the FAFSA will need to be restarted by all contributors.