



**TEXAS
GEAR
UP**

**FILLING OUT THE
FAFSA/TASFA**

FILLING OUT THE FAFSA/TASFA

FAFSA and TASFA. They sound the same, don't they? But like "tomato" and "potato," they're actually very different animals. Er, vegetables. You get the point.

So, let's take a look at what each one is, and how they can help you in your quest to pay for college.

WHAT IS FAFSA?

FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and it's the biggest and best of all financial aid forms. Quite simply, you absolutely **must** complete and submit it to colleges to be considered for federal and college-based financial aid.

And you'll need your parents' help, since it requires income and tax information about your entire household. So, make sure you've got snacks and some comfy chairs ready to go before you and your family dive into this form.

WHAT IS TASFA?

TASFA stands for Texas Application for State Financial Aid, and it's designed to help any student who is a **not** a U.S. citizen—but is classified as a Texas resident—get an opportunity to receive Texas state grants.

Here's the deal: The Texas government wanted to help certain unauthorized immigrants be able to afford college. And since non-U.S. citizens don't qualify for **federal** financial aid, Texas decided to pass its own law.

The FAFSA is typically ready for you to use by October 1st of any given year.

Don't hesitate – get that form filled out as soon as possible. And let your parents know that they'll need to have their previous year's tax records on hand to complete their part of the form.

You may want to start by taking a look at the Texas schools that will accept qualified TASFAs. Here is a complete list (*bold italics indicate same school system*):

- Abilene Christian University
- Alamo Community Colleges
- Amarillo College Amarillo
- Angelo State University
- Austin College
- Austin Community College
- Baylor University
- Brazosport College
- Brookhaven College
- Cedar Valley College
- Central Texas College
- Cisco College Cisco
- Coastal Bend College
- College of the Mainland
- Collin County Community College District
- Concordia University Austin
- Dallas Baptist University
- Del Mar College
- Eastfield College
- East Texas Baptist University
- El Centro College
- El Paso Community College
- Frank Phillips College
- Grayson College
- Hill College
- Houston Community College District
- Howard College
- Howard Payne University
- Jarvis Christian College
- Lamar University
- Laredo Community College
- Lee College
- Lon Morris College
- Lonestar College System
- Lubbock Christian University
- McLennan Community College
- Midland College Midland
- Midwestern State University
- Mountain View College
- Navarro College
- Northeast Texas Community College
- North Lake College
- Odessa College
- Panola College
- Paris Junior College
- Paul Quinn College
- Prairie View A&M University
- Ranger College
- Richland College
- Sam Houston State University
- San Jacinto College
- Schreiner University
- Southern Methodist University
- South Texas College
- Southwestern Adventist University
- Southwestern Assemblies of God University
- St. Edward's University Austin
- St. Mary's University
- Stephen F. Austin State University
- Sul Ross State University
- Tarleton State University
- Tarrant County College
- Temple College
- Texas College
- Texas A&M International University
- ***Texas A&M University: College Station, Commerce, Corpus Christi, Galveston Galveston, Kingsville, San Antonio, Texarkana***
- Texas Christian University
- Texas Lutheran University
- Texas Southern University
- Texas Southmost College
- ***Texas State Technical College: West Texas, Waco***
- Texas State University
- Texas Tech University
- Texas Wesleyan University
- Texas Woman's University
- ***University of Texas: Austin, Arlington, Dallas R, El Paso, Rio Grande Valley, San Antonio, Houston, Pan American***
- Trinity Valley Community College
- Tyler Junior College
- University of Dallas
- ***University of Houston: Clearlake, Downtown, Victoria***
- University of Mary Hardin-Baylor
- ***University of North Texas: Denton, Dallas***
- University of St. Thomas
- Vernon College
- Victoria College
- Wayland Baptist University
- Weatherford College
- Western Texas College
- Wharton County Junior College

PRO-TIP
If a school you want to apply isn't on this list, you might as well check with the school itself to see what other kinds of financial aid you may qualify for.

COMPLETING THE TASFA



Okay, if you’ve determined that the TASFA is something that could help you, here’s what you’ll need to do:

- **First, you’ve got to apply for admission at your prospective colleges.**
- **Then, you and your parents will need to confirm whether or not you’re eligible to actually complete the TASFA. Contact your prospective school’s registrar or admissions office, and they’ll be able to let you know.**
- **Make sure your family has filed the previous year’s taxes.**
- **If you’re a male between the ages of 18–25, you must register with the selective service.**

Once you’ve taken these steps, and confirmed that you qualify, congratulations! You can now complete the TASFA. It’s a paper form that you can find online

by doing an Internet search for “TASFA application.” Be sure you’re using the most current version by ensuring the correct dates are on the form.

Once you complete it, you’ll need to print it and send it to your prospective colleges, along with the following:

- **Proof of registration with Selective Service—once registered, you will receive a letter with a registration card in the mail. This will serve as proof of registration.**
- **Current tax return, W-2, and tax return transcript**

If your family needs their tax return transcript, they can order it through the IRS online or by calling 1-800-908-9946.

If you have any other questions about TASFA, give a call to your prospective colleges, or phone the Texas Financial Aid Information Center at 1-888-311-8881.

COMPARING FAFSA AND TASFA

So, to make it super clear which form you’ll want to complete, check out this handy chart:

RESIDENCY STATUS	FAFSA	TASFA
I am a U.S. citizen.	x	
I am a permanent resident with an Alien Registration Card (I-551).	x	
I am a conditional permanent resident with visa type I-551C.	x	
I am an eligible noncitizen with an Arrival - Departure Record (I-94) showing one of the following: • Refugee • Asylum granted • Parolee (for a minimum of one year) • Cuban-Haitian entrant	x	
I do not meet one of the statuses above; however, I have been classified as a Texas resident and therefore am eligible to pay the Texas in-state tuition rate. My classification as a Texas resident is NOT due to an in-state scholarship or assistantship.		x



And here's a summary of the two applications:

FAFSA

- For both federal aid and state grants
- Can be completed and submitted online

TASFA

- Only for Texas state grants
- Must be printed and mailed to schools, along with other required documents

PREPARING FOR FAFSA

Yes, having a solid pencil or a smooth-typing keyboard will help. But there's more to filling out the FAFSA than how you will do it. You'll want to be armed with information. Just what information is that, you may ask? Well, check out the list below:

- **Tax Info: For 2017 college admissions, you'll need your family's 2015 tax return. And—this is cool—you might even qualify to use the Data Retrieval Tool, which allows you to upload your family's tax info directly from the IRS into the FAFSA, (more about this on page 6).**
- **Social Security Numbers (or other registration numbers for non-US citizens): from both you and your parents**
- **Dates of Birth: from both you and your parents**
- **Recent bank and investment statements**
- **Statements of untaxed income**
- **An FSA ID for you and at least one parent**

JUST WHAT IS AN FSA ID?

It's how you will log in to the FAFSA website.

**Note: if you've used FAFSA before, the FSA ID replaces your four-digit PIN.*

Both you and at least one of your parents will need to create an FSA ID.

Don't worry—it's a standard username and password situation.

Now, you can also log in using your name, **social security number**, and **date of birth**—but, eventually, you'll be asked for your FSA ID. So you and the family might as well take a minute and create one before starting the process.

If you've got brothers or sisters who are also applying for FAFSA, they'll each to need to create a unique FSA ID—but good news for your parents is that they can use just their one ID for each application.

To create your FSA ID, check out this website:

<https://fsaid.ed.gov/npas/index.htm>

And here's an FAQ if you have any questions:

<https://fsaid.ed.gov/npas/pub/faq.htm>

➤ WHAT IF MY PARENTS ARE DIVORCED?

In the case of divorce, the custodial parent is the one who should fill out the FAFSA with you. That's the parent you've lived with the most during the past 12 months.

Now, if your parents share custody equally—a 50/50 split—then here's how you figure out who the custodial parent is:

- **Determine which parent provided you with the most financial support during the past 12 months (this is probably the one who claimed you as a dependent on their tax return).**
- **If you didn't receive any support from either parent during the past 12 months, then go back to the most recent calendar year in which you received some support from either one of them. That's the parent who'll co-sign your FAFSA.**

AM I DEPENDENT OR INDEPENDENT? ◀

Look, you probably pick out your own clothes, make your own playlists, and choose your own pizza toppings. For sure, you're pretty independent. But, let's go ahead and take a look at how FAFSA defines dependence anyway, because it's a huge factor in qualifying for financial aid.

For reference, here's a list of questions that the FAFSA asks to determine if you're considered dependent or independent:

- **Will you be 24 years old or older as of December 31st of the award year?**
- **As of today, are you married (or separated but not divorced)?**
- **Will you be working on a master's or doctorate program?**
- **Are you active duty in the U.S. armed forces?**

- **Are you a veteran of the U.S. armed forces?**
- **Do you have, or will you have, children that will receive more than half of their support from you?**
- **Do you have other dependents?**
- **Are both of your parents deceased, have you been in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?**
- **Are you an emancipated minor?**
- **Are you an unaccompanied youth?**

A “no” to all of these questions means you're a **dependent**.

That means your parent's financial information will be considered when determining your financial need.

A “yes” to any of these questions means you're **independent**.

This means colleges will only be going off of your own financial information when determining need.

Now, let's be clear—none of the following things will categorize you as independent:

- **Your parents don't want to provide their financial information.**
- **Your parents don't want to help you pay for school.**
- **Your parents have disowned you or kicked you out of the house.**
- **You live on your own, and pay all your own bills, but cannot answer “yes” to any of the above questions.**

The rules are the rules. But, if you think there are special circumstances that should absolutely label you as independent, then call the financial aid office of your prospective colleges and see what they have to say. There's no guarantee you'll get yourself tagged as independent—but if you believe it, then you might as well try.

WHAT IS DATA TRANSFER RETRIEVAL?

Specifically, we're talking about the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (<https://fafsa.ed.gov/help/irshlp9.htm>). Remember, this is the easy way your family can electronically upload their tax return directly into the FAFSA.

You see, back in the stone ages, you'd have to mail (*huh?*), fax (*what?*), or drop off in person (*no way!*) your tax returns when applying for financial aid. But you don't have to worry about any of that now, thanks to the Data Transfer Retrieval tool.

A few things to keep in mind:

- **It's possible your family won't be able to use it. There are some limitations based on tax filing status. But most people can use the tool, no problem.**
- **You can't use the tool immediately after your family files their taxes electronically. Typically, you'll have to wait about 3 weeks after filing before you can use it.**
- **If you don't have easy access to a computer or the internet, or for some reason you've got to have a hard copy of your family's tax return, you can either:**
 - * Call 1-800-908-9946 and follow the prompts.
 - * Print the following form and mail or fax as directed: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f4506tez.pdf>

COMMON MISTAKES

Filling out financial aid forms can be like trying to find your car in an underground parking lot: confusing, frustrating, and kind of smelly. Well, maybe minus the smelly part.

You see, there's a decent chance you and your parents might make some mistakes before it's all over. And that's no good, because mistakes can delay your money—or even worse, result in less financial aid that you should have gotten.

So, here are some common mistakes and how to avoid them:

WRONG FAFSA SCHOOL CODE

One of the FAFSA sections asks which colleges you want to receive the completed form. It asks for both the school name and its federal school code:

The screenshot shows a search interface with two columns. The left column has a 'State' dropdown menu, a 'City' text box labeled '(optional)', and a 'School Name' text box labeled '(optional)'. Below these is a blue 'SEARCH' button and a link for 'Search Tips'. The right column has a 'Federal School Code' text box. A vertical dashed line with 'OR' in the middle separates the two columns. A blue 'SEARCH' button is located below the Federal School Code field.

You absolutely don't want to enter the wrong code here—otherwise, the wrong school will get your form. Best thing to do is visit the school's website, go to the financial aid section, and find the school's FAFSA code.

Or just call the school directly and ask.

PRO-TIP

Call the school's financial aid office 1 or 2 weeks after submitting your app and confirm that they got it. This will give you peace of mind that you entered the right code (*whew!*).

NOT ACCOUNTING FOR EVERYONE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD

The question “How big is your household?” can be confusing. For one, it doesn’t mean the size of your house. It does refer to the people inside your house. And for instance, what if your family has:

- Siblings who spend most of the year living in a college apartment?
- Siblings who have graduated but who are still supported by mom and dad?
- Grandparents who are living with you and supported by your parents?

You may want to include all of these. It’s a case-by-case situation, but here’s the thing for you and your parents to remember: the *larger* your household, the *greater* your financial aid eligibility. The tricky thing is that you have to provide financial information for every family member you include (tax records, sources of income, bank statements, etc.).

NOT USING THE CORRECT SITE TO SUBMIT THE FAFSA

Here’s the deal: there is *one* website, and one website *only*, for you to use to fill out and submit your FAFSA. And it’s this one:

fafsa.ed.gov

There are some imitators out there that will try to charge you money—but remember: FAFSA is free! These sites are ripping you off, and there’s no guarantee they’ll deliver your app to the correct schools. So don’t use them.

FILLING OUT INFORMATION INCORRECTLY

Double check, triple check—hey, even **quadruple check** all the info on your FAFSA before submitting. The simple switch of a few numbers, or a “yes” when you meant to say “no,” could delay the processing of your FAFSA or even greatly affect how much money you’ll end up getting.



PRO-TIP

If you live with a step-parent, always include his or her financial information, even if that person is not contributing to your college expenses. Step-parents are considered part of your household, and not including them would be a costly mistake.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS



Okay, you've submitted your FAFSA, which is a huge accomplishment. But, as the saying goes, "It ain't over til it's over." And what that means is, your FAFSA journey isn't quite finished.

VERIFICATION

A financial award letter typically comes in the spring. When you get it, realize that the award that's being offered is **not yet final**. Colleges need to verify all the information you put on your FAFSA. They may need to **collect additional documents** from you and your family before they can do so.

Once again, imagine it's spring. You'll need to make a decision on which school to attend pronto. And to do that, you're going to need to know exactly how much aid you're being offered. So... get the schools what they need, and complete the verification process, *as soon as possible*.

"PROOF OF" DOCUMENTS

The verification process usually deals with tax info, but schools may request other documents that **prove** a FAFSA was filled out correctly.

For instance, if you or your parents indicated that they had little or no income, a school may want more info that shows exactly how your family supported itself—like selling your old Pokemon trading cards.

Or, if you put on your FAFSA that you're an orphan,

or are claiming to be independent, the college may want supporting documents (your parents' death certificates, a ruling from a judge, etc.).

As with the verification process, your financial aid award won't be finalized until the school receives all the documents it requested.

CSS PROFILE

Feel like you've done enough form filling for a lifetime? Well, don't go celebrating with X-Box and pizza quite yet. This is another big one that more and more schools are requiring in addition to the FAFSA.

Basically, a CSS Profile (administered by the **College Scholarship Service**, which is how it gets its name) is a form that helps determine your eligibility for **non-government** financial aid – such as a college's own grants, loans, and scholarships. And it is significantly longer than the FAFSA.

The CSS Profile is ready to be filled out around the same time as FAFSA, which is October 1st. Good news is, not all schools require it. Here are the Texas universities that ask for the CSS Profile—more good news: it's a pretty small list!

- Rice University
- Southern Methodist University
- St. Edward's University
- Texas Christian University
- Trinity University
- University of Dallas



OKAY—that’s a lot of info regarding both FAFSA and TASFA. Whew! If you need more help, don’t hesitate to chat with your school’s guidance counselor, or give a call to the financial aid office at the college you’re hoping to attend. You can also phone the FAFSA hotline at 1-800-433-3243. Now, go make your college dreams come true!