

FINANCIAL AID CHECKLIST

Follow these steps in your senior year of high school to apply for financial aid. Deadlines vary so complete the steps when you can, even if it's passed the suggested timing.

PREPARE

SEPTEMBER

☐ **Make college list**

Work with your advisor/counselor to identify and apply to at least one [financially safer school](#) — a college that you're likely to be accepted to and able to afford.

☐ **Create FSA ID**

Username and password that all students and their parent(s) must create to start the FAFSA.

- Watch [How to Create a StudentAid.gov Account](#)
- Create an FSA ID at [studentaid.gov](#)

APPLY

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

☐ **Submit FAFSA**

Available by October 1st 2026, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is required by all colleges, universities, and technical programs for students to apply for financial aid.

- Watch [FAFSA Overview](#)
- Collect information needed using the [FAFSA Checklist](#)
- Fill out and submit your FAFSA at [fafsa.gov](#)

☐ **Submit CSS Profile**

Required by some private colleges for students to apply for financial aid directly from the college.

- Visit [cssprofile.collegeboard.org](#) to see if your college(s) require the CSS Profile and to submit the application
- Collect information needed using the [CSS Profile Checklist](#)

FOLLOW UP

JANUARY – FEBRUARY

☐ **Review FAFSA Submission Summary (FSS)**

The FSS becomes available shortly after you submit the FAFSA. It summarizes the information you reported on it, includes your Student Aid Index (SAI), and flags issues with your FAFSA that must be resolved.

☐ **Submit institutional forms**

Some colleges require you to fill out their own financial aid forms, which can be found online or will be sent to you via mail or email.

- Visit your college website(s) to see if they require an institutional form

☐ **Complete verification**

If you're selected for verification, a process colleges use to ensure the information reported on your FAFSA is correct, you're required to provide the requested documents in order to receive financial aid.

- See our [Verification Handout](#)

DECIDE

MARCH – MAY

☐ **Review financial aid offers**

Aid offers show you the amount of financial aid you will receive if you attend a specific college. Compare all offers before deciding where to attend college.

- Use the [College Cost Calculator](#) to compare your offers and estimate your indirect costs

☐ **Pay tuition deposit**

A non-refundable down payment required by most 4-year colleges and universities to hold your spot at the college, due by May 1.

- See our [Tuition Deposit Handout](#) for more information



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