



CSS Profile: The Other Financial Aid Form You Should Know

Learn how the CSS Profile works, who needs it, and how to avoid common mistakes.

Overview: What is the CSS Profile and Who Needs It?

The CSS Profile is an online application used by many colleges to assess eligibility for institutional (college-specific) financial aid. If your school requires it, you must complete it, oftentimes in addition to the FAFSA, to be eligible for financial aid from that school.

CSS Profile vs. FAFSA – What’s the Difference?

Feature	CSS Profile	FAFSA
Purpose	Determines eligibility for institutional (college-specific) financial aid, including grants and scholarships.	Determines eligibility for federal financial aid (grants, loans, work-study).
Administered By	College Board	U.S. Department of Education
Cost	\$25 for the first school, \$16 for each additional school (fee waivers available).	Free to complete.
Schools Accepted	Used by ~270 colleges and universities for institutional aid.	Accepted by all U.S. colleges and universities for federal aid.
Details Required	More comprehensive. Includes home equity, non-custodial parent income, and other assets.	Focuses mainly on income and household size.
Tax Year	Tax information from 2025 filing	Tax information from 2025 filing
International Eligibility	School dependent. Check this list of participating schools to confirm your eligibility.	Non-US citizens who meet these criteria can apply for federal student aid

Important note: Many schools that require the CSS profile also require the FAFSA to be submitted in order to be considered for aid. Check the requirements for each of the schools you are applying to!



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How to Set Up Your CSS Login

- Visit the CSS Profile Website: [CSS Profile Home](#)
- Create or Log into Your College Board Account:
 - If you've taken the SAT, PSAT, or AP exams, use the same credentials.
 - If not, [create a new account](#).
- Start Your Application:
 - Select the appropriate application year.
 - Add the colleges you plan to apply to

Note if the parents are divorced or separated, the [non-custodial parent](#) may need to create their own account to complete a 2nd CSS profile, otherwise only one login is required.

What You Need to Complete Your CSS Profile

Before starting, gather the following:

- **Tax Returns:** The most recently completed federal tax returns (student and parent, if applicable).
- **W-2 Forms:** Or recent pay stubs to report income.
- **Bank Statements:** Checking and savings accounts.
- **Investment Records:** Include home equity, stocks, bonds, and 529 plans.
- **Other Income Details:** Child support, Social Security benefits, etc.

The CSS Profile often asks for more detailed information than the FAFSA, including assets like home equity, non-custodial parent details, and significant medical expenses. This allows schools to better understand a student's financial situation beyond federal guidelines.

Dependent vs. Independent Status

Understanding your dependency status is crucial when filling out the CSS Profile, as it determines whose financial information you must report.

Dependent Students

- Must report parental financial information, even if you don't live with your parents or they don't support you financially.

Independent Students

- Report only their own financial information, and if married, that of their spouse.

Tip: Most students under age 24 are considered dependent unless married, have children, are veterans, or meet other special criteria.



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Deadlines

CSS Profile deadlines vary by school and application type (e.g., early decision, early action, regular decision). These deadlines are often earlier than FAFSA deadlines, so it's critical to check each school's requirements.

- Typical Deadlines: Between January and March. Early application deadlines may be as early as November.
- View Your School's Deadline: [Participating Institutions and Programs](#)

Pro Tip: Submitting your CSS Profile early ensures you won't miss out on aid opportunities! Schools also set FAFSA deadlines, so check both requirements.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Filling out the CSS Profile correctly and on time is key to receiving the most financial aid. Here are common errors and how to avoid them:

- Missing Deadlines
 - Each school sets its own deadline. Missing it may reduce or eliminate your aid eligibility.
 - Tip: Track deadlines for each college—submit early if you can.
- Inaccurate Information
 - Mistakes can delay processing or lead to less aid.
 - Examples:
 - Typos in name, date of birth, or SSN
 - Parents answering "Student" questions (e.g., legal dependents or veteran status)
 - Misreporting income, assets, or household size
- Not Reporting Special Circumstances
 - Unusual situations (job loss, medical bills, divorce) affect your financial need.
 - Action: Use the "Special Circumstances" section or contact schools directly with documentation.
- Not Updating After Submission
 - If you discover an error or new info, go to your dashboard and select "Update Your Profile."
 - Some updates may need to be handled directly with the financial aid office.

Double-check everything before submitting, and keep a copy for your records.



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Fees & Fee Waivers

- Cost: \$25 for the first school, \$16 for every subsequent school.
- Fee Waivers:
 - Automatically applied for US citizens meeting eligibility criteria:
 - **Family's Adjusted Gross Income:** \$100,000 or less
 - **SAT Fee Waiver:** If you qualified for an SAT fee waiver
 - **Orphan/Ward of the Court:** If under age 24.
 - Some schools offer fee waivers for international students, but the College Board does not. Contact individual schools directly to inquire about waiver options.

Note: If parents are not living together, both may need to complete the CSS Profile and pay separate fees. For more details, visit: [CSS Profile Fee Waivers](#).

After You Submit: What to Do Next

1. Check Your Dashboard

- View your payment receipt and monitor next steps.
- Upload documents if requested through the IDOC (Institutional Documentation Service).

2. Add More Schools

- Use "Add a College or Program" to send your CSS Profile to additional schools.
- Fees may apply unless you have a waiver.

3. Make Corrections

- If you made an error, select "Correct Your CSS Profile" from your dashboard.
- Corrections are free but may need to be resent to each school.
- For changes not allowed online, contact financial aid offices directly.

4. Review Financial Aid Offers

- Colleges will use your Profile to create customized aid packages.
- Watch for emails or portal updates from each school.

5. Complete the FAFSA Too

- The CSS Profile is not a replacement for the FAFSA. Submit both to maximize your aid eligibility.



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Additional Resources

Official FAQs – [College Board Website](#)

- The College Board CSS Profile FAQs page is your go-to for official information.
- It covers common topics like fee waivers, required documents, how to make corrections, and more.
- Visit: cssprofile.collegeboard.org (or search “CSS Profile FAQ” on Google).

Ask Your School Counselor

- Your high school counselor is a valuable resource—don’t hesitate to reach out if you’re unsure about anything.
- Counselors can help with questions about:
 - Dependency status
 - Fee waiver eligibility
 - Submission timelines
 - Understanding what documents are needed
- They may also help coordinate with colleges if you need to explain special circumstances.