

How to File an Income Tax Return¹³⁰

Step 1: Decide how you will file. Before you begin the process of filing your federal and state income tax returns, decide how you would like to file. You can 1) print the forms off the IRS website and mail them to the IRS office, 2) file online using the e-file forms on the IRS website or a guided tax preparation website, or 3) hire a tax professional to file for you.

Step 2: Gather forms. If you've decided to file yourself, you will begin by gathering the required documents. First, you will need IRS Form 1040, which you can access on the IRS website. If you decide to use a tax preparation software (like TurboTax, H&R Block, Tax Slayer, or Tax Act), the website will provide this form for you.

Next, you will need to know how much money you made the previous year. This can be done by gathering the required tax documents, as are applicable. These may include:

1. A W-2 form. This will be sent to you by your employer.
2. Tax forms that report other types of income such as Form 1099 or Form 1099-INT.
3. Receipts for charitable donations, medical expenses, child care expenses etc. if you are itemizing your deductions.
4. If you work in the gig economy, you'll need to report that income to the IRS by filling out and attaching a Schedule C form to your Form 1040. If you drive for ride sharing or food delivery services, you can deduct expenses like miles driven on this form.

Think about if you did anything in the last year that may impact your taxes, like changing your job, opening a savings account, selling stocks or mutual funds, or paying student loan interest or college tuition.

Step 3: Complete Form 1040. Follow the instructions on the form by the IRS, or answer the questions asked by the tax preparation software.

You will:

1. Choose your **filing status**.
2. Determine if you are claiming any **dependents**.
 - a. If you have young children or older children who you still support, you can claim them as a qualifying child or qualifying relative. If you live with your parents or if

¹³⁰ "5 Tips for How to File Taxes for the First Time." *Intuit TurboTax*, Sep. 8, 2021. <https://turbotax.intuit.com/tax-tips/general/tips-for-how-to-file-taxes-for-the-first-time/L6nNi6uJn>