**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What documents do I need if I have a mortgage?**

Your mortgage company should send you Form 1098 which reports the mortgage interest you paid.

**What documents should I receive from my employer?**

The forms to prove employment may vary depending on individual situations. For most, an employer will provide a W-2 form. The self-employed (i.e. independent contractors, product sales representatives such as Mary Kay, etc.) should receive a 1099-MISC from the company.

**What documents do I need if I am unemployed?**

If you received unemployment benefits from your state over the past year, you must claim that as income and, therefore, pay taxes on those benefits. The unemployment agency should provide you with a 1099-G form, which explains the amount of benefits you drew during the past year. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) receives a copy as well and will tax you at the appropriate rate in your tax bracket. Not everyone owes. If you worked a portion of the past year, chances are you paid payroll taxes and may earn a refund if those deductions were overpaid.

**What documents do I need if I am self-employed?**

You will need to file a Schedule C using IRS Form 1040. Depending on your type of business and where you conduct business, there may be other forms you will need. You may also need to make quarterly estimated payments by filing Form 1040-ES, *Estimated Tax for Individuals*.

**What documents do I need if I am divorced?**

Taking necessary steps before tax time will make things easier once you file your taxes for the first time after a divorce. Change your W-4 through your employer so taxes will be withheld at the correct rates. Also, if you (or a family member) changed your name, file Form SS-5 with the Social Security Administration to ensure there aren’t any complications with the IRS.

**When is the deadline to file my taxes?**

The standing deadline for personal taxes is April 15. However, sometimes that date falls on a weekend or after Emancipation Day (a holiday in DC) and pushes the deadline to as late as April 18.

**When is the earliest that I can file my taxes?**

When you get your W-2, you can have your taxes *prepared* right away, but the IRS will not accept them before a pre-defined date.

**Can I claim charitable donations without a receipt?**

Yes, you can as long as you keep good records in case you are ever audited by the IRS. Be sure to record the name of the organization, the date and location, as well as a detailed description of what you donated. Keep notes on the amount you claimed as a deduction and how you figured the fair market value on the items you donated. In the case of a monetary donation, as long as it’s less than $250, a canceled check or even a payroll deduction can suffice for proof of the donation.

**Can I deduct expenses paid for repairing my home?**

Typically, general home repairs cannot be deducted from your taxes. Home repairs are meant to keep your home in good condition, but do not increase the value of your home. However, if you live in a “federally declared disaster area” and your home is affected, then you can claim the cost to repair the damages. If you use part of your home as a principal place of business, some repairs can be deducted, but you must itemize your deductions on Schedule A.

**What are my next steps if I have been impacted by a natural disaster?**

The first step is to check the [IRS Tax Relief Site](http://www.irs.gov/uac/Tax-Relief-in-Disaster-Situations) to see if your area has been determined as a “disaster area” by the President because the IRS provides specific relief to these victims. (If you do not have access to the internet, call FEMA for disaster assistance at**1-800-621-3362). If you are in a disaster area and you were impacted by the disaster, meet with a tax preparer to determine which year you should claim casualty loss. Doing so will help you figure out the best possible tax break.**

**What tax consequences will I face if I lost my home in a foreclosure?**

For federal taxes, a foreclosure is viewed as the sale of property. Two separate matters will impact your tax liability: any gain from the sale of your property and credited income you receive from any debt forgiveness. There are ways to calculate your Gains and Cancellation of Debt. To learn the specifics on how your particular situation is impacted, visit the [Home Foreclosure and Debt Cancellation section](http://www.irs.gov/uac/Home-Foreclosure-and-Debt-Cancellation) on the IRS website or contact our office for guidance.

**How are my taxes impacted if I have filed bankruptcy?**

Depending on which Chapter you filed for, taxes may not be exempt. With Chapter 7 bankruptcy, federal taxes are exempt from discharge. When filing Chapter 13 bankruptcy, it is very important to file and pay your taxes during the bankruptcy proceedings because the court can dismiss your claim if you fail to meet this requirement. Dismissing the claim leaves you responsible for all of your debts. For further tax information on bankruptcy, read the [IRS Publication 908 (10/2012), Bankruptcy Tax Guide](http://www.irs.gov/publications/p908/index.html).

**Can my spouse and I file our tax return together if we are legally separated and not divorced?**

If your divorce is not final, you may choose to file married filing jointly. Just note, that you and your spouse are responsible for the tax bill and any future audits.

**If I forgot to report a second income on my taxes, how can I report it now?**

Since it is not a small change (missing form or math miscalculation), missed income probably requires that you file an amendment. You’ll need to file Form 1040X, *Amended U.S. Individual Income Tax Return*, on paper; no e-filing here. Additionally, if any changes you are making need forms or schedules attached, make sure you do so.

Don’t panic, you have **three years** since the date of filing or **two years** from paying (whichever is later) to correct the issue. But note, if your amended return claims more refund money, go ahead and cash your original refund check – no need to wait the average 12 weeks it takes to process your amended return. However, if your amended return shows you owe, you’ll want to lower fees and interest by paying those taxes as fast as you can.

You can then track the status of your amended tax return(s) with the IRS’s [‘Where’s My Amended Return’ tool](http://www.irs.gov/Filing/Individuals/Amended-Returns-(Form-1040-X)/Wheres-My-Amended-Return-1). Check the IRS’s site about three weeks after you’ve mailed your amended return or call 866-464-2050.

If you are uncertain about needing to amend a tax return, don’t hesitate to contact our office.

**Do I have to pay taxes on money that was gifted to me?**

No. The federal tax laws do not consider gifted money to be earned income therefore it is not taxable to you. No state has a tax law on gifted money either.

**Am I taxed on money that I inherit from a loved one?**

Generally, property received as an inheritance is not included in your income. However, if property you receive this way later produces income such as interest, dividends, or rents, the income is taxable to you.

**Do I need to report work-study income if I am a full-time student?**

Yes, any money which you received as a result of work is taxable income and must be reported on your tax return. Attach your W-2 showing your earnings and your taxes withheld to your tax return.

**Why should I file my taxes electronically?**

The main reason for filing taxes electronically (e-filing) is to get your refund faster. Twenty-four hours after sending your tax return, the IRS will send you a confirmation of receipt or a rejection notice. Generally, e-filing is safer and faster than filing on paper.

**How can I check the status of my refund?**

The ['Where’s My Refund' tool](http://www.irs.gov/Refunds) on the IRS website provides the most up-to-date information regarding the status of your refund. This tool is updated every 24 hours. We also have a link to this site under our links tab.

**Why is my refund less than I expected?**

Many factors can contribute to why your refund is less than you expected. You have to consider the three elements that define a refund: your taxable income, the amount withheld from your paycheck for federal and state taxes, and your tax rate. If you aren’t getting as much money back try to look on the bright side – you didn’t give the IRS a zero-interest loan.