

# Direct Loan Entrance Counseling Guide

For Borrowers of Direct Loans

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**U.S. Department of Education**  
Dr. Miguel Cardona  
Secretary

**Federal Student Aid**  
Richard Cordray  
Chief Operating Officer

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Federal Student Aid, an office of the U.S. Department of Education, ensures that all eligible Americans benefit from federal financial assistance—grants, loans, and work-study programs for education beyond high school. By championing the promise of postsecondary education, we uphold its value as a force for greater inclusion in American society and for the continued vitality of America as a nation.



**i Need More Information, or Have a Comment?**

If you are a borrower with questions about the Direct Loan Program or your Direct Loans, you should contact your loan servicer or the websites or offices described in the content of this publication.

If you have general questions about Federal Student Aid's programs, you may call the Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC) at

1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)  
Locations without access to 800 numbers, call 1-334-523-2691.  
You can email FSAIC at [studentaid@ed.gov](mailto:studentaid@ed.gov).

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## **Be Sure to Save This Publication**

Keep this publication and all other documents you receive associated with your Direct Loan in a safe place. You will need to refer to them as you progress in and complete your postsecondary education.



## ⓘ **Important! You May Be Contacted by Third-Party Student Debt Relief Companies**

You should exercise caution when dealing with third-party student loan debt relief companies. The services that these companies typically provide are offered to borrowers free of charge through the U.S. Department of Education or your servicer. At no cost, the Department and our federal loan servicers can help you:

- ⓘ lower your monthly loan payment,
- ⓘ change your repayment plan,
- ⓘ consolidate multiple federal student loans,
- ⓘ postpone monthly payments while you're furthering your education or are unemployed, and
- ⓘ get your loans out of default.

Have questions or need help with your student loans? Contact your loan servicer for FREE assistance.



## About This Guide

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The ***Direct Loan Entrance Counseling Guide*** provides an overview of the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Direct Loan) Program including information you'll need to successfully repay the federal student loans you'll be eligible to receive to help pay for your college costs. For additional information about many of the topics covered in this guide, see your *Master Promissory Note* (MPN) or your copy of the Borrower's Rights and Responsibilities Statement that accompanied your MPN.

You can find a copy of your completed MPNs in “*My Documents*” when you log in to [StudentAid.gov/documents](https://studentaid.gov/documents). Once you are logged in and on the “*My Documents*” page, use the drop down box next to “Completed Documents” to select and view your *Master Promissory Note* (MPN).

### What is Entrance Counseling?

If you have not previously received a Direct Loan or Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL), the federal government requires you to complete entrance counseling to ensure that you understand the responsibilities and obligations you are assuming. You must complete entrance counseling before you can receive the proceeds of your first Direct Loan.

If you are completing entrance counseling to borrow a loan as an undergraduate student, then the entrance counseling will fulfill counseling requirements for Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans. If you are completing entrance counseling to borrow a loan as a graduate or professional student, the entrance counseling will fulfill counseling requirements for Direct Unsubsidized Loans and Direct PLUS loans.

## Who should complete entrance counseling?

Federal law requires entrance counseling for students who have not previously received a subsidized or unsubsidized loan or PLUS loan (graduate/professional students only) under the Direct Loan Program or Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program.

## What information do I need to complete entrance counseling?



A verified username and password (FSA ID);



The name of your school(s) and the tuition, fees, and other charges you will be paying this year. You can find this information on your student account at your school. Your school's student accounts office (often called the bursar's office) can provide you with a paper copy of your student account or tell you how to view it online.



The letter you may have received from your school's financial aid office often referred to as the Financial Aid Offer;



Details on your income, financial aid, and living expenses;

## How does one complete entrance counseling?

You can complete the Direct Loan Entrance Counseling online at [StudentAid.gov/entrance-counseling](https://StudentAid.gov/entrance-counseling).

Your school may have alternate entrance counseling requirements. Check with your school's financial aid office to be sure that the counseling available on this website satisfies its requirements for entrance counseling.





## Terms Used in This Guide

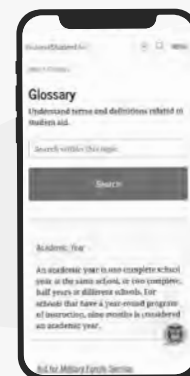
**Acceleration**— Demand for immediate repayment of your entire federal student loan. The entire unpaid amount of your federal student loan becomes due and payable if you:

- ✓ receive loan money but don't enroll at least half-time at the school that determined you were eligible to receive the federal student loan,
- ✓ use your loan money to pay for anything other than expenses related to your education at the school that determined you were eligible to receive the federal student loan,
- ✓ make a false statement that causes you to receive a federal student loan that you're not eligible to receive, or
- ✓ default on your federal student loan.

**Aggregate Loan Limit**— A limit on the total amount of FFEL and Direct Subsidized Loans and/or Unsubsidized Loans that you may borrow for undergraduate and graduate study. If the total amount you receive over the course of your education reaches the aggregate loan limit, you will not be eligible to receive additional loans. However, if you repay some of your loans to bring your outstanding loan debt below the aggregate loan limit, you could then borrow again, up to the amount of your remaining eligibility under the aggregate loan limit.

### Note on Terms

Throughout this guide, the words “we,” “us,” and “our” refer to the U.S. Department of Education. You will also frequently encounter the words “loan holder,” “loan servicer,” and “*Master Promissory Note*.” To assist you, we provide the definitions for those and other terms used in this publication on pages 8–10 of this guide. You can find an expanded glossary of terms at [StudentAid.gov/help-center/answers/topic/glossary/articles](https://StudentAid.gov/help-center/answers/topic/glossary/articles)





**Annual Percentage Rate (APR)**—The actual yearly cost of borrowing money reflected as a percentage rate.

**Capitalized Interest (Capitalization)**—Unpaid interest that has been added to the principal balance of a federal student loan. Future interest is charged on the increased principal balance, and this may increase the amount of your monthly payment and the total amount you repay over the life of the federal student loan.

**Federal Student Loan**—In this guide, loans made under the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Direct Loan) Program, Federal Perkins Loan Program, and the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program.

**Grace Period**—A period of time (generally six months) after you graduate or drop below half-time enrollment during which you are not required to make payments. The repayment period for your loan begins after the end of the grace period.

**Interest**—The cost of borrowing money. Interest is calculated as a percentage of the outstanding (unpaid) principal balance.

**Loan Discharge (Cancellation)**—The elimination of a loan debt under certain limited circumstances.

**Loan Forgiveness**—The elimination of a loan debt under one or more of the various Direct Loan forgiveness programs.



**Loan Holder**—The U.S. Department of Education is your loan holder. Your loan servicer will be different than your loan holder (see below).

**Loan Servicer**—An entity that collects payments on a federal student loan, responds to customer service inquiries, and performs other administrative tasks associated with maintaining a loan on behalf of a loan holder. A loan servicer performs all servicing tasks on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. A current listing of federal loan servicers for federally held loans made through the Direct Loan Program can be found at [StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/repayment/servicers](http://StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/repayment/servicers).

Federal Student Loan Holders and Servicers		
	Direct Loan Program	Federal Family Education Loan Program <sup>1,2</sup>
<b>Who is the loan holder?</b>	The U.S Department of Education	A bank, school, other organization, or the U.S Department of Education
<b>Who is the loan servicer?</b>	An organization assigned by the U.S Department of Education  Many organizations that service Direct Loans also service FFEL Program loans.	An organization assigned by the loan holder  Many organizations that service FFEL Program loans also service Direct Loans

<sup>1</sup> It's important to note that while loans made under the FFEL Program were in many cases made by banks, they are not "private" student loans. Loans that were made under the FFEL Program have the same protections and most of the repayment options as loans made under the Direct Loan Program.

<sup>2</sup> The authority to make new FFEL Program loans ended June 30, 2010.

**Loan Holder**—The U.S. Department of Education is your loan holder. Your loan servicer will be different than your loan holder (see below).

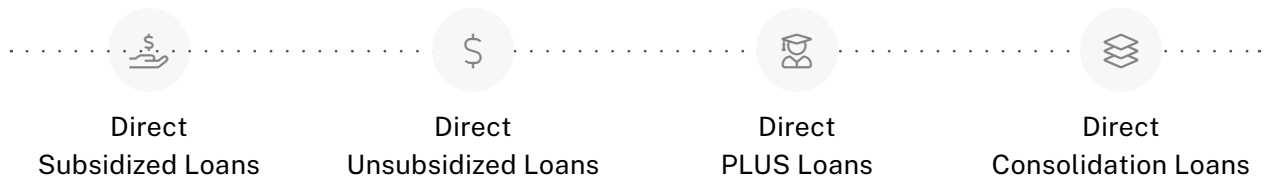
**Loan Servicer**—An entity that collects payments on a federal student loan, responds to customer service inquiries, and performs other administrative tasks associated with maintaining a loan on behalf of a loan holder. A loan servicer performs all servicing tasks on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. A current listing of federal loan servicers for federally held loans made through the Direct Loan Program can be found at [StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/repayment/servicers](http://StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/repayment/servicers).

### Identifying Your Loan Servicer

You can identify the servicer for your new Direct Loan by using your username and password to log in to your "Dashboard" on [StudentAid.gov/dashboard](http://StudentAid.gov/dashboard). Click "View Details" on the "My Aid" card for more information about your loan.

# The Direct Loan Program

Through the Direct Loan Program, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) provides the following loans to eligible students at participating schools:



Types of Federal Student Loans (Excluding Consolidation Loans) <sup>1</sup>			
	Direct Subsidized Loans	Direct Unsubsidized Loans	Direct PLUS Loans
<b>Who may receive this loan?</b>	Undergraduate students with financial need	All students	PLUS loans are federal loans that graduate or professional students and parents of dependent undergraduate students can use to help pay for college or career school. PLUS loans can help pay for education expenses not covered by other financial aid.
<b>When does the government pay my interest?</b>	While you are enrolled and six months after you graduate or drop below half-time enrollment  Deferment periods  During certain periods of repayment under the Income-Based Repayment, Pay As You Earn, and Revised Pay As You Earn plans	You pay all interest charged over the course of your loan term.	You pay all interest charged over the course of your loan term.
<b>When must I begin making payments?</b>	Six months after you graduate or drop below half-time enrollment	Six months after you graduate or drop below half-time enrollment	Parent PLUS Loans will go into repayment once the loan is fully disbursed. (However, the parent can request a deferment while the student is enrolled.) Graduate and professional PLUS Loan borrowers receive an automatic deferment while in school and a six-month deferment after they graduate, leave school, or drop below half-time enrollment.

<sup>1</sup> You may receive more than one type of loan under the Direct Loan Program. Each loan type has its own terms and conditions, such as interest rates. You repay your Direct Loan via a servicer to the Department of Education.



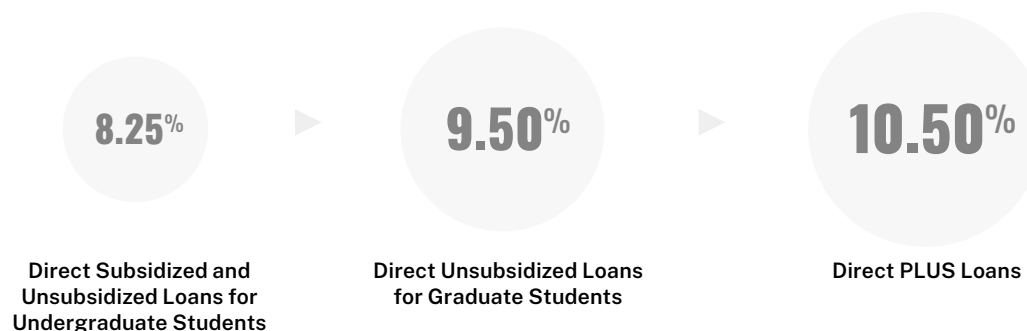
# Interest Rates in the Direct Loan Program

The interest rates on Direct Subsidized Loans, Direct Unsubsidized Loans, and Direct PLUS loans are fixed rates that are calculated each year in accordance with formulas specified in the laws and regulations that set the terms and conditions of Direct Loans.

When the rates are calculated, they apply to all loans for which the first disbursement (when funds are posted to your account or delivered to you) is made during the period beginning on July 1 of one year and ending on June 30 of the following year. Each loan you receive over the course of your education may have a different fixed interest rate, depending on when the loan is first disbursed, the loan type, and whether you are an undergraduate student or a graduate or professional student.

**Each type of loan has a maximum fixed interest rate (or cap). The maximum interest rates are**

- ✓ 8.25% on Direct Subsidized Loans made to undergraduates<sup>1</sup> and Direct Unsubsidized Loans made to undergraduates;
- ✓ 9.50% on Direct Unsubsidized Loans made to graduate students; and
- ✓ 10.50% on Direct PLUS Loans made to graduate and professional students, and parents of dependent undergraduate students.



<sup>1</sup> Graduate and professional students are not eligible for Direct Subsidized Loans.

## How Interest Accrues

Direct Loans are “simple daily interest” loans. This means that interest accrues daily. The amount of interest that accrues per day is calculated by dividing the interest rate on your loan (as a decimal) by the number of days in a year and then multiplying that by the outstanding principal balance of the loan.

For example, on a \$10,000 Direct Unsubsidized Loan with a 6.8% interest rate, the amount of interest that accrues per day while the loan has an outstanding balance of \$10,000 is \$1.86, calculated as follows:

$$(0.068 / 365) \times \$10,000 = \$1.86$$

## How You Can Find the Interest Rates on Your Loans

You can find the interest rates for your Direct Loans and FFEL Program loans by logging in to your account at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) with your account username and password. The site will open to your Dashboard where you will see a record of the loans and grants you’ve received. By selecting “View Details” and then “View Breakdown” under the loans tab, you will be able to see your loan(s) sorted by servicer. By expanding the “View Loans” option, you will see the details of your loan(s) including the interest rate for each loan.



# Loan Limits in the Direct Loan Program

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## Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loan Limits

For Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans, there are limits on the maximum amount you may borrow for an academic year (annual loan limits) and the maximum amount you may borrow in total for undergraduate and graduate study (aggregate loan limits). The actual loan amount you are eligible to receive is determined by your school and is based on your academic year, grade level, whether you are dependent or independent, and other factors, such as:

- ✓ the length of your program,
- ✓ your cost of attendance,
- ✓ your Expected Family Contribution (EFC),
- ✓ other financial aid you receive, and
- ✓ your remaining eligibility under the annual and aggregate loan limits.

If you're an undergraduate student, your annual loan limit will include all Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans you receive for the same academic year.



## Direct PLUS Loans and Loan Limits

Direct PLUS Loans don't have fixed limits. You can borrow up to the cost of attendance at the school you're attending, minus all other financial assistance you receive. Your school will determine the actual Direct PLUS Loan amount that you are eligible to receive.

Loan Limits in the Direct Loan Program		
Academic Year	Dependent Students (except students whose parents are unable to obtain PLUS loans)	Independent Students (and dependent undergraduate students whose parents are unable to obtain PLUS loans)
<b>First-Year Undergraduate Annual Loan Limit</b>	\$5,500—No more than \$3,500 of this amount may be in subsidized loans.	\$9,500—No more than \$3,500 of this amount may be in subsidized loans.
<b>Second-Year Undergraduate Annual Loan Limit</b>	\$6,500—No more than \$4,500 of this amount may be in subsidized loans.	\$10,500—No more than \$4,500 of this amount may be in subsidized loans.
<b>Third-Year-and-Beyond Undergraduate Annual Loan Limit</b>	\$7,500 per year—No more than \$5,500 of this amount may be in subsidized loans.	\$12,500—No more than \$5,500 of this amount may be in subsidized loans.
<b>Graduate or Professional Student<sup>1</sup> Annual Loan Limit</b>	Not applicable	\$20,500 (unsubsidized loans only)
<b>Subsidized and Unsubsidized Aggregate Loan Limit</b>	\$31,000—No more than \$23,000 of this amount may be in subsidized loans.	\$57,500 for undergraduates—No more than \$23,000 of this amount may be in subsidized loans. \$138,500 for graduate or professional students—No more than \$65,500 of this amount may be in subsidized loans. The graduate aggregate limit includes all federal loans received for undergraduate study.

<sup>1</sup> All students enrolled in graduate and professional degree programs are considered independent.



### Considerations for Graduate/Professional Students

Use Direct Unsubsidized Loans first, then use Direct PLUS Loans, if needed. Direct Unsubsidized Loans offer:

- Lower interest rates
- Lower origination fees



## Credit Checks and Direct PLUS Loans

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One of the eligibility requirements to receive a Direct PLUS Loan is that you must not have an adverse credit history. If you request a Direct PLUS Loan, a credit check will be conducted to determine if you have an adverse credit history. Direct PLUS Loans are the only Direct Loans that require a credit check.

If you have an adverse credit history, you may still receive a Direct PLUS Loan if you obtain an endorser or if you document to ED's satisfaction that there are extenuating circumstances related to your adverse credit history. An endorser is someone who does not have an adverse credit history and who agrees to repay your federal student loan if you do not. If you have an adverse credit history, but you manage to qualify for a Direct PLUS Loan by obtaining an endorser or by providing satisfactory documentation of extenuating circumstances, you must complete special Direct PLUS Loan counseling before you can receive the loan.





## Half-time Enrollment Requirement

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You must be enrolled at least half-time to receive a Direct Subsidized Loan, a Direct Unsubsidized Loan, or a Direct PLUS Loan. For Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans, if you drop below half-time enrollment, the six-month grace period (see box on page 18) begins. If you are a Direct PLUS Loan student borrower and you drop below half-time enrollment, the six-month post-enrollment deferment period begins. You have to begin making payments after the end of the six-month grace period or six-month post-enrollment deferment period, as applicable.

**For undergraduate students, federal regulations set the following minimum standards for half-time enrollment:**

- ✓ For schools that measure academic progress in credit hours and use semesters, trimesters, or quarters, half-time is at least six semester hours or quarter hours per term.
- ✓ For schools that measure academic progress in credit hours but do not use terms, half-time is at least 12 semester hours or 18 quarter hours per academic year.
- ✓ For schools that measure academic progress in clock hours, half-time is at least 12 clock hours per week.

Schools that measure academic progress in credit hours and use terms other than semesters, trimesters, or quarters determine the minimum number of credit hours for half-time enrollment based on the number of weeks of instructional time in the term, the number of weeks of instructional time in the program of study's academic year, and the number of credit hours in the program's academic year.

Schools may choose to define half-time enrollment based on a higher number of credit or clock hours than the minimum standards shown above, and a school's half-time enrollment standard may be different for summer sessions, for example. Your school can tell you if its definition of half-time enrollment is different from these minimum standards.

These minimum standards apply only to undergraduate students. If you are a graduate or professional student, the definition of half-time enrollment is determined by your school. If you drop below half-time enrollment and then resume enrollment on at least a half-time basis before the end of the six-month grace period, your Direct Subsidized Loan or Direct Unsubsidized Loan will return to “in-school” status and you will regain a full six-month grace period.

Periods When Interest Accrues on Direct Subsidized Loans <sup>1</sup>	
While enrolled in school at least half-time	<input type="radio"/> No
During my grace period on loans first disbursed (paid out) after June 30, 2014	<input type="radio"/> No
During deferment periods	<input type="radio"/> No
During certain periods of repayment under the Income-Based Repayment, Pay As You Earn, and Revised Pay As You Earn plans	<input type="radio"/> No
During forbearance periods	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes
During all other periods of repayment	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes

<sup>1</sup> Interest on Direct Unsubsidized Loans and Direct PLUS loans accrues during all periods.



# Direct Loan Disbursements

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In most cases, your school will disburse the proceeds of your Direct Loan by crediting it to your school account to pay tuition and fees, room and board, and other authorized charges. If the loan disbursement amount exceeds school charges, the remaining balance of the disbursement will be paid to you directly by check or other means. You will be notified in writing each time your school disburses a portion of your loan. The notification will include:

- ✓ the expected date and amount of the loan disbursement,
- ✓ your right to cancel all or a portion of your Direct Loan, and
- ✓ the procedures and time frame for notifying the school that you want to cancel all or a portion of your Direct Loan.

# Be Smart in Your Use of Financial Aid

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First, finance your education with sources of aid that you do not have to repay. You don't have to repay grants, scholarships, or work-study earnings.

Your school's financial aid office determines your eligibility for each type of federal student aid based on your *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®). Filing the FAFSA form is free! Go to the FAFSA site at [StudentAid.gov/fafsa](https://StudentAid.gov/fafsa) to complete an application or forecast your eligibility for aid.

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## 1. Apply for grants and scholarships.

- ✓ Explore federal grant programs.
- ✓ Search for scholarships and grants offered by your school and state as well as nonprofit and private organizations.
- ✓ Consider scholarships for U.S. military service, education support offered by the military, and education benefits for veterans.
- ✓ For more ideas and information, visit [StudentAid.gov/understand-aid/types](https://StudentAid.gov/understand-aid/types).



## 2. Work part time.

- ✓ Explore job opportunities on or off campus.
- ✓ Explore work-study programs, including Federal Work-Study offered at your school. Contact your school's financial aid office.
- ✓ Balance work hours with your studies.



## 3. Borrow only what you need.

- ✓ You don't have to accept the full amount offered. You may request and borrow a lower amount.
- ✓ If you're eligible, take advantage of Direct Subsidized Loans. The government pays the interest while you are in school and during certain other periods (see chart on page 18).

## Next, use federal student loans before considering private loans.

Exhaust your federal student loan options before considering student loans offered by a private lender, such as a bank or a credit union. Consult your school's financial aid administrator regarding all of your student loan options. Private student loans may have disadvantages, including

- variable interest rates that can exceed 18%,
  - requiring you to make loan payments while you're still in school,
  - penalty fees for paying off your loan early,
  - requiring an established credit record and using your credit score and other factors to determine the cost of your loan,
  - requiring a cosigner,
  - the inability to consolidate private student loans into a Direct Consolidation Loan,
  - limited options for loan forgiveness, and
  - limited options for deferments and forbearances.
- 

## Federal student loans usually offer the following advantages over private loans:

- ✓ Lower interest rates and interest rates that are fixed once the loan is made
- ✓ The federal government generally will make interest payments on Direct Subsidized Loans while you are in school on at least a half-time basis.
- ✓ No credit check required, except for Direct PLUS Loans
- ✓ Flexible and affordable repayment plans for Direct Loans
- ✓ The ability to consolidate Federal Family Education Loans (FFEL) into a Direct Consolidation Loan (See the discussion later under *Loan Consolidation*.)

### Did You Know?

It's important to graduate! According to U.S. Census Bureau Data, the average college graduate with a four-year degree earns almost \$1 million more over their lifetime than a high school graduate.



# Repayment

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## What is repayment?

Repayment is the process of satisfying your obligation to pay back the money you borrowed to help you pay for your education.

For Direct Subsidized Loans, Direct Unsubsidized Loans, and Direct PLUS Loans as a graduate or professional student, the repayment period begins when your grace period ends (see page 18). Direct PLUS Loans for parent borrowers enter repayment when they are fully disbursed (paid out), but parents may defer making payments while their child is enrolled in school at least half-time and for an additional six months after their child graduates, leaves school or drops below half-time enrollment.

## What determines the rules of my repayment?

You repay your loan according to a repayment plan that you choose through your federal loan servicer. The repayment plan you choose determines the amount you pay each month and the number of payments you must make.

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### Did You Know?

Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans are eligible for a six-month grace period that generally begins on the day after you graduate, leave school, or drop below half-time enrollment.

Direct PLUS loans qualify for a six-month post-enrollment deferment after you graduate, leave school, or drop below half-time enrollment. You're not required to make payments during the grace period or the six-month post-enrollment deferment period.

## When do I need to start making payments?

You are not required to make payments while you are enrolled at least half-time at an eligible school or (for most loan types) during the first six months after you leave school or drop below half-time enrollment.

## How long do I have to repay my loan?

The maximum time period over which you must repay your federal student loan is called the repayment period. The repayment period can range from 10 to 30 years, depending on your repayment plan and other factors. By keeping your repayment period as short as possible and by making your payments on time, you reduce the amount of interest you pay over the life of the loan.

## Can I make payments when I'm not required to do so?

Yes! If you have a Direct Loan, you are not required to make payments while you are in school and enrolled at least half time, during your grace period, or during a period of deferment (see page 36) or forbearance (see page 37). However, making payments while you are not required to do so— instead of allowing interest to be capitalized (added to the principal balance)— can substantially reduce the cost of your Direct Loan over time.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On Direct Unsubsidized Loans and Direct PLUS Loans, interest accrues while borrowers are in school, during a grace period, and periods of forbearance and deferment. That interest will be capitalized (added to the principal amount) when your Direct Loan enters repayment or when the deferment or forbearance period expires unless you pay the accrued interest before repayment begins.

## What if I want to pay off my loan early?

You may prepay all or part of your Direct Loan at any time without a penalty. If you intend for any additional funds that you send your servicer to be used to pay down your principal, you must instruct your loan servicer of your intention or the servicer will apply the funds to future scheduled payments.

### Did You Know?

You can make payments during your grace period to prevent interest from accruing and reduce the amount of interest that may be capitalized when you enter repayment. You can find out how much you can save by contacting your loan servicer.



### Select the Right Repayment Plan for You

**Choose the repayment plan that's right for you.** You can select and change your repayment plan at any time. Contact your loan servicer to find out what repayment plans are available to you.

**If you do not select a repayment plan,** your loan servicer will place you on the Standard Repayment Plan with fixed payments over a maximum of 10 years.

## What happens if I return to school?

If you return to school on at least a half-time basis before your six-month grace period ends, your Direct Loan will return to in-school status. You won't have to make payments until six months after you graduate, leave school, or drop below half-time enrollment.

If you return to school on at least a half-time basis after your six-month grace period has ended, you'll qualify for an in-school deferment and won't have to make payments while you remain enrolled at least half-time. However, when you graduate, leave school, or drop below half-time, your in-school deferment will end, and you'll be required to begin making payments right away.

## What if I'm called to active-duty military service?

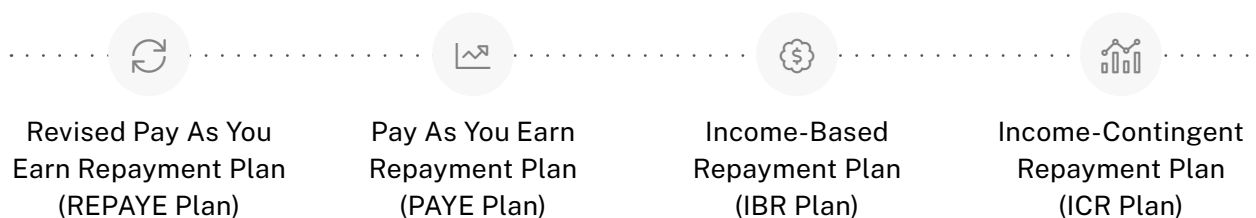
Active-duty military service for more than 30 days in a reserve component of the U.S. armed forces is not counted as part of your grace period. Specifically, active-duty service, as well as the time necessary for you to reenroll in school after your active-duty service ends, is excluded from your grace period. However, a period that is excluded from your grace period may not exceed three years.

If the call or order to active duty occurs while you are in school and requires you to drop below half-time enrollment, the start of your grace period will be delayed until after the end of the excluded period described above. If the call or order to active duty occurs during your grace period, you will receive a full six-month grace period at the end of the excluded period.

## What are my options if my federal student loan payments are high compared to my income?

If your Direct Loan payments are high compared to your income, you may want to repay your loans under an income-driven repayment plan. Most Direct Loans are eligible for at least one income-driven repayment plan. If your income is low enough, your payment could be as low as \$0 per month.

### The Direct Loan Program offers four income-driven repayment plans:



These plans are designed to make your student loan debt more manageable by reducing your monthly payment amount. If you'd like to repay your federal student loans under an income-driven plan, you need to fill out an application.



## Traditional Repayment Plan Options for Direct Loans

Repayment Plans	Eligible Loans	Monthly Payment and Time Frame	Eligibility and Other Information
<b>Standard Repayment Plan</b>	Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans  Direct PLUS Loans  Direct Consolidation Loans	Payments are a fixed amount that ensures your loans are paid off within 10 years (within 10 to 30 years for Consolidation Loans).	All borrowers are eligible for this plan.  You'll usually pay less over time than under other plans.  The Standard Repayment Plan with a 10-year repayment period is not a good option for those seeking Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF). The Standard Repayment Plan for Consolidation Loans is not a qualifying repayment plan for PSLF.
<b>Graduated Repayment Plan</b>	Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans  Direct PLUS Loans  Direct Consolidation Loans	Payments are lower at first and then increase, usually every two years, and are for an amount that will ensure your loans are paid off within 10 years (within 10 to 30 years for Consolidation Loans).	All borrowers are eligible for this plan.  You'll pay more over time than under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan.  Generally not a qualifying repayment plan for PSLF.
<b>Extended Repayment Plan</b>	Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans  Subsidized and Unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loans  All PLUS loans  All Consolidation Loans (Direct Loans or FFEL Program loans)	Payments may be fixed or graduated and will ensure that your loans are paid off within 25 years.	You must have more than \$30,000 in outstanding Direct Loans.  Your monthly payments will be lower than under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan or the Graduated Repayment Plan.  You'll pay more over time than under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan.  Not a qualifying repayment plan for PSLF.



### Always Repay Your Student Loans

You must repay the full amount of your federal student loan(s), even if you:

- don't complete your program of study,
- aren't satisfied with or didn't receive the education or other services that you paid for with your federal student loans.
- can't find employment after graduation, and/or

## Income-Driven Repayment Plan Options for Direct Loans

Repayment Plans	Eligible Loans	Monthly Payment and Time Frame	Eligibility and Other Information
<p><b>Revised Pay As You Earn Repayment Plan (REPAYE)</b></p>	<p>Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans</p> <p>Direct PLUS Loans made to students</p> <p>Direct and FFEL Consolidation Loans that do not include Direct or FFEL PLUS Loans made to parents</p>	<p>Your monthly payments will be 10% of discretionary income.</p> <p>Payments are recalculated each year and are based on your updated income and family size.</p> <p>You must update your income and family size each year, even if they haven't changed.</p> <p>If you're married, both your and your spouse's income or loan debt will be considered, whether taxes are filed jointly or separately (with limited exceptions).</p> <p>Any outstanding balance on your loan will be forgiven if you haven't repaid your loan in full after 20 years (for loans made for undergraduate study) or 25 years (for loans made for graduate study).</p>	<p>Any Direct Loan borrower with an eligible loan type may choose this plan.</p> <p>Your monthly payment can be more than the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan amount.</p> <p>You may have to pay income tax on any amount that is forgiven.</p> <p>A good option for those seeking Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF).</p>
<p><b>Pay As You Earn Repayment Plan (PAYE)</b></p>	<p>Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans</p> <p>Direct PLUS Loans made to students</p> <p>Direct and FFEL Consolidation Loans that do not include Direct or FFEL PLUS Loans made to parents</p>	<p>Your monthly payments will be 10% of your discretionary income, but never more than you would have paid under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan.</p> <p>Payments are recalculated each year and are based on your updated income and family size.</p> <p>You must update your income and family size each year, even if they haven't changed.</p> <p>If you're married, your spouse's income or loan debt will be considered only if you file a joint tax return.</p> <p>Any outstanding balance on your loan will be forgiven if you haven't repaid your loan in full after 20 years.</p>	<p>You must be a new borrower on or after Oct. 1, 2007, and must have received a disbursement of a Direct Loan on or after Oct. 1, 2011.</p> <p>You must have high debt relative to your income.</p> <p>Your monthly payment will never be more than the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan amount.</p> <p>You'll usually pay more over time than under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan.</p> <p>You may have to pay income tax on any amount that is forgiven.</p> <p>A good option for those seeking Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF).</p>

<p><b>Income-Based Repayment Plan (IBR)</b></p>	<p>Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans</p> <p>Subsidized and Unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loans</p> <p>All PLUS Loans made to students</p> <p>Direct and FFEL Consolidation Loans that do not include Direct or FFEL PLUS Loans made to parents</p>	<p>Your monthly payments will be 10 or 15% of your discretionary income, (depending on when you received your first loans), but never more than you would have paid under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan.</p> <p>Payments are recalculated each year and are based on your updated income and family size.</p> <p>If you're married, your spouse's income or loan debt will be considered only if you file a joint tax return.</p> <p>Any outstanding balance on your loan will be forgiven if you haven't repaid your loan in full after 20 or 25 years (depending on when you received your first loan).</p>	<p>You must have a high debt relative to your income.</p> <p>Your monthly payment will never be more than the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan amount.</p> <p>You'll pay more over time than under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan.</p> <p>You may have to pay income tax on any amount that is forgiven.</p> <p>A good option for those seeking Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF).</p>
<p><b>Income-Contingent Repayment Plan (ICR)</b></p>	<p>Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans</p> <p>Direct PLUS Loans made to students</p> <p>Direct Consolidation Loans</p>	<p>Your monthly payment will be the lesser of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 percent of discretionary income, or</li> <li>• the amount you would pay on a repayment plan with a fixed payment over 12 years, adjusted according to your income.</li> </ul> <p>Payments are recalculated each year and are based on your updated income, family size, and the total amount of your Direct Loans.</p> <p>You must update your income and family size each year, even if they haven't changed.</p> <p>If you're married, your spouse's income or loan debt will be considered only if you file a joint tax return or you choose to repay your Direct Loans jointly with your spouse.</p> <p>Any outstanding balance will be forgiven if you haven't repaid your loan in full after 25 years.</p>	<p>You'll usually pay more over time than under the 10-year Standard Plan.</p> <p>You may have to pay income tax on any amount that is forgiven.</p> <p>Good option for those seeking PSLF.</p> <p>The only plan that parent borrowers can access by consolidating their Parent PLUS Loans into a Direct Consolidation Loan.</p>

## Sample Monthly Payment Amounts for Direct Program Loans

Traditional Repayment Plans												
Initial Debt	Non-Consolidation Standard			Consolidation Standard			Extended Fixed					
	Monthly	Years <sup>1</sup>	Total	Monthly	Years	Total	Monthly	Years	Total			
\$5,000	\$53	10	\$6,364	\$53	10	\$6,364	N/A	N/A	N/A			
\$10,000	\$106	10	\$12,728	\$79	15	\$14,234	N/A	N/A	N/A			
\$25,000	\$265	10	\$31,820	\$165	20	\$39,597	N/A	N/A	N/A			
\$50,000	\$530	10	\$63,639	\$292	25	\$87,689	\$292	25	\$87,689			
\$100,000	\$1,061	10	\$127,279	\$537	30	\$193,256	\$585	25	\$175,377			

Initial Debt	Non-Consolidation Graduated				Consolidation Graduated				Extended Graduated			
	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Initial	Final	Years	Total
\$5,000	\$30	\$90	10	\$6,715	\$30	\$90	10	\$6,715	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
\$10,000	\$60	\$180	10	\$13,431	\$48	\$144	15	\$15,306	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
\$25,000	\$150	\$450	10	\$33,578	\$129	\$227	20	\$41,684	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
\$50,000	\$300	\$900	10	\$67,157	\$234	\$410	25	\$93,104	\$234	\$410	25	\$93,104
\$100,000	\$600	\$1,800	10	\$134,313	\$430	\$753	30	\$207,886	\$467	\$820	25	\$186,207

<sup>1</sup>The 'Years' column indicates the number of years in repayment.

## Income-Driven Repayment Plans

### Starting AGI \$25,000 unmarried with no dependents

Initial Debt	ICR					IBR <sup>2</sup>				
	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven <sup>3</sup>	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven
\$5,000	\$30	\$39	20	\$8,131	-	\$49	\$53	10	\$6,395	-
\$10,000	\$59	\$77	20	\$16,262	-	\$49	\$106	13.8	\$14,497	-
\$25,000	\$148	\$193	20	\$40,655	-	\$49	\$265	20	\$34,091	\$14,604
\$50,000	\$204	\$395	22.4	\$88,042	-	\$49	\$276	20	\$34,223	\$65,777
\$100,000	\$204	\$968	25	\$152,534	\$80,213	\$49	\$276	20	\$34,223	\$165,777

Initial Debt	PAYE					REPAYE (only undergraduate loans)					REPAYE (w/ grad loans)				
	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven
\$5,000	\$49	\$53	10	\$6,395	-	\$49	\$105	7	\$6,094	-	\$49	\$105	7	\$6,094	-
\$10,000	\$49	\$106	13.8	\$14,497	-	\$49	\$162	12.4	\$14,316	-	\$49	\$162	12.4	\$14,316	-
\$25,000	\$49	\$265	20	\$34,091	\$14,604	\$49	\$276	20	\$34,223	\$12,471	\$49	\$365	23.5	\$47,892	-
\$50,000	\$49	\$276	20	\$34,223	\$65,777	\$49	\$276	20	\$34,223	\$56,927	\$49	\$390	25	\$54,741	\$48,897
\$100,000	\$49	\$276	20	\$34,223	\$165,777	\$49	\$276	20	\$34,223	\$132,889	\$49	\$390	25	\$54,741	\$135,129

<sup>2</sup> These values assume you are a new borrower on or after July 1, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> The 'Forgiven' column indicates the remaining loan amount that will be forgiven after you have satisfied the repayment period requirements. You may have to pay federal income tax on the forgiven loan amount.

## Income-Driven Repayment Plans (cont'd)

Starting AGI \$40,000 married with no dependents (spouse has no loans)

Initial Debt	ICR					IBR				
	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven
\$5,000	\$36	\$45	14.8	\$7,190	-	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
\$10,000	\$72	\$90	14.8	\$14,380	-	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
\$25,000	\$181	\$225	14.8	\$35,949	-	\$118	\$265	15	\$37,767	-
\$50,000	\$361	\$450	14.8	\$71,898	-	\$118	\$504	20	\$66,814	\$30,605
\$100,000	\$379	\$931	20.8	\$175,382	-	\$118	\$504	20	\$66,814	\$133,186

Initial Debt	PAYE					REPAYE (only undergraduate loans)					REPAYE (w/ grad loans)				
	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven	Initial	Final	Years	Total	Forgiven
\$5,000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$118	\$154	3.4	\$5,477	-	\$118	\$154	3.4	\$5,477	-
\$10,000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$118	\$198	6.8	\$11,918	-	\$118	\$198	6.8	\$11,918	-
\$25,000	\$118	\$265	15	\$37,767	-	\$118	\$360	14.3	\$37,566	-	\$118	\$360	14.3	\$37,566	-
\$50,000	\$118	\$504	20	\$66,814	\$30,605	\$118	\$504	20	\$66,814	\$27,396	\$118	\$694	24.3	\$97,425	-
\$100,000	\$118	\$504	20	\$66,814	\$133,186	\$118	\$504	20	\$66,814	\$115,587	\$118	\$694	25	\$103,659	\$103,742

These figures are estimates based on an interest rate of 5% (the average Direct Loan interest rate for undergraduate and graduate borrowers during the last five years). For the income-driven plans, the estimates assume that you live in the continental U.S. and that your income increases 5% each year. These figures use the 2020 Poverty Guidelines and Income Percentage Factors.



# Navigating Repayment

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## Where do I send my payments?

In the Direct Loan Program, each loan you obtain is assigned to a federal loan servicer, who handles payments and other administrative functions.

In most cases, you will send your payment to your loan servicer. If you do not know who your loan servicer is, log in to [StudentAid.gov](https://StudentAid.gov) using your username and password to access your “Dashboard”.

## When should I contact my loan servicer?

Contact your loan servicer if you

- ✓ change your name, address, or phone number,
- ✓ need help making your monthly federal student loan payments,
- ✓ want to change or select a repayment plan,
- ✓ are called to active duty with the U.S. armed forces for more than 30 days,
- ✓ fail to begin classes at the school that determined you were eligible to receive your loan,
- ✓ do not begin classes as at least a half-time student for the loan period certified by your school,
- ✓ drop below half-time enrollment during the semester or term,
- ✓ leave school, or
- ✓ graduate.

## How do I change my repayment plan?

Contact your loan servicer to select or change your repayment plan. Your loan servicer can explain which repayment plans are available to you. However, if you do not select a repayment plan, your loan servicer will place you on the Standard Repayment Plan with fixed payments over a maximum of 10 years.

### Compare Repayment Plans Online

You can get estimates of your monthly payments for each repayment plan by logging in with your username and password to access our *Loan Simulator* at [StudentAid.gov/loan-simulator](https://StudentAid.gov/loan-simulator).

## You can qualify for an interest rate reduction for payments you make automatically

On your loans that are owned by us, you receive a 0.25% interest rate reduction under the Automatic Debit payment option. This option allows your loan servicer to automatically deduct your monthly payment from your checking or savings account.



# Your Repayment Obligation — Avoiding Delinquency and Default

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Repayment of your Direct Loan is a serious financial obligation. When you make payments on time, you begin establishing a credit history that will affect your future eligibility to obtain loans for the purchase of a car or home. When you apply for a job, employers often use your credit history as a way to measure how you meet your responsibilities and your ability to establish and stick to a plan.

## **Falling behind on your Direct Loan payments can have serious consequences:**

- ✓ Your Direct Loan becomes delinquent the first day after you miss (fail to make) a payment that is due.
- ✓ If a Direct Loan is delinquent for 270 days, it goes into default.
- ✓ Loans on which payments are delinquent and loans that are in default are reported to national credit agencies.

### **Avoid Default!**

If your account becomes delinquent, your loan servicer will send you warning notices reminding you of your repayment obligation. Contact your loan servicer if you think you will have trouble making your payments or won't be able to pay on time.

Allowing your federal student loans to go into default can increase the amount you will have to pay back because fees and penalties will be added to the balance due.

# Negative Consequences of Delinquency and Default

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## What are the consequences for my federal student aid?

- You will lose your eligibility for loan deferments and forbearances and your eligibility to choose from among the available repayment plans.
- You will not be eligible for additional federal student aid if you return to school.

## What are the consequences for my career and future income?

- You may be required to immediately repay the entire unpaid amount of your loan. This process is known as acceleration.
- You may not be eligible for certain types of employment.
- Your loans may be turned over to a collection agency, and you will have to pay additional charges, late fees, and collection costs.
- You may have part of your income withheld by the federal government. This is known as wage garnishment.
- Your federal and state income tax refunds may be withheld and applied to your debt. This is known as a tax offset.

## What are the consequences for my credit rating?

- Your credit score will be damaged.
- You may have difficulty qualifying for credit cards, car loans, or mortgages and will be charged much higher interest rates.
- You may have difficulty signing up for utilities, getting car or homeowner's insurance, or getting a cell phone plan.
- You may have difficulty getting approval to rent an apartment (credit checks may be required).

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### **Credit History**

Although your credit history is not taken into account in determining your eligibility for Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans, your credit history will be affected if you do not repay your federal student loans under the repayment plan you agree to when you enter repayment.





# Strategies for Avoiding Delinquency and Default

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## Borrow only what you need.

You have to pay back your federal student loans even if you do not complete your studies, are unable to get a job after graduating, or are not satisfied with the educational services you received from your school.

- ✓ Borrow as a last resort and only borrow what you need. Money you don't borrow is money you don't have to pay back.
- ✓ Consider reducing the amount of money you borrow, if you can. You may request and borrow a lower federal student loan amount than you qualify for. If you find later in the year that you need additional loan funds, you can request a higher federal student loan amount.

## Plan ahead.

- ✓ Make sure you have a budget for the whole year, not just the next few months.
- ✓ Keep in mind that you may have large one-time expenses, such as tuition or books, at the start of each year or semester.
- ✓ Be aware that you may receive your funding, such as loans, grants, or scholarships only a few times a year.

## Pay for expenses with money you earn and save.

Live within your means, and you will set yourself up for future success. You don't have to repay money you didn't borrow in the first place!

## Be a smart borrower.

- ✓ If you can, pay any interest that accrues on your Direct Unsubsidized Loans and Direct PLUS Loans while you're in school.
- ✓ Use your federal student loan money only to pay for authorized education expenses at the school that certified your loan eligibility.
- ✓ Pay off debt with a high interest rate. If you have any debt with a high interest rate (e.g., credit cards), pay that debt off as soon as possible.
- ✓ Borrow only what you need.

## Control your education and non-education expenses.

Which ones are vital and which ones are nice to have? Rank them and reduce the amount you spend on lower-priority expenses.

- ✓ Share housing or live at home.
- ✓ Buy used textbooks or rent textbooks.
- ✓ Take public transit or carpool.
- ✓ Lower your cell phone bill.
- ✓ Choose less expensive entertainment options.
- ✓ Borrow only what you need.
- ✓ As much as possible, pay expenses with money you've earned and saved.

## Finish your program and graduate.

When you graduate, you are more likely to increase your employability, career options, and potential income. However, making smart choices about your occupation and career path can also ensure you have the resources to meet your federal student loan obligations.

## Stay in touch with your loan servicer.

Visiting your servicer's website, using their online payment options, and signing up for electronic correspondence can help ensure that you never miss a letter or bill. Open all your mail and read everything about your federal student loan(s). Contact your loan servicer before you miss a payment on your federal student loan(s). Your loan servicer can explain your repayment options so you can avoid missing a payment. If you are not sure who your loan servicer is, or if you want information about your loans, please log in to your "Dashboard" at [StudentAid.gov/dashboard](https://studentaid.gov/dashboard).

## Pay on time.

It is very important that you make your Direct Loan payments on time. Contact your loan servicer if you think you will have trouble making your payments or won't be able to pay on time.

## Select a more appropriate repayment plan.

One way to avoid default is to lower your monthly payments by changing to a different repayment plan. Some repayment plans have a monthly payment based on your income. You are never charged a fee to change repayment plans on your Direct Loans.

If lowering your monthly payment is not an option or you are experiencing only a temporary problem repaying your loans, you may be able to temporarily postpone or lower your payments by applying for deferment or forbearance.



## Stay in Touch

You must make payments on your federal student loan even if you do not receive a bill or repayment notice. You are also responsible for staying in touch with your loan servicer.



# Deferment

If you experience temporary problems in repaying your federal student loans, contact your loan servicer to see if you are eligible for deferment. A deferment allows you to temporarily stop making payments on your federal student loans. In most cases, if you have Direct Subsidized Loans and have not exceeded 150 percent of the published length of your program, you are not charged interest on those loans during deferment. You are not charged interest on Direct Subsidized Loans during periods of deferment.<sup>1</sup>

## You may qualify for a deferment if you are

- ✓ enrolled at least half-time at an eligible postsecondary school;
- ✓ in a full-time course of study in a graduate fellowship program;
- ✓ in an approved full-time rehabilitation program for individuals with disabilities;
- ✓ unemployed or unable to find full-time employment (for a maximum of three years);
- ✓ experiencing an economic hardship (including serving in the Peace Corp) as defined by federal regulations (for a maximum of three years);
- ✓ serving on active duty during a war or other military operation or national emergency and for an additional 180-day period following the demobilization date for your qualifying service;
- ✓ performing qualifying National Guard duty during a war or other military operation or national emergency and for an additional 180-day period following the demobilization date for your qualifying service; or
- ✓ a member of the National Guard or other reserve component of the U.S. armed forces (current or retired) and you are called or ordered to active duty under certain circumstances:
  - ⊙ while you are enrolled at least half time at an eligible school;
  - ⊙ within six months of having been enrolled at least half time during the 13 months following the conclusion of your active duty service; or
  - ⊙ until you return to enrolled student status on at least a half-time basis, whichever is earlier.

### Did you know?

Periods of deferment and forbearance do not count toward the maximum length of time you have to repay your federal student loans, except for periods while on Economic Hardship Deferment, under the income-driven repayment plans.

For more information on deferment and forbearance, visit [Studentaid.gov/manage-loans/lower-payments/get-temporary-relief](https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/lower-payments/get-temporary-relief)

<sup>1</sup>Note: Interest will continue to be charged during deferment on your Direct Unsubsidized Loans and Direct PLUS Loans. If you do not pay this interest during the deferment, it will be capitalized at the end of the deferment.



# Forbearance

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If you are having temporary problems repaying your Direct Loans and are not eligible for a deferment, contact your loan servicer to see if you are eligible for forbearance. Forbearance is another method of temporarily postponing or reducing loan payments. You are never charged a fee for applying for a forbearance on your Direct Loans.<sup>1</sup>

**You may be granted a forbearance if you meet one of the following requirements:**

- ✓ You are unable to make your scheduled loan payments for reasons including, but not limited to, financial hardship and illness.
- ✓ You are serving in a medical or dental internship or residency program and you meet specific requirements.
- ✓ The total amount you owe each month for all of the Direct Loans you receive is 20% or more of your total monthly gross income (for a maximum of three years).
- ✓ You are serving in an approved AmeriCorps position.
- ✓ You are performing a teaching service that would qualify for loan forgiveness under the requirements of the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program.
- ✓ You qualify for partial repayment of your loans under the Student Loan Repayment Program, as administered by the Department of Defense.
- ✓ You are called to active duty in the U.S. armed forces.

<sup>1</sup>Note: Interest will continue to be charged during a forbearance on all types of loans. If you do not pay this interest, it will be capitalized at the end of the forbearance.

# Loan Consolidation

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A Direct Consolidation Loan may help make payments more manageable by combining several federal student loans into one loan with one monthly payment. You need to apply for loan consolidation and choose a repayment plan. Depending on the amount of your student loans and the repayment plan you choose, you have between 10 and 30 years to repay your Direct Consolidation Loan. (Private education loans are not eligible for consolidation, but they may be taken into account when determining your maximum repayment period under certain repayment plans.)

The interest rate for Direct Consolidation Loans is fixed. The fixed rate is the weighted average of the interest rates on all of the loans you consolidate, rounded up to the nearest 1/8 of 1%. There is no cap on the interest rate on a Direct Consolidation Loan. To learn more, visit [StudentAid.gov/app/launchConsolidation.action](https://StudentAid.gov/app/launchConsolidation.action).

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## How can consolidation help me manage my debt?

Loan consolidation can offer you benefits to help manage your education debt. Through consolidation, you can do the following:

- ✓ make lower monthly payments by increasing your repayment period, and
- ✓ make a single monthly loan payment on one bill to one lender.
- ✓ If you consolidate loans other than Direct Loans (such as Perkins or FFEL Loans), consolidation may give you access to additional income-driven repayment plan options and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF).

As with other types of student loans, you may prepay a Direct Consolidation Loan without penalty and may change repayment plans if you find that your current plan no longer meets your needs.

## Is there a downside to consolidation?

Although consolidation can help many students manage their monthly payments, there are some cases when a Direct Consolidation Loan may not be right for you:

- ⊖ Any outstanding interest on the loans you consolidate will be capitalized immediately upon consolidation.
- ⊖ Because Direct Consolidation Loans can have a repayment period of up to 30 years, you may be increasing the total amount you have to pay in interest.
- ⊖ If you consolidate Perkins Loans, you lose eligibility for cancellation benefits that are available only for Perkins Loans, and you also lose eligibility for Perkins Loan interest subsidy benefits.
- ⊖ If you consolidate existing Direct Loans or FFEL program loans, you will lose any previously made qualifying payments towards PSLF or IDR forgiveness.



# Loan Forgiveness and Discharge

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Under certain circumstances, you may have all or a portion of your Direct Loans forgiven or discharged. Contact your loan servicer for details. If you are unsure of your loan servicer, or want more information about your loans, use your username and password to log in to your “Dashboard” at [StudentAid.gov/dashboard](https://StudentAid.gov/dashboard).

## ..... Loan Forgiveness Programs .....

### Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program

You are eligible for Teacher Loan Forgiveness if you teach full time at certain elementary or secondary schools or educational service agencies that serve low-income students.

This program forgives up to \$5,000 (up to \$17,500 for highly-qualified teachers in certain subject areas) of your Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans (not Direct PLUS loans), provided you teach for five consecutive years as a highly qualified teacher.

For more information, visit <https://StudentAid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/teacher>.

### Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program

PSLF forgives all of your remaining Direct Loan debt after you have made the 120 qualifying payments. To be eligible for PSLF, you must be

- ✔ making payments under a qualifying repayment plan; and
- ✔ working full-time at a qualifying public service organization while making 120 qualifying monthly payments.

For more information, visit [StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service](https://StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service).

## Loan Discharge

### School-related discharge

Your Direct Loans may be discharged if

- ✓ your school closed before you could complete your program,
- ✓ your school falsely certified your loan eligibility,
- ✓ your school signed your name without your authorization,
- ✓ your school failed to refund all or a portion of your Direct Loan to the loan servicer when it was required by law to do so, or
- ✓ your Direct Loan was falsely certified as a result of identity theft.

### Total and permanent disability discharge

If you become totally and permanently disabled as defined in federal regulations and meet certain other requirements, your loan may be discharged. For more information, please visit [StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/disability-discharge](https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/disability-discharge).

### Death

If you die, or if you are a parent borrower of a Direct PLUS Loan and the student for whom you obtained the loan dies, you may be eligible for a discharge.





# Resolving Student Loan Disputes

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If you think there might be an issue with your Direct Loan, first collect and review all of your loan paperwork, then identify and document what you think the problem is. Call your loan servicer to discuss the issue. A current listing of federal loan servicers can be found at [StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/repayment/servicers](https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/repayment/servicers). If you don't know your servicer, see "Identifying Your Loan Servicer" on page 10.

## The Ombudsman

If you are unable to resolve the issue by working with your loan servicer, then, as a last resort, you may contact the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Ombudsman Group for assistance. The FSA Ombudsman Group works with federal student loan borrowers to resolve disputes or issues from an impartial, independent viewpoint.

You can find additional information about the FSA Ombudsman Group at [StudentAid.gov/feedback-ombudsman/disputes/prepare](https://studentaid.gov/feedback-ombudsman/disputes/prepare).

### **You can contact the Ombudsman at:**

U.S. Department of Education  
Federal Student Aid Information Center  
P.O. Box 1854  
Monticello, KY 42633

[customerservice@studentaid.gov](mailto:customerservice@studentaid.gov)

If you would like additional information to guide you through the problem resolution process, you can visit the section "Resolving Disputes" at [StudentAid.gov/feedback-ombudsman/disputes](https://studentaid.gov/feedback-ombudsman/disputes).



# Financial Planning and Debt Management

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Every successful aspect of your life requires planning, whether it is planning a weekend or planning a year-long project. Personal financial planning might be the most important of all because it can help secure your future.

## Budgeting

The first important step in planning your finances is to create a monthly budget that includes what you will earn, spend, and owe. Having a budget that you stick to will make you much more knowledgeable about your finances and about money in general.

Knowing exactly where your money is going every month can help you avoid falling further into debt and can help you see future financial issues before they arise. If you include the loan payments you will have to make under the various repayment options available to you, you can determine the repayment plans that offer payments you will be able to afford. Then you can choose the repayment plan that best helps you meet your goals (e.g., getting out of debt as quickly as possible).

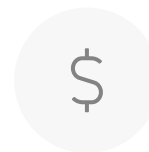
## Set short- and long-term goals.



Pay off credit card debt.



Buy a car without having to borrow.



Pay off your student loans.

## **Save.**

- ✔ Take advantage of any retirement savings plan offered by your employer, especially any matching plan. Increase automatic deposits when you get a raise.
- ✔ Start a private savings plan. As your budget becomes more familiar to you, you will be able to come up with new ways to squeeze savings out of your monthly income. Saving just \$10 per week at 3% interest adds up to \$6,000 in 10 years.
- ✔ Set up automatic deposits from your paycheck.

## **Create a monthly spending plan and spend wisely.**

- ✔ Gather details on your income and expenses.
- ✔ Set monthly spending limits.
- ✔ Pay with money you have, and track whether you exceed your spending limits.
- ✔ Pay your credit card balance in full each month.
- ✔ Pay your bills on time.

## **Take advantage of education-related tax incentives.**

- ✔ Stay up-to-date on federal tax deductions for education-related expenses and on interest you pay on your Direct Loans.
- ✔ Learn about tax credits for education-related expenses while attending school.



# Your Credit and Identity

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## Credit Report

A credit report is a collection of information about you and your credit history, kept by the three major credit bureaus:

- ✓ Equifax
- ✓ TransUnion
- ✓ Experian

These credit bureaus track and store information on your credit history, such as

- ✓ how promptly you pay your bills,
- ✓ the total amount of debt you owe, and
- ✓ how many credit cards you have.

Credit bureaus also report your credit score. Lenders use your credit score to decide whether to lend you money and what interest rate to charge you. Employers and insurance companies may also check your credit score.

## Maintain a good credit score:

- ✓ Review your credit report. You are entitled to check your credit report once per year for free. Learn more by visiting [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://AnnualCreditReport.com) or by calling 1-877-322-8228.
- ✓ Contact credit bureaus to correct inaccurate information.
- ✓ Pay all bills on time, including federal student loan payments.
- ✓ Keep your debt-to-income ratio as low as possible. This shows what percentage of your income goes toward repaying debt each month.



## Credit Scores

Borrowers with higher credit scores are charged lower interest rates than those with lower credit scores. (This does not apply to federal student loans.) For more information on credit reports and credit scores, you can visit the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) website at [ftc.gov](https://ftc.gov) or the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) website at <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/>.

## Tips on protecting your credit and identity:

- ✓ Never give your personal information (e.g., Social Security number, date of birth, account numbers, etc.) to an individual or business with which you did not initiate contact.
- ✓ Store documents containing your personal or financial information in a safe location and shred unnecessary documents.
- ✓ Protect your passwords.
- ✓ Monitor your bank and credit card statements.
- ✓ Avoid costly credit card interest charges by using your credit card to charge only what you can afford to pay off completely at the end of the month.
- ✓ Search for the lowest annual interest rate (APR) and fees on credit cards and loans.
- ✓ Limit the number of credit cards you hold.
- ✓ Limit other borrowing and reduce the amount you borrow for large purchases (e.g., a car) by planning ahead and saving for those purchases in advance.
- ✓ Read the fine print in every credit card and loan agreement.



# Helpful Reminders

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Keep your loan paperwork in a safe place, including your MPN, disclosure notices, and billing statements. These provide you with a record of the terms of your federal student loan(s) and how much you have borrowed. Copies of your MPN are available in the “My Documents” section of your StudentAid.gov account. Use your username and password to log in to [StudentAid.gov/documents](https://StudentAid.gov/documents) to access your MPN.

You can also find out who your loan servicer is and get more information about your loans by logging in to [StudentAid.gov/aid-summary](https://StudentAid.gov/aid-summary).



# Student Contact Information and Acknowledgment

You are required to provide your current contact information to your loan servicer. If you complete exit counseling online, your contact information will automatically be provided to your loan servicer. If you did not (and will not) complete exit counseling online, you may use this page to provide the information to your school. You are also required to notify your loan servicer of any changes to your contact information after you leave school. You can use this page for that as well. You must complete all items on both the front and back.

**Important!** You must provide your loan servicer with your contact information as well as information on your closest living relative and two personal references. You must keep the information current.

## Personal Information (Please print clearly)

Last Name, First Name (Middle Name is Optional)

Permanent Home Street Address

City, State, Zip Code/Postal Code, Country

Area Code/Telephone Number

Email Address

Driver's License or State ID number (Optional)

Issuing State

Expected Employer (Leave blank if unknown)

Employer's Street Address

Employer's City, State, Zip Code/Postal Code, Country

Employer's Area Code/Telephone Number

**Enter closest living relative with a U.S. address different from yours, who will know your whereabouts for at least three years.**

Last Name, First Name (Middle Name is Optional)

Permanent Home Street Address

City, State, Zip Code/Postal Code, Country

Area Code/Telephone Number

Email Address

## Student Contact Information and Acknowledgment (Cont.)

**References: You must list two persons with U.S. addresses different from yours who will know your whereabouts for at least three years.**

1

Last Name, First Name (Middle Name is Optional)

Permanent Home Street Address

City, State, Zip Code/Postal Code, Country

Area Code/Telephone Number

Email Address

2

Last Name, First Name (Middle Name is Optional)

Permanent Home Street Address

City, State, Zip Code/Postal Code, Country

Area Code/Telephone Number

Email Address

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### Student Acknowledgment

**I have received exit counseling materials for Direct Loan borrowers.**

**I have read and I understand my rights and responsibilities as a borrower.**

**I understand that I have a loan from the federal government that must be repaid.**

Student's Signature

Date

Student's Name (Please Print)



# Your Rights and Responsibilities as a Borrower

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## I Have the Right to

- ✓ written information on my loan obligations and information on my rights and responsibilities as a borrower;
- ✓ a copy of my MPN either before or at the time my loan is disbursed;
- ✓ a grace period and an explanation of what this means;
- ✓ notification, if ED transfers my loan to another servicer without my consent;
- ✓ a disclosure statement, received before I begin to repay my loan, that includes information about interest rates, fees, the balance I owe, and a loan repayment schedule;
- ✓ deferment or forbearance of repayment for certain defined periods, if I qualify and if I request it;
- ✓ prepay my loan in whole or in part any time without an early repayment penalty; and
- ✓ documentation when my loan is paid in full.

## I Am Responsible for

- ✓ completing exit counseling before I graduate, leave school, or drop below half-time enrollment;
- ✓ repaying my loan according to my repayment schedule even if I do not complete my academic program, I am dissatisfied with the education I received, or I am unable to find employment after I graduate;
- ✓ notifying my lender or loan servicer if I
  - ✓ move or change my address,
  - ✓ change my telephone number,
  - ✓ change my name,
  - ✓ change my Social Security number, or
  - ✓ change employers, or if my employer's address or telephone number changes;
- ✓ making monthly payments on my loan after my grace period ends, unless I have a deferment or forbearance; and
- ✓ notifying my lender or loan servicer of anything that might alter my eligibility for an existing deferment or forbearance.

For more information visit:  
[StudentAid.gov/entrance-counseling](https://studentaid.gov/entrance-counseling)

Last Updated: September 2021

