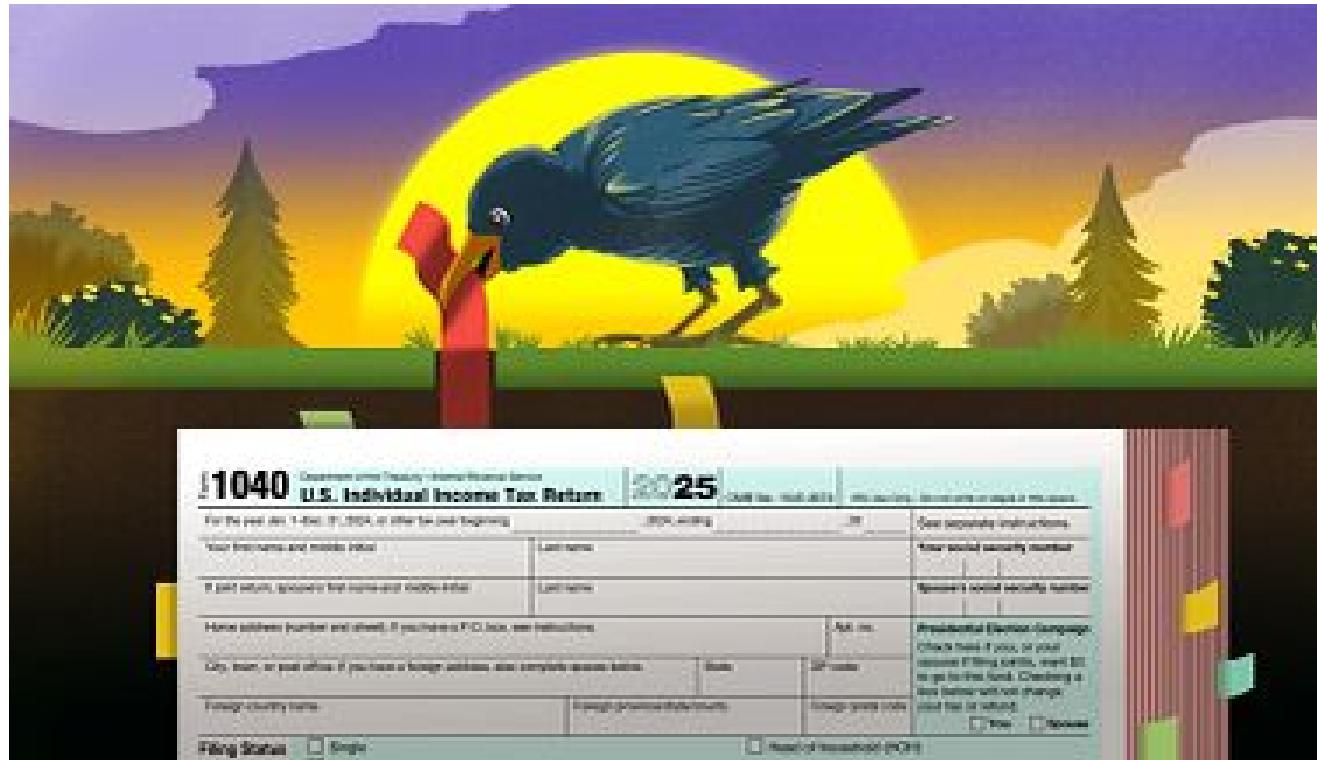


Why You Should File Your Taxes Early

 www.aarp.org/money/taxes/why-file-taxes-early/



The early bird may get the worm, and those who file their tax returns far ahead of April 15 can reap a variety of benefits, too.

Here are seven reasons to [file your taxes](#) as early as possible. (Plus, you'll have peace of mind knowing that this annual, often-dreaded task is squared away.)

1. You'll get your refund sooner

One reason to file early is that you will likely receive [your refund](#) faster. The IRS will begin accepting 2025 tax returns on Jan. 26. The agency says most taxpayers receive their refunds within 21 days when filing electronically, barring any issues with processing their returns.

"The IRS processes early filings first," says Mark Gallegos, a tax partner at Porte Brown in the Chicago area. "If you're in the front of the line, you get your refund quicker."

2. You'll have more time to pay Uncle Sam

Taxpayers have until April 15 to make a payment regardless of when they file, so if you owe the IRS money for the 2025 tax year, filing early provides more time to manage paying off the debt, says Desmond Hudson, owner of Hudson Tax Services in Philadelphia.

It also gives you more time to explore the option of a payment plan if you [can't afford to pay what you owe](#) in full by April 15. The IRS offers both short- and long-term payment plans. You can find more information at [IRS.gov/paymentplan](#).

Most Popular

3. You can get a head start on planning for a tax-friendly 2026

Completing your 2025 filing promptly allows you to start preparing for 2026. If you owe taxes this year, you may want to increase your withholding or estimated taxes so that you're not in the hole in 2027. The sooner you adjust your withholding or estimated taxes, the less likely you'll owe Uncle Sam money next year.

Conversely, if you're due a big refund this year, you may want to reduce your withholding to keep more money in your pocket throughout the year.

Filing early, Hudson says, "gives me time to say, 'Let me fix some of this stuff now.'"

4. You'll have more time to fix errors

Filing as soon as possible provides you more time to address any surprises that may pop up, like an inaccurate tax form from your employer. In addition, "Early filers have more runway to locate missing documents," Gallegos says.

If the IRS finds an error on your 2025 return, you'll most likely need to file an amended return using [Form 1040-X](#).

5. The IRS typically has shorter wait times if you need to call them

Generally, the earlier you file, the easier it is to reach an IRS representative if you have a question or encounter a problem. Kamila Elliott, CEO of financial planning firm Collective Wealth Partners in Atlanta, says the IRS usually has shorter wait times in February compared with March and April. "They're more communicative because it hasn't really gotten busy yet," she says.

6. It's your best defense against tax-related identity theft

Filing early can reduce the risk of [fraud](#), such as a bad actor submitting a return in your name using stolen personal data like your Social Security number. “Unfortunately, we know this happens, but fraudsters can’t file under your name once your real return is already in the system,” says Gallegos.

You can also protect yourself by obtaining an identity protection pin (IP PIN) from the IRS. This six-digit number, which changes every year, helps the IRS verify your identity when processing your return. If you put the wrong IP PIN or don’t list it on your return, your electronic return will be rejected, and a paper return will take longer to process while the IRS validates your identity. The fastest way to obtain an IP PIN is on the [IRS website](#).

7. You’ll get more face time with your tax preparer

If you’re using a tax professional to help prepare your return, scheduling meetings with them is usually easier earlier in the tax filing season, because many taxpayers procrastinate.

This helps your tax pro, too — there’s one less filer overwhelming them at the last minute. “The closer we get to April 15, the less sleep we’ve had,” says Mindy Rankin, a member in the tax division at Warren Averett in Panama City, Florida.

Gathering the paperwork you need to file your return

Ensure you have all the necessary documents to file your return. For most taxpayers, the following are required:

- Form W-2 to report wages if you worked as an employee.
- Schedule C to report income and business expenses if you were self-employed.
- Form 1099-G if you collected unemployment.
- Form 1099-R if you received distributions from pensions, annuities, retirement plans or IRAs.
- Form SSA-1099 if you received [Social Security benefits](#).
- Form 1099-INT if you need to report interest income on investments.
- Form 1099-DIV if you received dividends earned on investments.
- Form 1099-B if you sold investments. (Many brokerage firms provide a combined 1099 statement covering interest, dividends and capital gains.)
- Form 1098 if you paid mortgage interest.
- Documentation for any [charitable donations](#).
- Form 1095-A if you obtained health insurance through the government’s marketplace.
- Form 1099-SA if you received a distribution from a [health savings account](#) (HSA), Medicare Advantage Medical Savings Account (MSA) or Archer MSA.

Make sure to also get all of the [federal tax forms](#) you’ll need to file your return.

How to track your refund

After you've filed your federal return, you can use the IRS's "[Where's My Refund?](#)" to monitor its progress across three stages: return received, refund approved and refund sent. There is also a mobile app, [IRS2Go](#), available in English and Spanish, that lets you [track your refund](#).

Sharon Waters, a former CPA, has written for Wired.com and other publications.