

Personal Finance

It's Tax Time - Don't Procrastinate



Whether this year will be your first time filing or you've been doing your taxes for years, it's never too early to prepare for tax season. By knowing ahead of time what documents you'll need, you'll be more likely to make tax prep easier and more efficient - helping reduce the stress that can come from waiting until the last minute.

Advance preparation can also help you file early to get your refund earlier if you're entitled to one. With an average of 3 out of 4 taxpayers receiving a tax refund, don't wait till tax day.

Here are important tips to help when preparing to file:

Make a checklist

To get started, create a checklist so you'll know what documents to watch for and collect. Most tax documents like W-2s are made available by employers and other institutions online, although they may also be mailed. You can check with your employer's HR department to find out how and when tax documents are likely to be delivered.

If you've been a gig worker - even part time - or are entirely self-employed, you'll need to gather documents like 1099-Ks, plus all the receipts and records of your self-employment income and expenses throughout the year, including quarterly estimated tax payments you may have already made.

For anyone who has filed before, take out last year's taxes for an idea of what you'll likely need this year. Information and documents you'll need depend on your unique situation, and they include but are not limited to:

- * Your Social Security number (as well as your spouse's and children's, if applicable)

- * Records of income received, including interest income
- * Mortgage interest statements (1098)
- * Payments for tuition (1098-T) or student loan interest (1098-E)
- * Health care and childcare expenses
- * Vehicle or home purchase documents
- * Charitable contribution receipts

"By preparing early, you'll have more time to gather documents, review your tax return and speak with your Tax Pro, helping you feel more confident and less stressed," said Mark Steber, chief tax information officer, Jackson Hewitt Tax Services. "By waiting until the April deadline, you could make a mistake, requiring the filing of an amended tax return or subjecting yourself to avoidable penalties and interest."

Decide how you'll file

Taxes can be confusing, no matter your circumstances, so it's a good idea to consider how you'd like to file this year. It can help to have someone on your side who understands recent changes in tax laws, how to file accurately - and how to make the most of applicable deductions.

You can get expert help filing your taxes at Jackson Hewitt Tax Services. Choosing a professional tax service can take the worry out of figuring out your taxes, no matter your circumstances.

Make sure you and your tax professional electronically file your tax return. It's not only the fastest way to make sure the IRS receives your return, but it's the safest way. This keeps paper from getting stolen out of your mailbox or getting lost in the mail.

Also, electronically deposit your tax refund. Having your refund directly deposit into your bank account or on a prepaid bank card is the safest option. This avoids the possibility of your check getting stolen or getting marked as "undeliverable" if sent to the wrong mailbox.

"These two bonus tips alone can cut days and weeks off your tax return refund timing and better safeguard your information and money," said Steber.

The chance to double your refund

With Jackson Hewitt's second annual Double Your Refund Sweepstakes, you could win a prize equal to your federal tax refund. The 15-week sweepstakes starts the first week of January and goes through April 15. Each week there will be two grand prize winners who will win a prize equal to their federal tax refund (a maximum match of \$10,000 and minimum of \$1,500), plus 20 runner-up winners each week who will win \$200. In addition, there will be a season-long drawing where there will be two additional grand prize winners and 20 runner-up winners randomly drawn.

"As we launch the 2024 tax season, the second annual Double Your Refund sweepstakes will allow hundreds of clients the chance to win extra money during tax time - with the chance to potentially double the size of their tax refund - which we know will be financially beneficial," said Kim Hudson, SVP and chief marketing officer at Jackson Hewitt Tax Services.

How to enter: File your 2023 federal tax return at any Jackson Hewitt location within the 15-week period or mail an entry form by the Monday following the week you file your tax return. For the season-long drawing, enter at JacksonHewitt.com.