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Choosing the Correct Filing Status

It's important to use the right filing status when you file your tax return. The status you choose can affect the amount of tax you owe for the year. It may even determine if you must file a tax return. Keep in mind that your marital status on Dec. 31 is your status for the whole year. Sometimes more than one filing status may apply to you. If that happens, choose the one that allows you to pay the least amount of tax.

[IRS e-file](#) is the easiest and most accurate way to file your tax return. Tax software helps you choose the right filing status. Most people can use tax software and e-file for free with IRS Free File. This free service is only available on the IRS website. Visit IRS.gov and click "[Free File](#)" on the home page.

Here's a list of the five filing statuses:

1. **Single.** This status normally applies if you aren't married. It applies if you are divorced or legally separated under state law.
2. **Married Filing Jointly.** If you're married, you and your spouse can file a joint tax return. If your spouse died in 2015, you can often file a joint return for that year.
3. **Married Filing Separately.** A married couple can choose to file two separate tax returns. This may benefit you if it results in less tax owed than if you file a joint tax return. You may want to prepare your taxes both ways before you choose. You can also use it if you want to be responsible only for your own tax.
4. **Head of Household.** In most cases, this status applies if you are not married, but there are some special rules. For example, you must have paid more than half the cost of keeping up a home for yourself and a qualifying person. Don't choose this status by mistake. Be sure to check all the rules.

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5. Qualifying Widow(er) with Dependent Child. This status may apply to you if your spouse died during 2013 or 2014 and you have a dependent child. Other conditions also apply.

The “[Filing](#)” tab on IRS.gov can help with many of your federal income tax filing needs. Use the [Interactive Tax Assistant](#) tool to help you choose the right filing status. For more on this topic see [Publication 501](#), Exemptions, Standard Deduction, and Filing Information. Go to [IRS.gov/forms](#) to view, download or print the tax products you need.

Each and every taxpayer has a set of fundamental rights they should be aware of when dealing with the IRS. These are your [Taxpayer Bill of Rights](#). Explore your rights and our obligations to protect them on IRS.gov.

Additional IRS Resources:

- [IRS Tax Map](#)
- Instructions and Forms [1040](#), [1040A](#) and [1040EZ](#)

IRS YouTube Videos:

- *Filing Status* – [English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [ASL](#)
- *Welcome to Free File* – [English](#)
- *First Time Filing a Tax Return?* – [English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [ASL](#)
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