Applying for federal financial aid:  
A step-by-step breakdown

Applying for federal financial aid may seem confusing, but it’s not as complicated as you may think. Follow these simple steps to get the financial aid you need for higher education.

1. Time to get started! Fill out and submit the completed FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible.
2. The Department of Education (ED) reviews the FAFSA and calculates your expected family contribution (EFC).
3. ED sends you a Student Aid Report (SAR) and submits your information to the schools you indicated on the FAFSA.
4. Schools send award letters describing your financial aid package, based on the information provided by ED.
5. You then accept your preferred award offer, sign the award letter, and return it to your chosen school.
6. Congratulations! The school disburses your financial aid package once school begins, and your college career is off and running!