



Student Loan Tips

When to Start Applying for Student Loans

Learn the best time to apply for student loans — including federal and private options — so you're ready when tuition is due.

By **Lisa Kaplan** / May 27, 2025

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One of the most common questions students and families ask is: **when should I apply for student loans?** The answer depends on the type of loan — but the earlier you plan, the better.

Here's a breakdown of when to apply and why timing matters.

Start with the FAFSA

The first step in applying for any kind of financial aid — including federal student loans — is completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You can submit the FAFSA starting in the fall before the academic year begins. The earlier you apply, the better your chances of receiving grants, work-study, and subsidized loans.

Private Student Loans

If you still have a gap after federal aid, it's time to explore private student loans. You should apply for a private loan about 30 to 60 days before your tuition payment is due. This gives your lender time to process, your school time to certify, and you time to make any adjustments if needed.

Second-Look Loans

If you've already applied and were declined by a traditional private lender, GradBridge offers a **second-look student loan** for near-approval borrowers. These applications are typically processed quickly — especially when referred by a partner lender — and often result in higher approval odds.

What You'll Need to Apply

- School information and cost of attendance
- Social Security number and personal info
- Loan amount requested
- Cosigner details (if needed)

Timing Tips

- Don't wait until your bill is due — aim to apply **a few weeks in advance**

- If applying with a cosigner, give them time to gather their information
- Watch for school certification delays — your school must approve the loan amount

Planning ahead means less stress, better options, and a smoother path to getting the funding you need for college.