GUIDE

Form 1040-ES and 2026 estimated tax

Form 1040-ES is the IRS form and worksheet for quarterly estimated tax, which freelancers, business owners and investors pay when no one withholds enough for them. For 2026, payments are due April 15, June 15 and September 15, 2026, and January 15, 2027. Pay at least 90% of this year's tax or 100% of last year's to avoid a penalty.

QUICK FACTS

- **Who pays.** Anyone expecting to owe $1,000 or more after withholding and credits
- **2026 dates.** April 15, June 15 and September 15, 2026, and January 15, 2027
- **Safe harbor.** 90% of this year's tax or 100% of last year's, 110% if last year's AGI was over $150,000

Who needs to pay estimated tax?

You generally need to pay if you expect to owe at least $1,000 in federal tax for 2026 after withholding and refundable credits, and your withholding will cover less than the safe harbor. That includes:

- Sole proprietors, freelancers and 1099 contractors
- Partners and S-Corp owners whose share of profit isn't covered by withholding
- Landlords, investors and retirees with large untaxed income

Employees can often skip estimates by raising withholding on a new Form W-4 instead.

How much should I pay?

Enough to meet a safe harbor, in four equal parts:

- 90% of your 2026 tax, or
- 100% of your 2025 tax, or 110% if your 2025 AGI was over $150,000 ($75,000 married filing separately).

The worksheet in Form 1040-ES walks through it, including self-employment tax. Our quarterly tax calculator does the same math in a minute.

General information, not tax advice for your situation.

How do I pay?

Online is fastest and gives you proof: IRS Direct Pay from a bank account, your IRS online account, EFTPS, or a debit or credit card through an approved processor (which charges a fee). You can also mail a check with the 1040-ES voucher. Whatever the method, mark it for the right tax year and keep the confirmation. Our estimated tax payment tracker keeps them in one place.

What if my income is uneven?

If most of your income arrives late in the year, equal payments can overpay early. The annualized income method on Form 2210 lets you match payments to when you earned the money, which can remove or reduce a penalty. It takes more work, so keep good monthly books.

What happens if I underpay?

The IRS charges an underpayment penalty, figured like interest at the federal short-term rate plus 3%, for each quarter from the due date until you pay. It isn't huge, but it adds up, and paying late is better than not paying. Farmers and fishermen have special rules, with one payment by January 15 or filing by March 1.

Do I also owe state estimates?

Most states with an income tax have their own estimated payments, usually on similar dates. Check your state's revenue site. Our tax deadline calendar lists every federal date.

Common questions

What are the 2026 estimated tax due dates?
April 15, 2026, June 15, 2026, September 15, 2026 and January 15, 2027.

Can I skip the January payment?
Yes, if you file your 2026 return and pay everything owed by February 1, 2027.

Do I need to file Form 1040-ES with the IRS?
No. The form is a worksheet and payment voucher. You only send the voucher if you pay by check.

Does an S-Corp owner pay estimates?
Often, on profit passed through on the K-1, unless extra withholding from salary covers it.

Want a plan for this year?

We run your numbers and show you the options. Book a free 30-minute call at eminenttax.com/contact or call (972) 347-4590.

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