GUIDE

# Form W-4 for 2026, step by step

Form W-4 tells your employer how much federal income tax to withhold. Most people fill in Step 1 and sign Step 5. Use Step 2 if you have two jobs or a working spouse, Step 3 for dependents, and Step 4 for other income, deductions like tips or overtime, and extra withholding. Employers keep it and don't send it in.

QUICK FACTS

- **Required.** Your details and signature
- **Two jobs.** Check the box or use the worksheet
- **New for 2026.** Tips, overtime and senior deductions through Step 4(b)

## How do I fill out a W-4?

1. **Step 1:** name, address, Social Security number and filing status
2. **Step 2:** only if you hold more than one job at a time, or you're married filing jointly and your spouse works. Check the box if there are exactly two jobs with similar pay, or use the worksheet or the IRS estimator
3. **Step 3:** credits for dependents, such as $2,200 for each child under 17 in 2026, if your income is under the limits
4. **Step 4(a):** other income without withholding, like interest or side business profit, if you want tax withheld for it
5. **Step 4(b):** deductions beyond the standard deduction, including the new deductions for qualified tips, qualified overtime and seniors
6. **Step 4(c):** any extra amount to withhold each paycheck
7. **Step 5:** sign and date

## What's new on the 2026 W-4?

The 2026 form reflects the 2025 tax law. Workers can lower withholding for the tips, overtime and senior deductions through the Step 4(b) worksheet, and the form has a separate box for claiming exemption from withholding, below Step 4(c). See what changes on your paycheck with the paycheck calculator.



General information, not tax advice for your situation.

## Can I claim exempt?

Only if you owed no federal income tax last year and expect to owe none this year. An exempt W-4 expires, so you have to give your employer a new one by February 15 of the next year to stay exempt.

## What do employers do with a W-4?

Collect one from each new hire and keep it on file. Use it to figure withholding with IRS Publication 15-T. If an employee doesn't give you one, withhold as if they're single with no adjustments. Employees can change their W-4 any time, and the change should take effect within about 30 days. Our payroll service collects and applies W-4s for you.

## Common questions

**Do I need a new W-4 every year?**
No. Only when you want to change withholding, or each year by February 15 if you claim exempt.

**Should I check the Step 2 box?**
Check it if you have exactly two jobs, or two jobs between you and your spouse, with similar pay. Otherwise use the worksheet or the IRS estimator.

**Can I lower withholding for no tax on overtime?**
Yes. Estimate your qualified overtime deduction and enter it in Step 4(b).

**What happens if I don't fill out a W-4?**
Your employer withholds as if you're single with no other adjustments, which usually means more tax withheld.


### Want payroll handled?

We set it up, run it and file the returns. Book a free 30-minute call at eminenttax.com/contact or call (972) 347-4590.

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