



How To Save Time And Money This Tax Season

(NAPS)—Tax season is upon us, and you should have received all the documents needed to file your taxes and (hopefully) get a refund. To help reduce the stress that comes with filing taxes, Glinda Bridgforth, a leading financial expert who explores the emotional and cultural factors that block financial success, identifies a few ways to save time and money this tax season:

1. Get organized. Whether you visit a tax professional or do it yourself, gather all documents ahead of time, such as your employer W-2s and any 1099 forms you may receive for interest income, retirement plans, or gig work such as driving for Uber. Don't forget to check your online accounts where you might need to download tax documents.

"Avoid the panic and stress that comes from disorganization," says Bridgforth. "Also, look at last year's return, which can serve as a good guide."

2. Start (and finish) early. Don't wait until April. Starting the process early will let you get organized, and have more time if you need it. Filing early will not only help you get your refund faster, it may also help you avoid tax-related identity theft since you will already have filed using your own Social Security number before someone else tries to. Speaking of identity theft...

3. Watch out for scams. Where there's money there's a con, and criminals have become very good at exploiting tax season. Be wary of threatening phone calls from "IRS agents" and phishing e-mails "from the IRS" seeking your personal information. Also, while all tax preparers and DIY websites aim to minimize taxes and maximize refunds, beware of promises for more than your fair share. Unscrupulous "tax preparers" entice unsuspecting taxpayers with hopes of a high refund, only for them to lose it all. The IRS just launched "Identity Theft Central" ([IRS.gov/identitytheft](https://www.irs.gov/identitytheft)) to help taxpayers report identity theft and learn how to protect themselves against crimes.

4. Get all your tax breaks. Did you get married? Have children? Change jobs? Take all the deductions you deserve.

"Even if nothing has changed in your life, you may have missed credits in the past that you're entitled to," notes Bridgforth. "For example, according to the IRS, one in every five eligible workers fails to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)."



Financial expert Glinda Bridgforth suggests five steps toward a better tax season.

If you find out you qualify for the EITC this year and didn't claim it in the past, you can even file amended returns for 2016, 2017, or 2018. The IRS provides a wealth of this type of information online at [IRS.gov/eitc](https://www.irs.gov/eitc).

5. Look for tax prep discounts and promotions, then use direct deposit. The full service tax prep companies, as well as the DIY websites, are competing for your business, so be sure to shop around and look for coupons or rebates to find the best deal. Many free options are also available to those who qualify. Just go to [IRS.gov/freefile](https://www.irs.gov/freefile) to check eligibility.

And for the fastest and most secure delivery of your tax refund, opt for direct deposit instead of a check.

"If you don't have or don't qualify for a traditional branch bank account, there are new digital options to consider," says Bridgforth. "Several FDIC-insured digital bank accounts and prepaid debit cards are available to open online or on your mobile phone, such as Green Dot Bank's Unlimited Cash Back Bank Account, or Intuit's Turbo Card prepaid debit card for those who use TurboTax."

In addition, if you direct deposit your federal tax refund into your Green Dot account, not only will you get it faster, you'll be entered in the Green Dot Extreme Tax Sweepstakes for a chance to win one of fifty \$1,000 prizes. Details and official rules can be found at [greendot.com/ExtremeTax](https://www.greendot.com/ExtremeTax).