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THE TAX LAWYER

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Five Must-Do Steps Before Filing Your Taxes

Before you mail or file your tax return electronically, take a breath. These 5 steps may sound silly but could save you a notice or even an audit.

1. Check Your Math. Make sure you add, subtract and multiply accurately. Check your numbers and do some simple math checks. This is another reason to use a software program. If you make a math mistake, you are likely to get a math correction notice from the IRS. This isn't an audit. But your goal is to minimize interaction with the IRS, which isn't known for the best mail handling practices. See [Can You Fix The Tax Return You Just Filed?](#)

2. Account For Every Form 1099. IRS Form 1099 comes in many versions, including 1099-INT for interest, 1099-DIV for dividends, 1099-G for tax refunds, 1099-R for pensions and 1099-MISC for miscellaneous income. These forms are sent by payers to you and the IRS. Regardless of how many you receive, make sure they are accounted for on your return. See [Watch Your Mail For 1099s.](#)



April 15 Tax Day (Photo credit: danielmoyle)

Forms 1098 are sent by lenders (to you and the IRS) recording how much interest you paid. The IRS matches your return against the 1098s and 1099s, so don't ignore them. If a Form 1099 reports more income than you had, you can explain or deduct it on the return, but you first need to report it.

See [Filing Your Taxes? 4 Key Facts About IRS Form 1099](#).

3. Disclose Just Enough. You'd be surprised how many people submit too much information. If your return is complex, you may need to add explanations or disclosures. Be concise, truthful and accurate, but don't provide copies of contracts, settlement agreements, bank statements, etc., unless you are later asked by the IRS. See [Shhh, Home Office And Other IRS Audit Trigger Secrets](#).

Disclosures can be made on regular paper or IRS forms. The former are "white paper" disclosures. A Form 8275 or plain paper can be used to disclose facts or a legal position. Form 8275-R is for disclosing positions that are contrary to IRS Regulations or other authority. Don't file a Form 8275-R or take a tax return position that requires one without professional help. See [Ten Ways To Audit Proof Your Tax Return](#).

4. Assemble Your Return Correctly. Follow the IRS instructions for assembling your return (return, schedules in alphabetical order, ancillary forms in numerical order, plain paper statements and footnotes at the end). Attach Forms W-2 where specified, but don't attach Forms 1099 and others that aren't required.

5. Don't Ask For Your Money Back. Getting a refund? Consider applying it to next year's tax payments rather than asking for the cash, especially if it is large. You'll have a lower profile with an initial or amended return. [Getting A Tax Refund? Ten Things To Know](#).

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