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deadline for filing annual income taxes with the Internal Revenue Service. But what if I told you that you don't really have to file your form 1040 by April 15?

Isaac M. O'Bannon • Apr. 14, 2015



April 15 is ingrained, implanted permanently in most Americans' minds as the deadline for filing annual income taxes with the Internal Revenue Service. But what if I told you that you don't really have to file your form 1040 by April 15? It's the truth - but you'd better read on for the details.

I'm not an anti-tax lunatic offering advice that will get you audited or arrested or

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amount, or you will likely owe interest and maybe penalties. If you are owed an income tax refund, there's no penalty, other than you having loaned the government your money for no interest for an additional six months.

Here's what the IRS says about extensions:

"Avoid a late-filing penalty by requesting a tax-filing extension. There are several ways to do so, including through the Free File link on IRS.gov, or by designating a payment as an extension payment and making it via one of the IRS e-payment methods, including the newest, IRS [Direct Pay](#). Alternatively, taxpayers can file [Form 4868](#). While an extension grants additional time to file, tax payments are still due April 15."

Also, some additional last-minute income tax filing tips from the IRS:

First and foremost, the IRS encouraged taxpayers to file electronically. Doing so, whether through [e-file](#) or [IRS Free File](#), vastly reduces tax return errors, as the tax software does the calculations, flags common errors and prompts taxpayers for missing information. And best of all, there is a free option for everyone. Whether filing electronically or on paper, be sure to make a copy of the return. In addition, the IRS offers these last-minute tips:

Check Out Tax Benefits

Before filing, the IRS encourages taxpayers to take a moment to see if they qualify for these and other often-overlooked [credits and deductions](#):

- Benefits for low-and moderate-income workers and families, especially the Earned Income Tax Credit. The special [EITC Assistant](#) can help taxpayers see if they're eligible.
- Savers credit, claimed on [Form 8880](#), for low-and moderate-income workers who contributed to a retirement plan, such as an IRA or 401(k).

- American Opportunity Tax Credit, claimed on [Form 8863](#), and other [education tax](#)

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the Affordable Care Act affects the 2014 return. This includes:

- Reporting health insurance coverage.
- Claiming an exemption from the coverage requirement.
- Making an individual shared responsibility payment.
- Claiming the premium tax credit.
- Reconciling advance payments of the premium tax credit.

The [Interactive Tax Assistant](#) tool can also help.

Make the Right IRA Contribution

Eligible taxpayers have until April 15 to contribute to either a Roth or traditional individual retirement arrangement (IRA) for 2014. A six percent excise tax applies if a taxpayer contributes more than the law allows. [Publication 590-A](#) Describes the limits in detail and includes examples.

Gifts to Charity

A [new law](#) gives taxpayers the option of claiming on their 2014 return cash contributions made by April 15 to charities aiding the families of two slain New York police officers. Details are on [IRS.gov](#).

If claiming a charitable contribution deduction, use the [IRS Select Check](#) tool to see if a charity is eligible to receive tax-deductible donations. For donations of \$250 or more, taxpayers must obtain a written acknowledgment from the charity before filing a return.

IRS [Publication 526](#) has further details on making gifts to charity, including [records to keep](#). In addition, special reporting requirements generally apply to vehicle

donations, and taxpayers wishing to claim these donations must attach any required

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To avoid a refund delay or misrouting to a wrong account, make sure the financial institution routing and account numbers entered on the return are accurate. After filing, whether or not direct deposit was chosen, track the status of a refund with the [Where's My Refund?](#) tool on IRS.gov or IRS2Go.

Special Instructions for Paper Filers

Math errors and other mistakes are common on paper returns, especially those prepared or filed in haste at the last minute. These tips may help those choosing this option:

- Fill in all requested Taxpayer Identification Numbers, usually Social Security Numbers, such as those for any dependents claimed. Check only one filing status and the appropriate exemption boxes.
- When using the [tax tables](#), be sure to use the correct row and column for the filing status claimed and taxable income amount shown.
- Sign and date the return. If filing a joint return, both spouses must sign.
- Attach all required forms and schedules, such as [Schedule A](#) for people who itemize their deductions. In addition, attach to the front of the return all Forms W-2 and other forms reflecting withholding.
- Mail the return to the right address. Check [Where to File](#) on IRS.gov or the last page of the tax instructions. If mailing on Wednesday, April 15, be sure to do so early enough to meet the scheduled pick-up time and ensure a postmark before the midnight deadline.

Owe tax?

If so, use IRS Direct Pay or any of several other [e-payment](#) options. They are secure and easy and you receive immediate confirmation of your payment. Or, send a check or money order payable to the "United States Treasury," along with a [Form 1040-V](#) payment voucher. Taxpayers who can't pay by April 15 often qualify to set up a

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