

# 7 financial must-dos for students on winter break

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Now that school is out for the holidays, you're probably looking forward to a few weeks of relaxation. Besides traveling and spending quality time with your family, you likely have nothing planned beyond sleeping in and catching up on your favorite shows. While you certainly deserve a break, it's a good idea to [maximize your free time](#) by making some smart financial moves.

Check out our [student loans calculator](#).

## 1. Fill out the FAFSA

Even if your bill for the spring semester has been paid in full, it doesn't hurt to start thinking about financial aid for next year. If you're planning to apply for additional loans, work-study programs or federal grants, you'll need to fill out the FAFSA form again. Many states don't require students to submit their forms until March or June, but it's a good idea to avoid waiting until the last minute.

Here's why: In some cases, financial aid is available on a first come, first served basis. So if you wait until the last minute, you might miss out on your chance to receive a Pell Grant, for example.

When the [new FAFSA form](#) comes out in October 2016, students will be able to turn in their personal information in the fall. But until then, submitting your FAFSA in early January will give you priority access to the financial assistance you need.

## 2. Order Your Textbooks

While you're enjoying your winter break, textbooks are probably the least of your concerns. But the sooner you place your orders, the less you'll spend on them.

College students who wait until classes begin to buy their books often have to settle for the ones on the shelves of their campus bookstores. And those textbooks typically cost more than the same ones purchased on amazon.com or rented from other websites. If you're tired of wasting all of your money on textbooks, comparing prices in December, buying some used books and renting the rest can potentially save you hundreds of dollars.

## 3. Look for Scholarships and Grants

If you're worried that it'll take you years to [pay off your student loans](#) and your school hasn't offered you enough financial aid, you can try using outside awards to make up for the funding gap. Completing applications takes time and spending your entire break hunched over a laptop doesn't sound fun. If you're serious about reducing your financial burden, however, try to carve out some time to search for scholarships and grants.

Related Article: [4 Steps to Getting More Financial Aid](#)

## 4. Pay for a Couple of Coffee Dates

All students must one day join the workforce and networking is an integral part of job hunting. Instead of using most of the money in your bank account to pay for alcohol (assuming you're of age!) or unhealthy food, you could use it to buy coffee for someone you connected with at an event or on LinkedIn. Treating a new contact to coffee and conducting an informational interview are great ways to learn more about the field you're interested in.

## 5. Lock Down Paid Internships

Sick of interning for free? Paid internships are usually pretty competitive and in some industries, they're very rare. If you're set on getting a summer internship that'll compensate you for your work, it's best to begin looking for one after finals have ended. Keep in mind though that some companies start recruiting candidates even earlier than that.

## 6. Review Your Budget or Create One

If you've already set up a budget, you're light years ahead of many of your peers. Going through it over your winter break can give you an idea of how well you managed your money during the year. Based on your analysis, you might conclude that you could stand to save more or get a part-time job.

Students who don't have a budget at all might want to consider creating one. Your budget doesn't have to be ultra-complicated, but having some sort of guideline in place and tracking your spending can give you a sense of where your money is going.

[Calculate the Cost of College](#)

## 7. Take Advantage of Student Discounts

As you finish up your last-minute holiday shopping and meet up with old friends, you might as well make the most of the discounts that businesses extend to college students. Presenting your student ID at certain movie theaters, stores and restaurants can cut as much as 15% or more off the final price you pay.

### The Bottom Line

You might plan to spend the majority of your winter break in front of the television or under the covers. But it's best to get your finances under control while you're not overwhelmed with projects and papers.