



IRS Tax Tip 2016-21: Deciding Whether to Itemize or Use the Standard Deduction

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IRS Tax Tips

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Deciding Whether to Itemize or Use the Standard Deduction

Most people claim the standard deduction when they file their federal tax return, but you may be able to lower your tax bill if you itemize. You can find out which way saves you the most by figuring your taxes both ways. The IRS offers these six tips to help you choose:

1. **Use IRS Free File.** Most people qualify to use free, brand-name software to prepare and e-file their federal tax returns. [IRS Free File](#) is the easiest way to file. Free File software will help you determine if you should itemize and will file the right tax forms based on your answers. It will do the math and e-file your return – all for free.

Check your other [e-file options](#) if you can't use Free File.

2. **Figure Your Itemized Deductions.** Add up deductible expenses you paid during the year. These may include expenses such as:

- Home mortgage interest
- State and local income taxes or sales taxes (but not both)

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- Real estate and personal property taxes
- Gifts to charities
- Casualty or theft losses
- Unreimbursed medical expenses
- Unreimbursed employee business expenses

Special rules and limits apply. Visit IRS.gov and refer to [Publication 17](#), Your Federal Income Tax, for more details.

3. Know Your Standard Deduction. If you don't itemize, your basic standard deduction for 2015 depends on your filing status:

- Single \$6,300
- Married Filing Jointly \$12,600
- Head of Household \$9,250
- Married Filing Separately \$6,300
- Qualifying Widow(er) \$12,600

If you're 65 or older or blind, your standard deduction is higher than these amounts. If someone can claim you as a dependent, your deduction may be limited.

4. Check the Exceptions. There are some situations where the law does not allow a person to claim the standard deduction. This rule applies if you are married filing a separate return and your spouse itemizes. In this case, you can't claim a standard deduction. You usually will pay less tax if you itemize. See [Publication 17](#) for more on these rules.

5. Use the IRS ITA Tool. Visit IRS.gov and use the [Interactive Tax Assistant](#) tool. It can help determine your standard deduction. It can also help you figure your itemized deductions.

6. File the Right Forms. To itemize your deductions, use [Form 1040](#) and [Schedule A](#), Itemized Deductions. You can take the standard deduction on Forms 1040, 1040A or 1040EZ.

Each and every taxpayer has a set of fundamental rights they should be aware of when dealing with the IRS. These are your [Taxpayer Bill of Rights](#). Explore your rights and our obligations to protect them on IRS.gov.

Additional IRS Resources:

- [Publication 501](#), Exemptions, Standard Deduction, and Filing Information
- [Filing Your Taxes](#)

[IRS Tax Map](#)

IRS YouTube Videos:

- *Welcome to Free File* – [English](#)
- *Standard vs. Itemized Deductions* – [English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [ASL](#)
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