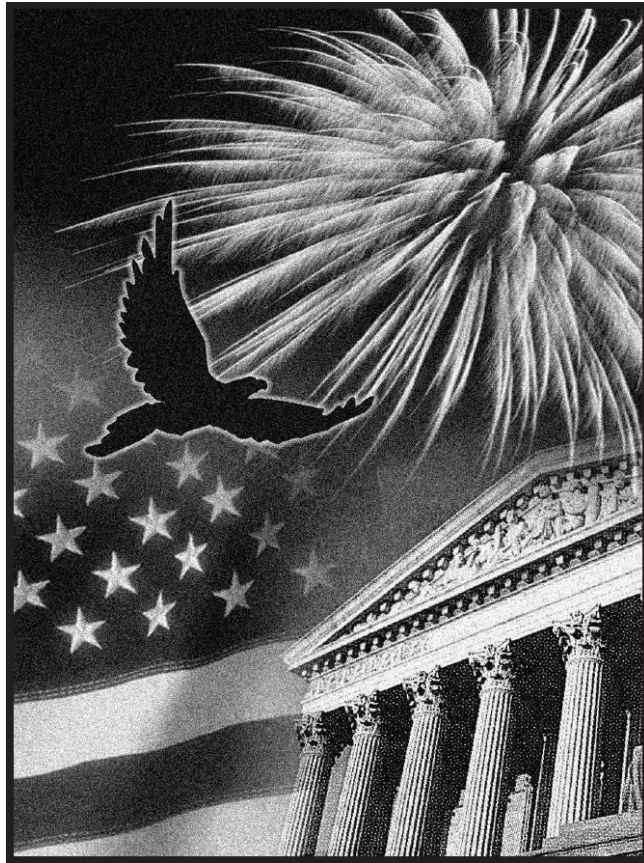


Publication 538

Accounting Periods and Methods

Volume 2 of 2



Get forms and other information faster and easier at:

- [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) (English)
- [IRS.gov/Korean](https://www.irs.gov/Korean) (한국어)
- [IRS.gov/Spanish](https://www.irs.gov/Spanish) (Español)
- [IRS.gov/Russian](https://www.irs.gov/Russian) (Русский)
- [IRS.gov/Chinese](https://www.irs.gov/Chinese) (中文)
- [IRS.gov/Vietnamese](https://www.irs.gov/Vietnamese) (Tiếng Việt)



Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service

Publication 538 (Rev. 01-2022) Catalog Number 39338B
Department of the Treasury **Internal Revenue Service** www.irs.gov



Visit the Accessibility
Page on [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov)

This page is intentionally left blank

2021. You can deduct the expense in 2020 because all events have occurred to fix the liability, the amount of the liability can be determined, and economic performance occurred in 2020.

Your office supplies may qualify as a recurring item, discussed later. If so, you can deduct them in 2020, even if the supplies are not delivered until 2021 (when economic performance occurs).

Workers' compensation and tort liability.

If you are required to make payments under workers' compensation laws or in satisfaction of any tort liability, economic performance occurs as you make the payments. If you are required to make payments to a special designated settlement fund established by court order for a tort liability, economic performance occurs as you make the payments.

Taxes. Economic performance generally occurs as estimated income tax, property taxes, employment taxes, etc. are paid. However, you can elect to treat taxes as a recurring item, discussed later. You can also elect to ratably accrue real estate taxes. See chapter 5 of Pub. 535 for information about real estate taxes.

Other liabilities. Other liabilities for which economic performance occurs as you make payments include liabilities for breach of contract (to the extent of incidental, consequential, and liquidated damages), violation of law, rebates and refunds, awards, prizes, jackpots, insurance, and warranty and service contracts.

Interest. Economic performance occurs with the passage of time (as the borrower uses, and the lender forgoes use of, the lender's money) rather than as payments are made.

Compensation for services. Generally, economic performance occurs as an employee renders service to the employer. However, deductions for compensation or other benefits paid to an employee in a year subsequent to economic performance are subject to the rules governing deferred compensation, deferred benefits, and funded welfare benefit plans. For information on employee benefit programs, see Pub. 15-B, Employer's Tax Guide to Fringe Benefits.

Vacation pay. You can take a current deduction for vacation pay earned by your employees if you pay it during the year or, if the amount is vested, within 2¹/₂ months after the end of the year. If you pay it later than this, you must deduct it in the year actually paid. An amount is vested if your right to it cannot be nullified or cancelled.

Exception for recurring items. An exception to the economic performance rule allows certain recurring items to be treated as

incurred during the tax year even though economic performance has not occurred. The exception applies if all the following requirements are met.

1. The all-events test, discussed earlier, is met.
2. Economic performance occurs by the earlier of the following dates.
 - a. 8¹/₂ months after the close of the year.
 - b. The date you file a timely return (including extensions) for the year.
3. The item is recurring in nature and you consistently treat similar items as incurred in the tax year in which the all-events test is met.
4. Either:
 - a. The item is not material, or

- b. Accruing the item in the year in which the all-events test is met results in a better match against income than accruing the item in the year of economic performance.

This exception does not apply to workers' compensation or tort liabilities.

Amended return. You may be able to file an amended return and treat a liability as incurred under the recurring item exception. You can do so if economic performance for the liability occurs after you file your tax return for the year, but within 8¹/₂ months after the close of the tax year.

Recurrence and consistency. To determine whether an item is recurring and consistently reported, consider the frequency with which the item and similar items are incurred (or expected to be incurred) and how you report these items for tax purposes. A

new expense or an expense not incurred every year can be treated as recurring if it is reasonable to expect that it will be incurred regularly in the future.

Materiality. Factors to consider in determining the materiality of a recurring item include the size of the item (both in absolute terms and in relation to your income and other expenses) and the treatment of the item on your financial statements.

An item considered material for financial statement purposes is also considered material for tax purposes. However, in certain situations an immaterial item for financial accounting purposes is treated as material for purposes of economic performance.

Matching expenses with income. Costs directly associated with the revenue of a period are properly allocable to that period. To determine whether the accrual of an expense in a particular year results in a better

match with the income to which it relates, generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) are an important factor.

For example, if you report sales income in the year of sale, but you do not ship the goods until the following year, the shipping costs are more properly matched to income in the year of sale than the year the goods are shipped.

Expenses that cannot be practically associated with income of a particular period, such as advertising costs, should be assigned to the period the costs are incurred. However, the matching requirement is considered met for certain types of expenses. These expenses include taxes, payments under insurance, warranty, and service contracts, rebates, refunds, awards, prizes, and jackpots.

Expenses Paid in Advance

An expense you pay in advance is deductible only in the year to which it applies, unless the expense qualifies for the 12-month rule.

Under the 12-month rule, a taxpayer is not required to capitalize amounts paid to create certain rights or benefits for the taxpayer that do not extend beyond the earlier of the following.

- 12 months after the right or benefit begins, or
- The end of the tax year after the tax year in which payment is made.

If you have not been applying the general rule (an expense paid in advance is deductible only in the year to which it applies) and/or the 12-month rule to the expenses you paid in advance, you must get IRS approval before using the general rule and/or the 12-month rule. See *Change in Accounting Method*, later, for information on how to get IRS approval. See *Expense paid in advance* under *Cash Method*, earlier, for examples illustrating the application of the general and 12-month rules.

Related Persons

Business expenses and interest owed to a related person who uses the cash method of accounting are not deductible until you make the payment and the corresponding amount is includible in the related person's gross income. Determine the relationship for this rule as of the end of the tax year for which the expense or interest would otherwise be deductible. See section 267 of the Internal Revenue Code for the definition of related person.

Inventories

An inventory is necessary to clearly show income when the production, purchase, or sale of merchandise is an income-producing factor. If you must account for an inventory in your business, you must use an accrual method of accounting for your purchases and sales. However, see *Exception for Small*

Business Taxpayers, below. Also, see Accrual Method, earlier.

To figure taxable income, you must value your inventory at the beginning and end of each tax year. To determine the value, you need a method for identifying the items in your inventory and a method for valuing these items. See Identifying Cost and Valuing Inventory, later.

The rules for valuing inventory are not the same for all businesses. The method you use must conform to generally accepted accounting principles for similar businesses and must clearly reflect income. Your inventory practices must be consistent from year to year.



The rules discussed here apply only if they do not conflict with the uniform capitalization rules of section 263A and the mark-to-market rules of section 475.

Exception for Small Business Taxpayers

If you are a small business taxpayer (defined below), you can choose not to keep an inventory, but you must still use a method of accounting for inventory that clearly reflects income. A small business taxpayer can account for inventory by (a) treating the inventory as non-incidental materials and supplies, or (b) conforming to its treatment of inventory in an applicable financial statement (as defined in section 451(b)(3)). If it does not have an applicable financial statement, it can use the method of accounting used in its books and records prepared according to its accounting procedures. See Regulations section 1.471-1(b). If, however, you choose to keep an inventory, you generally must use an accrual method of accounting and value the inventory each year to determine your cost of goods sold.

Small business taxpayer. You qualify as a small business taxpayer if you:

- Have average annual gross receipts of \$26 million or less (indexed for inflation) for the 3 prior tax years, and
- Are not a tax shelter (as defined in section 448(d)(3)).

If your business has not been in existence for all of the 3 tax-year period used in figuring average gross receipts, base your average on the period it has existed. If your business has a predecessor entity, include the gross receipts of the predecessor entity from the 3 tax-year period when figuring average gross receipts. If your business (or predecessor entity) had short tax years for any of the 3 tax-year period, annualize your business's gross receipts for the short tax years that are part of the 3 tax-year period.

Changing your method of accounting for inventory. If you want to change your method of accounting for inventory, you must file Form 3115. See the Instructions for Form 3115.

Items Included in Inventory

Your inventory should include all of the following.

- Merchandise or stock in trade.
- Raw materials.
- Work in process.
- Finished products.
- Supplies that physically become a part of the item intended for sale.

Merchandise. Include the following merchandise in inventory.

- Purchased merchandise if title has passed to you, even if the merchandise is in transit or you do not

have physical possession for another reason.

- Goods under contract for sale that you have not yet segregated and applied to the contract.
- Goods out on consignment.
- Goods held for sale in display rooms, merchandise mart rooms, or booths located away from your place of business.

C.O.D. mail sales. If you sell merchandise by mail and intend payment and delivery to happen at the same time, title passes when payment is made. Include the merchandise in your closing inventory until the buyer pays for it.

Containers. Containers such as kegs, bottles, and cases, regardless of whether they are on hand or returnable, should be included in inventory if title has not passed to the buyer of the contents. If title has passed to

the buyer, exclude the containers from inventory. Under certain circumstances, some containers can be depreciated. See Pub. 946.

Merchandise not included. Do not include the following merchandise in inventory.

- Goods you have sold, but only if title has passed to the buyer.
- Goods consigned to you.
- Goods ordered for future delivery if you do not yet have title.

Assets. Do not include the following in inventory.

- Land, buildings, and equipment used in your business.
- Notes, accounts receivable, and similar assets.
- Real estate held for sale by a real estate dealer in the ordinary course of business.

- Supplies that do not physically become part of the item intended for sale.



Special rules apply to the cost of inventory or property imported from a related person. See the regulations under section 1059A of the Internal Revenue Code.

Identifying Cost

You can use any of the following methods to identify the cost of items in inventory.

Specific Identification Method

Use the specific identification method when you can identify and match the actual cost to the items in inventory.

Use the FIFO or LIFO method, explained next, if:

- You cannot specifically identify items with their costs, or

- The same type of goods are intermingled in your inventory and they cannot be identified with specific invoices.

FIFO Method

The FIFO (first-in first-out) method assumes the items you purchased or produced first are the first items you sold, consumed, or otherwise disposed of. The items in inventory at the end of the tax year are matched with the costs of similar items that you most recently purchased or produced.

LIFO Method

The LIFO (last-in first-out) method assumes the items of inventory you purchased or produced last are the first items you sold, consumed, or otherwise disposed of. Items included in closing inventory are considered to be from the opening inventory in the order of acquisition and from those acquired during the tax year.

LIFO rules. The rules for using the LIFO method are very complex. Two are discussed briefly here. For more information on these and other LIFO rules, see sections 472 through 474 of the Internal Revenue Code and the related income tax regulations.

Dollar-value method. Under the dollar-value method of pricing LIFO inventories, goods and products must be grouped into one or more pools (classes of items), depending on the kinds of goods or products in the inventories. See Regulations section 1.472-8.

Simplified dollar-value method. Under this method, you establish multiple inventory pools in general categories from appropriate government price indexes. You then use changes in the price index to estimate the annual change in price for inventory items in the pools.

An eligible small business (average annual gross receipts of \$5 million or less for the 3

preceding tax years) can elect the simplified dollar-value LIFO method. See section 474(c).

Taxpayers who cannot use the method under section 474 should see Regulations section 1.472-8(e)(3) for a similar simplified dollar-value method.

Adopting LIFO method. File Form 970, Application To Use LIFO Inventory Method, or a statement with all the information required on Form 970 to adopt the LIFO method. You must file the form (or the statement) with your timely filed tax return for the year in which you first use LIFO.

Differences Between FIFO and LIFO

Each method produces different income results, depending on the trend of price levels at the time. In times of inflation, when prices are rising, LIFO will produce a larger cost of goods sold and a lower closing inventory. Under FIFO, the cost of goods sold will be

lower and the closing inventory will be higher. However, in times of falling prices, the opposite will hold.

Valuing Inventory

The value of your inventory is a major factor in figuring your taxable income. The method you use to value the inventory is very important.

The following methods, described below, are those generally available for valuing inventory.

- Cost.
- Lower of cost or market.
- Retail.

Goods that cannot be sold. These are goods you cannot sell at normal prices or they are unusable in the usual way because of damage, imperfections, shop wear, changes of style, odd or broken lots, or other similar causes. You should value these goods at their

bona fide selling price minus direct cost of disposition, no matter which method you use to value the rest of your inventory. If these goods consist of raw materials or partly finished goods held for use or consumption, you must value them on a reasonable basis, considering their usability and condition. Do not value them for less than scrap value. For more information, see Regulations section 1.471-2(c).

Cost Method

To properly value your inventory at cost, you must include all direct and indirect costs associated with it. The following rules apply.

- For merchandise on hand at the beginning of the tax year, cost means the ending inventory price of the goods.
- For merchandise purchased during the year, cost means the invoice price minus appropriate discounts plus

transportation or other charges incurred in acquiring the goods. It can also include other costs that have to be capitalized under the uniform capitalization rules of section 263A of the Internal Revenue Code.

- For merchandise produced during the year, cost means all direct and indirect costs that have to be capitalized under the uniform capitalization rules.

Discounts. A trade discount is a discount allowed regardless of when the payment is made. Generally, it is for volume or quantity purchases. You must reduce the cost of inventory by a trade (or quantity) discount.

A cash discount is a reduction in the invoice or purchase price for paying within a prescribed time period. You can choose either to deduct cash discounts or include them in income, but you must treat them consistently from year to year.

Lower of Cost or Market Method

Under the lower of cost or market method, compare the market value of each item on hand on the inventory date with its cost and use the lower of the two as its inventory value.

This method applies to the following.

- Goods purchased and on hand.
- The basic elements of cost (direct materials, direct labor, and certain indirect costs) of goods being manufactured and finished goods on hand.

This method does not apply to the following. They must be inventoried at cost.

- Goods on hand or being manufactured for delivery at a fixed price on a firm sales contract (that is, not legally subject to cancellation by either you or the buyer).

- Goods accounted for under the LIFO method.

Example. Under the lower of cost or market method, the following items would be valued at \$600 in closing inventory.

Item	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Market</u>	<u>Lower</u>
R.....	\$300	\$500	\$300
S.....	200	100	100
T.....	<u>450</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>200</u>
Total.....	<u>\$950</u>	<u>\$800</u>	<u>\$600</u>

You must value each item in the inventory separately. You cannot value the entire inventory at cost (\$950) and at market (\$800) and then use the lower of the two figures.

Market value. Under ordinary circumstances for normal goods, market value means the

usual bid price on the date of inventory. This price is based on the volume of merchandise you usually buy. For example, if you buy items in small lots at \$10 an item and a competitor buys identical items in larger lots at \$8.50 an item, your usual market price will be higher than your competitor's.

Lower than market. When you offer merchandise for sale at a price lower than market in the normal course of business, you can value the inventory at the lower price, minus the direct cost of disposition.

Determine these prices from the actual sales for a reasonable period before and after the date of your inventory. Prices that vary materially from the actual prices will not be accepted as reflecting the market.

No market exists. If no market exists, or if quotations are nominal because of an inactive market, you must use the best available evidence of fair market price on the date or

dates nearest your inventory date. This evidence could include the following items.

- Specific purchases or sales you or others made in reasonable volume and in good faith.
- Compensation amounts paid for cancellation of contracts for purchase commitments.

Retail Method

Under the retail method, the total retail selling price of goods on hand at the end of the tax year in each department or of each class of goods is reduced to approximate cost by using an average markup expressed as a percentage of the total retail selling price.

To figure the average markup, apply the following steps in order.

1. Add the total of the retail selling prices of the goods in the opening inventory and the retail selling prices of the

goods you bought during the year (adjusted for all markups and markdowns).

2. Subtract from the total in (1) the cost of goods included in the opening inventory plus the cost of goods you bought during the year.
3. Divide the balance in (2) by the total selling price in

(1). The result is the average markup percentage.

Then determine the approximate cost in three steps.

1. Subtract the sales at retail from the total retail selling price. The result is the closing inventory at retail.
2. Multiply the closing inventory at retail by the average markup percentage. The result is the markup in closing inventory.

3. Subtract the markup in (2) from the closing inventory at retail. The result is the approximate closing inventory at cost.

Closing inventory. The following example shows how to figure your closing inventory using the retail method.

Example. Your records show the following information on the last day of your tax year.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Value</u>
Opening inventory.....	\$52,000	\$60,000
Purchases.....	53,000	78,500
Sales.....		98,000
Markups.....		2,000
Markdowns.....		500

Using the retail method, determine your closing inventory as follows.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Value</u>
Opening inventory.....	\$52,000	\$60,000
Plus:		
Purchases.....	53,000	78,500
Net markups		
(\$2,000 – \$500 markdowns).....		<u>1,500</u>
Total.....	\$105,000	\$140,000
Minus:		
Sales.....		<u>98,000</u>
Closing inventory at retail.....		\$42,000

Minus: Markup* ($.25 \times \$42,000$). 10,500

Closing inventory at cost..... \$31,500

* See *Markup percentage*, next, for an explanation of how the markup percentage (25%) was figured for this example.

Markup percentage. The markup (\$35,000) is the difference between cost (\$105,000) and the retail value (\$140,000). Divide the markup by the total retail value to get the markup percentage (25%). You cannot use arbitrary standard percentages of purchase markup to determine markup. You must determine it as accurately as possible from department records for the period covered by your tax return.

Markdowns. When determining the retail selling price of goods on hand at the end of the year, markdowns are recognized only if the goods were offered to the public at the reduced price. Markdowns not based on an

actual reduction of retail sales price, such as those based on depreciation and obsolescence, are not allowed.

Retail method with LIFO. If you use LIFO with the retail method, you must adjust your retail selling prices for markdowns as well as markups.

Price index. If you are using the retail method and LIFO, adjust the inventory value, determined using the retail method, at the end of the year to reflect price changes since the close of the preceding year. Generally, to make this adjustment, you must develop your own retail price index based on an analysis of your own data under a method acceptable to the IRS. However, a department store using LIFO that offers a full line of merchandise for sale can use an inventory price index provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Other sellers can use this index if they can demonstrate the index is accurate, reliable, and suitable for their use.

Retail method without LIFO. If you do not use LIFO and have been determining your inventory under the retail method except that, to approximate the lower of cost or market, you have followed the consistent practice of adjusting the retail selling prices of goods for markups (but not markdowns), you can continue that practice. The adjustments must be bona fide, consistent, and uniform and you must also exclude markups made to cancel or correct markdowns. The markups you include must be reduced by markdowns made to cancel or correct the markups.

If you do not use LIFO and you previously determined inventories without eliminating markdowns in making adjustments to retail selling prices, you can continue this practice only if you first get IRS approval. You can adopt and use this practice on the first tax return you file for the business, subject to IRS approval on examination of your tax return.

Figuring income tax. Resellers who use the retail method of pricing inventories can determine their tax on that basis.

To use this method, you must do all of the following.

- State that you are using the retail method on your tax return.
- Keep accurate records.
- Use this method each year unless the IRS allows you to change to another method.

You must keep records for each separate department or class of goods carrying different percentages of gross profit. Purchase records should show the firm name, date of invoice, invoice cost, and retail selling price. You should also keep records of the respective departmental or class accumulation of all purchases, markdowns, sales, stock, etc.

Perpetual or Book Inventory

You can figure the cost of goods on hand by either a perpetual or book inventory if inventory is kept by following sound accounting practices. Inventory accounts must be charged with the actual cost of goods purchased or produced and credited with the value of goods used, transferred, or sold. Credits must be determined on the basis of the actual cost of goods acquired during the year and their inventory value at the beginning of the tax year.

Physical inventory. You must take a physical inventory at reasonable intervals and the book amount for inventory must be adjusted to agree with the actual inventory.

Loss of Inventory

You claim a casualty or theft loss of inventory, including items you hold for sale to customers, through the increase in the cost of goods sold by properly reporting your opening

and closing inventories. You cannot claim the loss again as a casualty or theft loss. Any insurance or other reimbursement you receive for the loss is taxable.

You can choose to claim the loss separately as a casualty or theft loss. If you claim the loss separately, adjust opening inventory or purchases to eliminate the loss items and avoid counting the loss twice.

If you claim the loss separately, reduce the loss by the reimbursement you receive or expect to receive. If you do not receive the reimbursement by the end of the year, you cannot claim a loss for any amounts you reasonably expect to recover.

Forgiveness of indebtedness by creditors or suppliers. If your creditors or suppliers forgive part of what you owe them because of your inventory loss, this amount is treated as taxable income.

Disaster loss. If your inventory loss is due to a disaster in an area determined by the President of the United States to be eligible for federal assistance, you can choose to deduct the loss on your return for the immediately preceding year. However, you must also decrease your opening inventory for the year of the loss so the loss will not show up again in inventory.

Uniform Capitalization Rules

Under the uniform capitalization rules, you must capitalize the direct costs and part of the indirect costs for production or resale activities. Include these costs in the basis of property you produce or acquire for resale, rather than claiming them as a current deduction. You recover the costs through depreciation, amortization, or cost of goods sold when you use, sell, or otherwise dispose of the property.



Special uniform capitalization rules apply to a farming business. See chapter 6 in Pub. 225.

Activities subject to the rules. You are subject to the uniform capitalization rules if you do any of the following, unless the property is produced for your use other than in a trade or business or an activity carried on for profit.

- Produce real or tangible personal property.
- Acquire property for resale.
However, see the exception for certain small taxpayers, discussed later.

Producing property. You produce property if you construct, build, install, manufacture, develop, improve, create, raise, or grow the property. Property produced for you under a contract is treated as produced by you to the

extent you make payments or otherwise incur costs in connection with the property.

Tangible personal property. Tangible personal property includes films, sound recordings, video tapes, books, artwork, photographs, or similar property containing words, ideas, concepts, images, or sounds. However, freelance authors, photographers, and artists are exempt from the uniform capitalization rules if they qualify.

Exceptions. The uniform capitalization rules do not apply to the following.

- A small business taxpayer that meets the gross receipts test under section 448(c) and that is not a tax shelter.
- Property produced to use as personal or nonbusiness property or for uses not connected with a trade or business or an activity conducted for profit.

- Research and experimental expenditures deductible under section 174.
- Intangible drilling and development costs of oil and gas or geothermal wells or any amortization deduction allowable under section 59(e) for intangible drilling, development, or mining exploration expenditures.
- Property produced under a long-term contract, except for certain home construction contracts. See section 460(e).
- Timber and certain ornamental trees raised, harvested, or grown, and the underlying land.
- Qualified creative expenses paid or incurred as a freelance (self-employed) writer, photographer, or artist that are otherwise deductible on your tax return.

- Costs allocable to natural gas acquired for resale to the extent these costs would otherwise be allocable to cushion gas stored underground.
- Property produced if substantial construction occurred before March 1, 1986.
- Property provided to customers in connection with providing services. It must be de minimus in amount and not be included in inventory in the hands of the service provider.
- Loan origination.
- The costs of certain producers who use a simplified production method and whose total indirect costs are \$200,000 or less. See Regulations section 1.263A-2(b)(3)(iv) for more information.
-

Qualified creative expenses. Qualified creative expenses are expenses paid or incurred by a freelance (self-employed) writer, photographer, or artist whose personal efforts create (or can reasonably be expected to create) certain properties. These expenses do not include expenses related to printing, photographic plates, motion picture films, video tapes, or similar items.

These individuals are defined as follows.

- A writer is an individual who creates a literary manuscript, a musical composition (including any accompanying words), or a dance score.
- A photographer is an individual who creates a photograph or photographic negative or transparency.
- An artist is an individual who creates a picture, painting, sculpture, statue, etching, drawing, cartoon, graphic

design, or original print item. The originality and uniqueness of the item created and the predominance of aesthetic value over utilitarian value of the item created are taken into account.

Personal service corporation. The exemption for writers, photographers, and artists also applies to an expense of a personal service corporation that directly relates to the activities of the qualified employee-owner. A qualified employee-owner is a writer, photographer, or artist who owns, with certain members of his or her family, substantially all the stock of the corporation.

Inventories. If you must adopt the uniform capitalization rules, revalue the items or costs included in beginning inventory for the year of change as if the capitalization rules had been in effect for all prior periods. When revaluing inventory costs, the capitalization rules apply to all inventory costs accumulated in prior

periods. An adjustment is required under section 481(a). It is the difference between the original value of the inventory and the revalued inventory.

If you must capitalize costs for production and resale activities, you are required to make this change. If you make the change for the first tax year you are subject to the uniform capitalization rules, it is an automatic change of accounting method that does not need IRS approval. Otherwise, IRS approval is required to make the change.

Change in Accounting Method

Generally, you can choose any permitted accounting method when you file your first tax return. You do not need to obtain IRS approval to choose the initial accounting method. You must, however, use the method consistently from year to year and it must clearly reflect your income. See Accounting Methods, earlier.

Once you have set up your accounting method and filed your first return, generally, you must receive approval from the IRS before you change the method. A change in your accounting method includes a change not only in your overall system of accounting but also in the treatment of any material item. A material item is one that affects the proper time for inclusion of income or allowance of a deduction. Although an accounting method can exist without treating an item consistently, an accounting method is not established for that item, in most cases, unless the item is treated consistently.

Approval required. The following are examples of changes in accounting method that require IRS approval.

- A change from the cash method to an accrual method or vice versa.
- A change in the method or basis used to value inventory.

- A change in the depreciation or amortization method (except for certain permitted changes to the straight-line method).
- A change involving the adoption, use, or discontinuance of any other specialized method of computing taxable income.
- A change where the Internal Revenue Code and

Treasury Regulations specifically require that the consent of the IRS must be obtained before adopting such a change.

Approval not required. The following are examples of types of changes that are not changes in accounting methods and do not require IRS approval.

- Correction of a math or posting error.

- Correction of an error in figuring tax liability (such as an error in figuring a credit).
- An adjustment of any item of income or deduction that does not involve the proper time for including it in income or deducting it.
- Certain adjustments in the useful life of a depreciable or amortizable asset.

Form 3115. In general, you must file a current Form 3115 to request a change in either an overall accounting method or the accounting treatment of any item. There are some instances when you can obtain automatic consent from the IRS to change to certain accounting methods. In other instances, you can file Form 3115 using the non-automatic change request procedures to request an accounting method change.

More information. For more information on making changes in accounting methods, see Form 3115 and the Instructions for Form 3115. See Revenue Procedure 2021-34, 2021-35 I.R.B. 337 (or any successor), available at [IRS.gov/irb/2021-35_IRB#REV-PROC-2021-34](https://www.irs.gov/irb/2021-35_IRB#REV-PROC-2021-34), for additional procedures that may apply for obtaining automatic consent to change methods of accounting for revenue recognition and certain other methods of accounting that may affect the accounting for revenue recognition. Also see Revenue Procedure 2022-09, 2022-02 I.R.B. 310 (or any successor) available at [IRS.gov/irb/2022-02_IRB#REV-PROC-2022-9](https://www.irs.gov/irb/2022-02_IRB#REV-PROC-2022-9), for additional procedures that may apply for obtaining automatic consent to change certain methods of accounting related to small businesses.



When making changes in accounting methods or when filing Form 3115, you must determine if the IRS has issued any new published guidance which

includes revenue procedures, revenue rulings, notices, regulations, or other relevant guidance in the Internal Revenue Bulletin. For the latest information, visit [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov).

How To Get Tax Help

If you have questions about a tax issue; need help preparing your tax return; or want to download free publications, forms, or instructions, go to [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) and find resources that can help you right away.

Preparing and filing your tax return.

After receiving all your wage and earnings statements (Forms W-2, W-2G, 1099-R, 1099-MISC, 1099-NEC, etc.); unemployment compensation statements (by mail or in a digital format) or other government payment statements (Form 1099-G); and interest, dividend, and retirement statements from banks and investment firms (Forms 1099), you have several options to choose from to prepare and file your tax return. You can

prepare the tax return yourself, see if you qualify for free tax preparation, or hire a tax professional to prepare your return.



For 2021, if you received an Economic Impact Payment (EIP), refer to your Notice 1444-C, Your 2021 Economic Impact Payment. If you received Advance Child Tax Credit payments, refer to your Letter 6419.

Free options for tax preparation. Go to [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) to see your options for preparing and filing your return online or in your local community, if you qualify, which include the following.

- **Free File.** This program lets you prepare and file your federal individual income tax return for free using brand-name tax-preparation-and-filing software or Free File fillable forms. However, state tax preparation may not be available through Free File. Go

to [IRS.gov/ FreeFile](https://www.irs.gov/FreeFile) to see if you qualify for free online federal tax preparation, e-filing, and direct deposit or payment options.

- **VITA.** The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offers free tax help to people with low-to-moderate incomes, persons with disabilities, and limited-English-speaking taxpayers who need help preparing their own tax returns. Go to [IRS.gov/ VITA](https://www.irs.gov/VITA), download the free IRS2Go app, or call 800-906-9887 for information on free tax return preparation.
- **TCE.** The Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program offers free tax help for all taxpayers, particularly those who are 60 years of age and older. TCE volunteers specialize in answering questions about pensions and retirement-related issues unique

to seniors. Go to [IRS.gov/TCE](https://www.irs.gov/TCE), download the free IRS2Go app, or call 888-227-7669 for information on free tax return preparation.

- **MilTax.** Members of the U.S. Armed Forces and qualified veterans may use MilTax, a free tax service offered by the Department of Defense through Military OneSource. For more information, go to [MilitaryOneSource \(MilitaryOneSource.mil/Tax\)](https://MilitaryOneSource.mil/Tax).

Also, the IRS offers Free Fillable Forms, which can be completed online and then filed electronically regardless of income.

Using online tools to help prepare your return. Go to [IRS.gov/Tools](https://www.irs.gov/Tools) for the following.

- The [Earned Income Tax Credit Assistant \(IRS.gov/ EITCAssistant\)](https://www.irs.gov/EITCAssistant) determines if you're eligible for the earned income credit (EIC).

- The [Online EIN Application \(IRS.gov/EIN\)](https://www.irs.gov/ein) helps you get an employer identification number (EIN) at no cost.
- The [Tax Withholding Estimator \(IRS.gov/W4app\)](https://www.irs.gov/w4app) makes it easier for everyone to pay the correct amount of tax during the year. The tool is a convenient, online way to check and tailor your withholding. It's more user-friendly for taxpayers, including retirees and self-employed individuals. The features include the following.
 - ▶ Easy to understand language.
 - ▶ The ability to switch between screens, correct previous entries, and skip screens that don't apply.
 - ▶ Tips and links to help you determine if you qualify for tax credits and deductions.

- ▶ A progress tracker.
- ▶ A self-employment tax feature.
- ▶ Automatic calculation of taxable social security benefits.
- The [First-Time Homebuyer Credit Account Look-up \(IRS.gov/HomeBuyer\)](https://www.irs.gov/first-time-homebuyer-credit-account-look-up) tool provides information on your repayments and account balance.
- The [Sales Tax Deduction Calculator \(IRS.gov/ SalesTax\)](https://www.irs.gov/sales-tax-deduction-calculator) figures the amount you can claim if you itemize deductions on Schedule A (Form 1040).



Getting answers to your tax questions. On IRS.gov, you can get up-to-date information on current events and changes in tax law.

- [IRS.gov/Help](https://www.irs.gov/help): A variety of tools to help you get answers to some of the most common tax questions.
- [IRS.gov/ITA](https://www.irs.gov/ita): The Interactive Tax Assistant, a tool that will ask you questions and, based on your input, provide answers on a number of tax law topics.
- [IRS.gov/Forms](https://www.irs.gov/forms): Find forms, instructions, and publications. You will find details on 2021 tax changes and hundreds of interactive links to help you find answers to your questions.
- You may also be able to access tax law information in your electronic filing software.

Need someone to prepare your tax return? There are various types of tax return preparers, including tax preparers, enrolled agents, certified public accountants (CPAs), attorneys, and many others who don't have

professional credentials. If you choose to have someone prepare your tax return, choose that preparer wisely. A paid tax preparer is:

- Primarily responsible for the overall substantive accuracy of your return,
- Required to sign the return, and
- Required to include their preparer tax identification number (PTIN).

Although the tax preparer always signs the return, you're ultimately responsible for providing all the information required for the preparer to accurately prepare your return. Anyone paid to prepare tax returns for others should have a thorough understanding of tax matters. For more information on how to choose a tax preparer, go to [Tips for Choosing a Tax Preparer](#) on IRS.gov.

Advance child tax credit payments. From July through December 2021, advance payments were sent automatically to taxpayers with qualifying children who met certain criteria. The advance child tax credit payments were early payments of up to 50% of the estimated child tax credit that taxpayers may properly claim on their 2021 returns. Go to [IRS.gov/AdvCTC](https://www.irs.gov/AdvCTC) for more information about these payments and how they can affect your taxes.

Coronavirus. Go to [IRS.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.irs.gov/Coronavirus) for links to information on the impact of the coronavirus, as well as tax relief available for individuals and families, small and large businesses, and tax-exempt organizations.

Employers can register to use Business Services Online. The Social Security Administration (SSA) offers online service at [SSA.gov/employer](https://www.ssa.gov/employer) for fast, free, and secure online W-2 filing options to CPAs,

accountants, enrolled agents, and individuals who process Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, and Form W-2c, Corrected Wage and Tax Statement.

IRS social media. Go to [IRS.gov/SocialMedia](https://www.irs.gov/SocialMedia) to see the various social media tools the IRS uses to share the latest information on tax changes, scam alerts, initiatives, products, and services. At the IRS, privacy and security are our highest priority. We use these tools to share public information with you. **Don't** post your social security number (SSN) or other confidential information on social media sites. Always protect your identity when using any social networking site. The following IRS YouTube channels provide short, informative videos on various tax-related topics in English, Spanish, and ASL.

- [Youtube.com/irsvideos](https://www.youtube.com/irsvideos).
- [Youtube.com/irsvideomultilingua](https://www.youtube.com/irsvideomultilingua).

- [Youtube.com/irsvideosASL](https://www.youtube.com/irsvideosASL).

Watching IRS videos. The IRS Video portal ([IRSVideos.gov](https://www.irsvideos.gov)) contains video and audio presentations for individuals, small businesses, and tax professionals.

Online tax information in other languages. You can find information on [IRS.gov/MyLanguage](https://www.irs.gov/MyLanguage) if English isn't your native language.

Free Over-the-Phone Interpreter (OPI) Service. The IRS is committed to serving our multilingual customers by offering OPI services. The OPI service is a federally funded program and is available at Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TACs), other IRS offices, and every VITA/TCE return site. OPI service is accessible in more than 350 languages.

Accessibility Helpline available for taxpayers with disabilities. Taxpayers who need information about accessibility services

can call 833-690-0598. The Accessibility Helpline can answer questions related to current and future accessibility products and services available in alternative media formats (for example, braille, large print, audio, etc.).

Getting tax forms and publications. Go to [IRS.gov/ Forms](https://www.irs.gov/forms) to view, download, or print all of the forms and publications you may need. Or, you can go to [IRS.gov/ OrderForms](https://www.irs.gov/orderforms) to place an order.

Getting tax publications and instructions in eBook format. You can also download and view popular tax publications and instructions (including the Instructions for Form 1040) on mobile devices as eBooks at [IRS.gov/ eBooks](https://www.irs.gov/ebooks).

Note. IRS eBooks have been tested using Apple's iBooks for iPad. Our eBooks haven't been tested on other dedicated eBook readers, and eBook functionality may not operate as intended.

Access your online account (individual taxpayers only). Go to [IRS.gov/Account](https://www.irs.gov/Account) to securely access information about your federal tax account.

- View the amount you owe and a breakdown by tax year.
- See payment plan details or apply for a new payment plan.
- Make a payment or view 5 years of payment history and any pending or scheduled payments.
- Access your tax records, including key data from your most recent tax return, your EIP amounts, and transcripts.
- View digital copies of select notices from the IRS.
- Approve or reject authorization requests from tax professionals.
- View your address on file or manage your communication preferences.

Tax Pro Account. This tool lets your tax professional submit an authorization request to access your individual taxpayer [IRS online account](#). For more information, go to [IRS.gov/TaxProAccount](#).

Using direct deposit. The fastest way to receive a tax refund is to file electronically and choose direct deposit, which securely and electronically transfers your refund directly into your financial account. Direct deposit also avoids the possibility that your check could be lost, stolen, or returned undeliverable to the IRS. Eight in 10 taxpayers use direct deposit to receive their refunds. If you don't have a bank account, go to [IRS.gov/DirectDeposit](#) for more information on where to find a bank or credit union that can open an account online.

Getting a transcript of a return. The quickest way to get a copy of your tax transcript is to go to [IRS.gov/ Transcripts](#). Click on either "Get Transcript Online" or "Get Transcript by Mail" to order a copy of your

transcript. If you prefer, you can order your transcript by calling 800-908-9946.

Reporting and resolving your tax-related identity theft issues.

- Tax-related identity theft happens when someone steals your personal information to commit tax fraud. Your taxes can be affected if your SSN is used to file a fraudulent return or to claim a refund or credit.
- The IRS doesn't initiate contact with taxpayers by email, text messages, telephone calls, or social media channels to request personal or financial information. This includes requests for personal identification numbers (PINs), passwords, or similar information for credit cards, banks, or other financial accounts.
- Go to [IRS.gov/IdentityTheft](https://www.irs.gov/identitytheft), the IRS Identity Theft Central webpage, for

information on identity theft and data security protection for taxpayers, tax professionals, and businesses. If your SSN has been lost or stolen or you suspect you're a victim of tax-related identity theft, you can learn what steps you should take.

- Get an Identity Protection PIN (IP PIN). IP PINs are six-digit numbers assigned to taxpayers to help prevent the misuse of their SSNs on fraudulent federal income tax returns. When you have an IP PIN, it prevents someone else from filing a tax return with your SSN. To learn more, go to [IRS.gov/IPPIN](https://www.irs.gov/ippin).

Ways to check on the status of your refund.

- Go to [IRS.gov/Refunds](https://www.irs.gov/Refunds).

- Download the official IRS2Go app to your mobile device to check your refund status.
- Call the automated refund hotline at 800-829-1954.

Note. The IRS can't issue refunds before mid-February 2022 for returns that claimed the EIC or the additional child tax credit (ACTC). This applies to the entire refund, not just the portion associated with these credits.

Making a tax payment. Go to [IRS.gov/Payments](https://www.irs.gov/Payments) for information on how to make a payment using any of the following options.

- [*IRS Direct Pay*](#): Pay your individual tax bill or estimated tax payment directly from your checking or savings account at no cost to you.
- [*Debit or credit card*](#): Choose an approved payment processor to pay online or by phone.

- [Electronic Funds Withdrawal](#): Schedule a payment when filing your federal taxes using tax return preparation software or through a tax professional.
- [Electronic Federal Tax Payment System](#): Best option for businesses. Enrollment is required.
- [Check or money order](#): Mail your payment to the address listed on the notice or instructions.
- [Cash](#): You may be able to pay your taxes with cash at a participating retail store.
- [Same-Day Wire](#): You may be able to do same-day wire from your financial institution. Contact your financial institution for availability, cost, and time frames.

Note. The IRS uses the latest encryption technology to ensure that the electronic

payments you make online, by phone, or from a mobile device using the IRS2Go app are safe and secure. Paying electronically is quick, easy, and faster than mailing in a check or money order.

What if I can't pay now? Go to [IRS.gov/Payments](https://www.irs.gov/Payments) for more information about your options.

- Apply for an [online payment agreement](https://www.irs.gov/opa) ([IRS.gov/ OPA](https://www.irs.gov/opa)) to meet your tax obligation in monthly installments if you can't pay your taxes in full today. Once you complete the online process, you will receive immediate notification of whether your agreement has been approved.
- Use the [Offer in Compromise Pre-Qualifier](https://www.irs.gov/oc/prequalifier) to see if you can settle your tax debt for less than the full amount you owe. For more information on the

Offer in Compromise program, go to [IRS.gov/OIC](https://www.irs.gov/OIC).

Filing an amended return. You can now file Form 1040-X electronically with tax filing software to amend 2019 or 2020 Forms 1040 and 1040-SR. To do so, you must have e-filed your original 2019 or 2020 return. Amended returns for all prior years must be mailed. Go to [IRS.gov/Form1040X](https://www.irs.gov/Form1040X) for information and updates.

Checking the status of an amended return. Go to [IRS.gov/WMAR](https://www.irs.gov/WMAR) to track the status of Form 1040X amended returns.

Note. It can take up to 3 weeks from the date you filed your amended return for it to show up in our system, and processing it can take up to 16 weeks.

Understanding an IRS notice or letter. Go to [IRS.gov/ Notices](https://www.irs.gov/Notices) to find additional information about responding to an IRS notice or letter.

You can use Schedule LEP, Request for Change in Language Preference, to state a preference to receive notices, letters, or other written communications from the IRS in an alternative language, when these are available. Once your Schedule LEP is processed, the IRS will determine your translation needs and provide you translations when available. If you have a disability requiring notices in an accessible format, see Form 9000.

Contacting your local IRS office. Keep in mind, many questions can be answered on IRS.gov without visiting an IRS Tax Assistance Center (TAC). Go to [IRS.gov/LetUsHelp](https://www.irs.gov/LetUsHelp) for the topics people ask about most. If you still need help, IRS TACs provide tax help when a tax issue can't be handled online or by phone. All TACs now provide service by appointment so you'll know in advance that you can get the service you need without long wait times. Before you

visit, go to [IRS.gov/TACLocator](https://www.irs.gov/TACLocator) to find the nearest TAC, check hours, available services, and appointment options. Or, on the IRS2Go app, under the Stay Connected tab, choose the Contact Us option and click on “Local Offices.”

The Taxpayer Advocate Service (TAS) Is Here To Help You What is TAS?

TAS is an ***independent*** organization within the IRS that helps taxpayers and protects taxpayer rights. Their job is to ensure that every taxpayer is treated fairly and that you know and understand your rights under the [Taxpayer Bill of Rights](#).

How Can You Learn About Your Taxpayer Rights?

The Taxpayer Bill of Rights describes 10 basic rights that all taxpayers have when dealing with the IRS. Go to [TaxpayerAdvocate.IRS.gov](https://taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov) to help you understand what these rights mean to you

and how they apply. These are ***your*** rights. Know them. Use them.

What Can TAS Do For You?

TAS can help you resolve problems that you can't resolve with the IRS. And their service is free. If you qualify for their assistance, you will be assigned to one advocate who will work with you throughout the process and will do everything possible to resolve your issue.

TAS can help you if:

- Your problem is causing financial difficulty for you, your family, or your business;
- You face (or your business is facing) an immediate threat of adverse action; or
- You've tried repeatedly to contact the IRS but no one has responded, or the IRS hasn't responded by the date promised.

How Can You Reach TAS?

TAS has offices [*in every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.*](#) Your local advocate's number is in your local directory and at [*TaxpayerAdvocate.IRS.gov/ Contact-Us.*](https://TaxpayerAdvocate.IRS.gov/Contact-Us) You can also call them at 877-777-4778.

How Else Does TAS Help Taxpayers?

TAS works to resolve large-scale problems that affect many taxpayers. If you know of one of these broad issues, please report it to them at [*IRS.gov/SAMS.*](https://IRS.gov/SAMS)

TAS for Tax Professionals

TAS can provide a variety of information for tax professionals, including tax law updates and guidance, TAS programs, and ways to let TAS know about systemic problems you've seen in your practice.

Low Income Taxpayer Clinics (LITCs)

LITCs are independent from the IRS. LITCs represent individuals whose income is below a certain level and need to resolve tax problems with the IRS, such as audits, appeals, and tax collection disputes. In addition, clinics can provide information about taxpayer rights and responsibilities in different languages for individuals who speak English as a second language. Services are offered for free or a small fee. To find a clinic near you, visit TaxpayerAdvocate.IRS.gov/about-us/Low-IncomeTaxpayer-Clinics-LITC or see IRS Pub. 4134, [Low Income Taxpayer Clinic List](#).