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# Dreading Doing Your Taxes? We've Got People for That!

## *Tips on Hiring a Qualified Tax Preparer*

ALEXANDRIA, VA, March 17, 2017 – It's the annual ritual that no one likes: Doing your taxes.

So why do it? The [National Society of Accountants](#) (NSA) has people for that! NSA is the primary organization representing "Main Street" accounting and tax professionals who prepare millions of tax returns for taxpayers.

A recent NSA survey shows the average cost for a professional to prepare an itemized Form 1040 plus a state return is just \$273, and the average cost to prepare a non-itemized return plus a state return is only \$176.

"It usually takes people more than five hours to prepare an itemized return – five hours that you won't get back," says NSA Executive Vice President John Ams. "Plus a professional tax preparer is likely to find a deduction that you might miss on your own, and that alone could pay for the fee and even make you money."

NSA members adhere to a [code of ethics](#), which is important. The typical member has more than 28 years of experience and holds one or more credential demonstrating their ability, experience, and knowledge of the tax code.

Some credentials and qualifications to look for include Enrolled Agent (EA), Certified Public Accountant (CPA), Accredited Tax Preparer (ATP), Accredited Business Accountant/Advisor (ABA) and Accredited Tax Advisor (ATA), tax attorneys and 2017 IRS Annual Filing Season Program participants. Some states also have licensing requirements for tax preparers. For more information, visit [www.chooseataxpro.org/guidetocredentials](http://www.chooseataxpro.org/guidetocredentials).

Follow these tips for choosing a tax preparer:

- Check to be sure the preparer has an IRS Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN). The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) requires all paid tax preparers to have a Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN), so make sure your tax preparer has one enters it on your return. Paid preparers must sign returns and include their PTIN as required by law. The preparer must also give you a copy of the return.
- Check the professional credentials of the preparer (such as EA, CPA, ATP, ABA or ATA), and see if they belong to a professional organization or regularly attend continuing education classes. Tax law changes can be complex; a competent tax professional needs to be up-to-date in these matters. Tax return preparers aren't required to have a professional credential, but make sure you understand the qualifications of the preparer you select.
- Avoid preparers who base their fee on a percentage of your refund or those who say they can get larger refunds than others can.
- Make sure your preparer offers IRS e-file. Any tax professional who gets paid to prepare and file more than 10 returns generally must file the returns electronically. It's the safest and most accurate way to file a return, whether you do it alone or pay someone to prepare and file for you.
- Do not rely on a preparer who is willing to e-file your return using your last pay stub instead of your Form W-2. This is against IRS e-file rules.
- Reputable preparers will ask to see your records and receipts. They'll ask you questions to determine your total income, deductions, tax credits and other items.

"Tax preparers are professionally responsible for the returns that they file on behalf of taxpayers," Ams notes. "They should be prepared to help you respond to any questions the IRS may ask about your return. So make sure they will do that if needed.

"NSA has urged Congress and the Internal Revenue Service for years to require tax preparers to be regulated. NSA members are honest, highly qualified professionals and we would welcome this oversight because they could easily meet any regulatory requirements the IRS or Congress would impose."

It's also a good idea to check the preparer's history. You can check with the Better Business Bureau to find out if a preparer has a questionable history. If you are not satisfied with the answers you receive, keep looking.

For more information and to use an online search directory to identify a qualified tax preparer in your area, visit [www.choosetaxpro.org](http://www.choosetaxpro.org), where you can find a guide to credentials, fee information, a consumer blog, and more. Click on "Find a Professional" to access the directory or call 800-966-6679.

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NSA and its affiliates represent more than 30,000 members who provide accounting, auditing, tax preparation, financial and estate planning, and management services to approximately 19 million individuals and business clients. Most members are sole practitioners or partners in small- to medium-size accounting firms. NSA protects the public by requiring its members to adhere to a strict code of ethics. For more information, visit [www.nsacct.org](http://www.nsacct.org).