FREE CHECKLIST · FOR YOUR 2026 RETURN

The 2027 tax season checklist for the self-employed

Everything to file your 2026 return and plan 2027, on one pad.

Written by a CPA.

- ☑ Every 2027 deadline in one place
- ☑ The documents to gather now
- ☑ 10 deductions to check, with code sections
- ☑ The 2026 changes that catch freelancers
- ☑ Planning your 2027 estimates and strategies

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General education, not tax advice. Talk to a tax professional about your situation.

Every 2027 deadline

Your 2026 return and your 2027 estimates, in date order. Tick each one off.

☐	**Jan 15** FRI · 2027	**Q4 2026 estimated tax payment** Covers income from Sept 1 to Dec 31, 2026. You can skip it if you file your 2026 return and pay in full by Feb 1.
☐	**Feb 1** MON	**1099-NEC to contractors and the IRS** For anyone you paid $2,000 or more for services in 2026 (up from $600). Clients' 1099s to you are due the same day. Jan 31 is a Sunday.
☐	**Mar 1** MON	**Paper 1099-MISC to the IRS** Rents, royalties and other payments. Mar 31 if you e-file. Feb 28 is a Sunday.
☐	**Mar 15** MON	**S-corp and partnership returns** Form 1120-S or 1065, or an extension. Also the last day to elect S-corp status for 2027 on Form 2553.
☐	**Apr 15** THU	**File your 2026 return, or extend** Form 1040 or Form 4868, and pay any balance due. Also your Q1 2027 estimate and the last day for 2026 IRA and HSA contributions.
☐	**Jun 15** TUE	**Q2 2027 estimated tax payment** Covers income from Apr 1 to May 31, 2027.
☐	**Sept 15** WED	**Q3 2027 estimate and extended business returns** Covers Jun 1 to Aug 31, 2027. Extended 1120-S and 1065 returns are due.
☐	**Oct 15** FRI	**Extended 2026 Form 1040 due** Also the last day to fund a 2026 SEP-IRA or Solo 401(k) employer contribution if you extended.
☐	**Dec 31** FRI	**Last day for 2027 deductions** Business purchases paid by now count for 2027, as does your Solo 401(k) employee-deferral election.
☐	**Jan 18** TUE · 2028	**Q4 2027 estimated tax payment** Covers Sept 1 to Dec 31, 2027. Jan 15 is a Saturday and Jan 17 is Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

An extension gives you more time to file, not to pay. Estimate and pay what you owe by Apr 15. State deadlines vary, and IRS disaster relief can move these dates for some areas.

General education, not tax advice. Source: IRS Forms 1040-ES, 1099-NEC and 1099-MISC instructions.

Documents to gather

Collect these for your 2026 return before you sit down with your software or your CPA.

Income

- [ ] 1099-NEC from each client that paid you $2,000 or more
- [ ] 1099-K from payment apps and marketplaces
  Sent when you pass $20,000 and 200 transactions
- [ ] 1099-MISC for rents, royalties or prizes
- [ ] Your own income records: invoices and deposits
  Report every dollar, with or without a 1099
- [ ] W-2s from any job, plus 1099-INT, 1099-DIV and 1099-B

Home office

- [ ] Square footage of your office and of your whole home
- [ ] Rent or mortgage interest, utilities, insurance and repairs

Health and retirement

- [ ] Health insurance premiums
  Form 1095-A if your plan is from the Marketplace
- [ ] HSA contributions and Form 1099-SA
- [ ] SEP-IRA, Solo 401(k) or IRA contribution records

Business expenses

- [ ] Statements for every business bank account and card
- [ ] Receipts for lodging, and for anything $75 or more
- [ ] Mileage log, split at July 1
  72.5¢ a mile through June 30, then 76¢
- [ ] Invoices for equipment, with the date each went into use
- [ ] Software, phone and internet bills
- [ ] What you paid contractors, and their W-9s

Taxes already paid

- [ ] Each 2026 estimated payment: date and amount
  Your IRS Online Account lists them
- [ ] State estimated payments, if your state has income tax
- [ ] Your 2025 return, for safe-harbor math and carryovers

Personal

- [ ] Form 1098 and property tax bills
- [ ] Charitable donation receipts
- [ ] Childcare provider's name and tax ID

CPA tip: Run all business money through one separate bank account and card. Half of this list becomes a single statement download.

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10 deductions to check

The ones freelancers miss most, with the tax-code section and the catch.

☐ 1 Half of self-employment tax

IRC §164(f)

Deduct 50% of your SE tax from your income.

Catch: automatic once Schedule SE is filed. Check that your software took it.

☐ 2 Home office

IRC §280A(c)

$5 per square foot up to 300 sq ft ($1,500), or your actual home costs by business-use share.

Catch: regular and exclusive business use only.

☐ 3 Business miles

IRC §162, §274(d)

72.5¢ a mile Jan–Jun 2026 and 76¢ Jul–Dec, or actual vehicle costs.

Catch: keep a log of date, miles and purpose. Commuting doesn't count.

☐ 4 Self-employed health insurance

IRC §162(l)

Premiums for you, your spouse and dependents, outside itemized deductions.

Catch: not for months you could join an employer plan; capped at your profit.

☐ 5 Solo 401(k) or SEP-IRA

IRC §402(g), §404

Solo 401(k): $24,500 (+$8,000 at 50+, or $11,250 at 60–63) plus an employer share. SEP: up to 20% of net SE earnings. Total cap $72,000.

Catch: Solo 401(k) is for owners with no employees besides a spouse.

☐ 6 Health savings account

IRC §223

$4,400 self-only or $8,750 family for 2026, plus $1,000 at age 55+. Deductible going in, tax-free for medical costs.

Catch: you need a qualifying high-deductible health plan.

☐ 7 QBI deduction

IRC §199A

Up to 20% of qualified business income, now permanent. New for 2026: at least $400 if your QBI is $1,000 or more.

Catch: limits start above $201,750 taxable income ($403,500 joint).

☐ 8 Equipment and software

IRC §168(k), §179

100% bonus depreciation for property acquired after Jan 19, 2025. Items up to $2,500 each can be expensed under the de minimis safe harbor.

Catch: business-use share only; vehicles have their own limits.

☐ 9 Phone and internet

IRC §162

The business share of your cell phone and internet bills.

Catch: deduct only the business-use percentage. Base it on a typical month.

☐ 10 Business meals

IRC §274(k), §274(n)

50% of meals with clients or prospects, or while traveling overnight for work.

Catch: note who was there and why. Entertainment is 0%.

Also worth a look: tax-prep and legal fees, business insurance, professional dues, courses that maintain your current skills (§162) and up to $5,000 of startup costs (§195).

The 2026 changes that catch freelancers

Most come from the 2025 tax law the IRS calls the Working Families Tax Cuts. Check each one against your return.

☐ **1099-NEC threshold**	Was $600. Now **$2,000** for payments made in 2026. You may get fewer 1099s, but every dollar is still taxable.
☐ **1099-K from payment apps**	The planned drop to $600 is gone. Apps report only above **$20,000 and 200 transactions**.
☐ **Two mileage rates**	**72.5¢** a mile Jan 1–Jun 30, then **76¢** Jul 1–Dec 31. Split your log at July 1.
☐ **QBI deduction**	Was set to expire after 2025. Now **permanent** at 20%, with a new **$400 minimum** if your QBI is $1,000 or more.
☐ **Bonus depreciation**	Back to **100%**, permanently, for business property acquired after Jan 19, 2025.
☐ **SALT deduction cap**	Was $10,000. Now **$40,400** for 2026 if you itemize, reduced once income passes $505,000.
☐ **No tax on tips**	New deduction of up to **$25,000** of qualified tips, 2025–2028. Self-employed tips count up to your net profit. Phases out above $150,000 of income ($300,000 joint).
☐ **No tax on overtime**	For a W-2 day job: deduct up to **$12,500** of overtime premium ($25,000 joint), 2025–2028.
☐ **Age 65 and older**	An extra **$6,000** deduction per person, 2025–2028. Phases out above $75,000 of income ($150,000 joint).
☐ **Car loan interest**	Up to **$10,000** on a new personal vehicle assembled in the US, 2025–2028. Phases out above $100,000 ($200,000 joint).

KEY 2026 NUMBERS

Standard deduction, single	**$16,100**	401(k) employee deferral	**$24,500**
Head of household	**$24,150**	IRA contribution	**$7,500**
Married filing jointly	**$32,200**	HSA, self-only / family	**$4,400 / $8,750**
Social Security wage base	**$184,500**	SE tax rate	**15.3%**

Not tax advice. Sources: IRS IR-2025-103, Rev. Proc. 2025-32, Notice 2025-67, FS-2026-07. **taxpad.com**

Plan your 2027

Set your estimates once, then look at the legal strategies that fit your business.

Your 2027 estimated payments

- [ ] **Who pays:** you expect to owe $1,000 or more when you file.
- [ ] **Safe harbor:** pay the smaller of 90% of your 2027 tax or 100% of your 2026 tax (110% if your 2026 AGI was over $150,000), in four payments.

2026 tax _____ × 100% or 110% = _____ ÷ 4 = _____ a quarter

- [ ] **Pay at IRS.gov/payments** with Direct Pay, EFTPS or your IRS Online Account, and save each confirmation.
- [ ] **Set it aside:** many freelancers move 25–30% of every payment into a separate tax account. Your rate depends on your income, deductions and state.

Legal strategies to ask your CPA about

S-corp election
Can cut self-employment tax on profit above a reasonable salary. For 2027, file Form 2553 by Mar 15, 2027.
Catch: payroll, a separate return and a reasonable salary. Usually pays off only at steady profit.

Solo 401(k) instead of a SEP-IRA
Same $72,000 cap, but the employee deferral usually lets lower and middle earners save more.
Catch: file Form 5500-EZ once plan assets top $250,000.

The Augusta rule, IRC §280A(g)
Rent your home to your business for meetings up to 14 days a year. The rent is tax-free to you.
Catch: you need a business entity paying fair-market rent for real business use, with records.

Hiring your children, IRC §3121(b)(3)(A)
Wages from your sole proprietorship to your child under 18 are free of Social Security and Medicare tax.
Catch: real work at a fair wage, with timesheets and payroll filings.

Keep more of what you earn.
New checklists and deadline reminders every week.
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