

As an AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Counselor, you will help determine the most advantageous (and allowable) filing status for the taxpayer. It is a critical component of completing accurate return.

Learning Objectives

- Determine the most beneficial filing status allowed for the taxpayer

The following list puts them in order from the most beneficial to the least beneficial to the taxpayer:

- Married Filing Jointly
- Qualifying Widow(er)
- Head of Household
- Single
- Married Filing Separately

Getting Started:



Study the associated IRS VITA/TCE Training Guide Chapter 5 Filing Status.



Open [Pub 4012 Volunteer Resource Guide](#) Tab B.

Hint from NTTC Modifications to the IRS Training Guide

Who is single?

A marriage that has been legally annulled is treated as never having existed.

Qualifying widow(er)

A widow or widower may use the qualifying widow(er) filing status even though their qualifying child cannot be claimed as a dependent – because the child does not meet the gross income test, or does not meet the joint return test, or except that the taxpayer may be claimed as a dependent of another taxpayer.

Experiencing Filing Status Determination with Pub 4012 Charts and Tables

Find the exercise starting on the next page. The purpose is to use the charts and tables in Pub 4012. The Filing Status tables are generally straightforward until Counsellors get into the complicated living situations. The exercise provides the answer. As a student, identify the steps or instructions that support the IRS' answer.

Filing Status

Pub 4491 Example (page 5-5): Kate's unmarried 16-year-old daughter, Shelby, lived with her all year. Kate is single, provided all of Shelby's support, and paid all the costs of keeping up the home. Shelby is Kate's qualifying child dependent and is Kate's qualifying person for Head of Household filing status.	Assume Shelby is U.S. citizen and is not a qualifying child of any other person. Answer the steps in Pub 4012 Tab C, Table 1	Table 1: 1. No 2. No 3. No 4. Yes 5. Yes 6. Yes 7. Yes 8. Yes 9. No
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Pub 4491 Example (page 5-6): Michael provided all the costs of keeping up his home for the year. Michael's son Justin lived with him the entire year. Justin is 22 and was not a full-time student during the tax year, so he cannot be Michael's qualifying child. Although Justin only worked part-time, he earned too much for Michael to claim him as a qualifying relative dependent. Therefore, Michael cannot file Head of Household because he does not have a qualifying person.	Answer the steps in Pub 4012 Tab C, Table 1 and Table 2 Single: Filing Status – Decision Tree: Justin cannot not be Michaels dependent ... fails Tab C, step 4	Table 1: 1. No 2. No 3. No 4. Yes 5. Yes 6. No 7. _ 8. _ 9. _	Table 2: 1. No 2. Yes 3. Yes 4. No 5. _ 6. _ 7. _ 8. _ 9. _
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Filing Status

<p>Pub 4491 Example(page 5-6): Jane and Todd are not married. Their daughter, Amanda, lived all year with Jane in an apartment. Todd lived alone. Todd earns more than Jane, and provides for some of her living expenses. He paid over half the cost of Jane's rent and utilities. He also gave Jane extra money for groceries. Even though Todd paid over half the cost of providing a home for Jane and Amanda, he cannot file Head of Household because Amanda did not live with him over half the year. Jane cannot be Head of Household either because she did not provide more than half the cost of keeping up the home for her daughter.</p>	<p>Check out Tab B, Filing Status Decision Tree: What step determines that Todd is single? What step determines that Jane is single? Assuming Todd provides more than half of Jane and Amanda's cost of living support, why can Todd not claim either as a qualifying relative (Tab C, Table 2)?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Pub 4491 Example (page 5-6): Nancy is single and lives alone. Nancy's mother, Maxine, lives alone in another city. Maxine receives Social Security payments, but has no other income. Nancy pays all of the costs of keeping up the home her mother lives in, and provides over half her support. Even though Maxine did not live with her, Maxine is Nancy's qualifying person for Head of Household filing status because Nancy can claim her mother as a dependent under the rules for qualifying relative.</p>	<p>For Nancy to claim her mother as a dependent, what steps must Nancy answer Yes in Tab C, Table 2?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Exercise Question 1 (page 5-6): Alexandra's younger brother, Sebastian, is seventeen years old. Sebastian lived with his grandparents for the first two months of the year. From March through July, he lived with Alexandra. On August 1, Sebastian moved in with some friends and stayed there for the rest of the year. Since Sebastian did not have a job, Alexandra gave him money every month. Assuming Alexandra had no other dependents, can she file as Head of Household?</p> <p>Yes No</p>	<p>Answer 1: No, because Sebastian lived with Alexandra for five months, which is less than half the year.</p> <p>Check out Tab B, Filing Status Decision Tree:</p> <p>What step determines that Alexandra is single?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Pub 4491 Example (page 5-6):</p> <p>Since her spouse died five years ago, Joan has lived with her friend, Mary Ann, who is also a widow. Joan is a U.S. citizen, is single, and lived with Mary Ann all year. Joan had no income and received all of her support from Mary Ann. Joan is Mary Ann's qualifying relative because she lived with Mary Ann all year as a member of her household. Mary Ann can claim Joan as a dependent on her return. However, Joan is not a qualifying person for Head of Household filing status because she is not related to Mary Ann in one of the ways listed on the chart in the Pub 4012 Volunteer Resource Guide. She is Mary Ann's qualifying relative dependent only because she lived with Mary Ann all year as a member of her household.</p>	<p>What steps in Pub 4012 Tab C do you use determining that Joan is Mary's dependent?</p> <p>What steps in Pub 4012 Tab B do you use determining that Joan is not Mary's dependent?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Pub 4491 Example (page 5-7): Denise is married but has lived apart from her spouse for two years. Denise pays all the costs of keeping up her home for herself and her dependent 12-year-old son, who lives with her. Denise can choose to file as Head of Household for the tax year because she meets the definition of “considered unmarried.”</p>	<p>Check out Tab B, Filing Status Decision Tree: What steps determine that Denise can claim Head of Household even though she is married?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Pub 4491 Example (page 5-8): Laura's spouse, Jim, died in September of the tax year. She has not remarried, and provides all the support for their dependent children, ages 8 and 10. Laura can file as Married Filing Jointly, claiming an exemption for her deceased spouse. For the next two tax years, she can use the Qualifying Widow(er) status if she does not remarry.</p>	<p>Check out Tab B, Filing Status Decision Tree: What steps determine that Laura can claim Married Filing Jointly in the current tax year that Jim died?</p> <p>What steps determine that Laura can claim Qualified Widow in the next two years after the current tax year that Jim died?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Exercise Question 2 (page 5-8): Jane's husband moved out of their home in February of the tax year and has not returned. Jane provides all the cost of keeping up the home for herself and her two dependent children. Jane refuses to file a joint return with her husband. What filing status should she use?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single• Married Filing Separately• Head of Household• Qualifying Widow(er)	<p>Answer 2: Head of Household. Even though Jane is still married to her husband, she meets the requirements to be "considered unmarried" for filing status purposes and qualifies to file as Head of Household. Although technically she could file as Married Filing Separately, it would not be to her advantage to do so.</p> <p>Check out Tab B, Filing Status Decision Tree: What steps determine that Jane can claim Head of Household even though she is married?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Exercise Question 3 (page 5-8): Seth lives alone and has never married. He does not support either of his parents. What filing status(es) can he use?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single• Married Filing Jointly• Married Filing Separately• Head of Household• Qualifying Widow(er)	<p>Answer 3: Because he is not married, has no dependents living in his household, and does not claim his parents as dependents, Seth can only file as Single.</p> <p>Check out Tab B, Filing Status Decision Tree: What steps determine that Seth can only claim Single?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Exercise Question 4 (page 5-8): Tanya's divorce became final in early September of the tax year. She has sole custody of her three children, who lived with her the entire year. The children are all under the age of 19. She provided more than half of the cost of keeping up the home. What filing status(es) can she use?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single• Married Filing Jointly• Married Filing Separately• Head of Household• Qualifying Widow(er)	<p>Answer 4: Because she is legally divorced, Tanya could file as Single. However, because she has children and meets the requirements for Head of Household, she should use this as her filing status because it will result in a lower tax.</p> <p>Check out Tab B, Filing Status Decision Tree: What Footnote(s) and steps determine that Tanya can claim Head Of Household?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/>
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Filing Status

<p>Exercise Question 5 (page 5-): Sydney's spouse died two years ago in January. He filed a joint return for that year as the surviving spouse. Since then, Sydney has not remarried, maintains a home for his young children who lived with him all year, and provides their sole support. Following the Filing Status Interview Tips in Pub 4012 Volunteer Resource Guide, determine what filing status Sydney should use?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single• Married Filing Jointly• Married Filing Separately• Head of Household• Qualifying Widow(er)	<p>Answer 5: Although Sydney meets the requirements to file as Single, Head of Household or Qualifying Widower, the Interview Tips will help you to determine that he should use the Qualifying Widower filing status because it will result in the lowest tax.</p> <p>Check out Tab B, Filing Status Decision Tree: What Footnote(s) and steps determine that Sydney can claim Qualified Widower?</p>	<p><i>List the table & steps:</i></p> <hr/>
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