

What is a Visa?

The F-1 Visa stamp in your passport is an **entry** document. It is permission to apply to **enter** the United States in that Visa category. Canadian citizens are not required to have a Visa stamp in their passport to enter the U.S.

The Visa expiration date is separate from your length of authorized stay in the U.S. The Visa expiration date is also different from your I-20 or DS-2019 end date. Read more about the “period of authorized stay” and a review of “documents” in the [What is F-1 Status Section](#).

What if the Visa Expires?

It is okay to remain in the U.S. after your F-1 Visa expires as long as:

- Your passport is valid.
- Your I-20 or DS-2019 is valid.
- You are a continuing full-time student
 - The F-1 Visa is only necessary for re-entry to the U.S. if you leave. After your Visa expires, you must apply for a new F-1 Visa the next time you travel internationally in order to return to the U.S.

Allowing the Visa to expire while in the U.S. does not affect future Visa applications. (There are some exceptions to this Visa validity rule regarding short trips to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean islands, except for Cuba. *(Please Read the Automatic Visa Revalidation Section Below.)*)

The ability to remain in the U.S. is also applicable if your Visa has a limited number of entries that have been used, or if you have changed your nonimmigrant status while in the U.S.

Visa Validity After a Break in Studies:

If your Visa is still valid, you will not need to renew your Visa regardless of the length of time outside the U.S.

Automatic Visa Revalidation

An exception to the rule requiring a valid, unexpired visa exists for students in F-1 status who travel for fewer than 30 days solely to Canada or Mexico or islands in the Caribbean except Cuba. Your visa will be considered to be “extended” to the date of reentry, eliminating the need to obtain a new visa at a U.S. consulate before that particular re-entry. This procedure is known as [Automatic Visa Revalidation](#).

Warning: if you apply for a new visa while in Canada, Mexico, or islands in the Caribbean, you will not be able to return to the U.S. if the visa application is denied. Also, citizens of Iran, Sudan, and Syria are not eligible for automatic visa revalidation.

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The automatic visa revalidation benefit applies to students who changed status within the U.S. and have an F-1 approval notice from USCIS. The previous visa type is considered to be “converted” to the F-1 for that entry only.

Where to Apply for a U.S. Visa

You cannot apply for an F-1 visa inside the U.S. Visas can only be obtained outside of the U.S. at a U.S. EMBASSY OR CONSULATE.

It is advisable to apply for the visa at a U.S. consulate in your home country, unless circumstances or travel plans make this impossible. It may be possible to apply for a visa at a U.S. consulate in a country other than your home country. This is called a “third country national (TCN)” application. Not all U.S. consulates accept TCN applications, and some allow TCN applications for limited situations; check with individual consulates, including those in Canada and Mexico, for TCN application policies.

It can be risky to apply in a country other than your home country. For instance, if you apply for a new visa in Canada and encounter delays, you must remain in Canada for the length of the processing. You will not be able to reenter the U.S. until the new visa is approved.

When to Apply for a Visa

Allow ample time for the visa application process. There are always risks of processing delays. Winter and spring breaks are very short, and not ideal for renewing visas.

U.S. consulates require in-person interviews for most first-time visa applicants. An interview may be waived if you are applying to renew your visa. You are encouraged to schedule the visa interview appointment as early as possible. The U.S. Department of State maintains an excellent website on the Visa Application Process, and you should study it carefully. You can also find information about how long it will take to get your visa. Students applying for initial-entry F-1 visas may be issued the visas up to one-year (this is a recent 2023 change) from the previous 120 days before the academic program start date as noted on the I-20.

Visa processing delays may occur for a variety of reasons, with enhanced security reviews based on your country of origin, and the likelihood of returning home after completion of studies.

How to Apply for a Visa

Required documents when applying for a visa:

- Visa application. Complete the DS-160 Application for an F-1 non-immigrant visa. You will be asked to select the country where you will be applying for the visa and you will be required to pay a visa application fee based on the country where you will apply for the visa.
- Have your receipt confirming payment of the SEVIS fee, if applicable.
- Valid passport. Your passport must be valid for at least six months when seeking admission or readmission to the United States, unless your country has an agreement with the United States. For a list of countries under this agreement, review the list on the Immigration Customs Enforcement website. Your passport should remain valid throughout your stay in the U.S.

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- Photos following U.S. State Department photo guidelines.
- I-20 issued by King's Schools via the International Program Director's Office. The I-20 certifies your admission and enrollment at King's Schools. If you are applying for a visa to continue studies at King's Schools, be sure the International Program Director/PDSO has signed the travel validation section of the form within the past year. (Newly admitted students do not require a travel signature for the "initial" visa interview.)

Additional documents may be required when applying for a visa:

- Financial evidence that shows amount and source of funding to cover tuition, living expenses, and travel costs. Consular and immigration officers exercise considerable discretion in determining whether financial support exists and is sufficient. Prepare documentation that is thorough, consistent, and credible.
- For continuing or returning King's students, an unofficial copy of your transcript, official academic transcript, or confirmation of enrollment may be requested from the Registrar's Office – request this from Mrs. Nancy White/Registrar at nwhite@kingsschools.org. This is not required but it is good to have it in case you are asked questions about your previous studies at King's Schools.
- Transcripts and/or diplomas from previous institutions attended for newly admitted students. An Acceptance Letter from the International Program Director/King's Schools may also be required for the visa application even though the I-20 is a verification of your admission to King's Schools for newly admitted students.
- Scores from standardized tests required by the educational institution.
- Your intent to depart the U.S. upon completion of your studies. Visa applicants are presumed to be "intending immigrants." Your visa will be denied unless you are able to show your intent to return home after your studies. Unfortunately, there is no single explanation, document, or letter that can guarantee visa issuance.

Additional things to consider when applying for a visa:

- Consular officers conduct quick interviews! Their initial impression of you is critical to your success. Keep your answers concise. Be honest in everything you write on your visa application and say during the interview. Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English. *Other people will not be able to speak on your behalf.
- Be able to explain the reasons you want to study in the U.S. and remember that your main reason for coming to the United States is to study, not to work!
- If you are denied the visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring the next time you apply, and try to get the reason you were denied in writing. Maintain a positive attitude! Do not engage the consular officer in an argument.