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Steuererklärung — Tax Return in Germany

Learn how to file your own tax return and get back an average of €1000.
Step-by-step guide through Elster.

Deutsche Begriffe: Steuererklärung | Lohnsteuerjahresausgleich | Elster | Finanzamt | Steuerberater | Grundfreibetrag | Werbungskosten | Progressionsvorbehalt

Steuererklärung — who and when must file it

Steuererklärung (tax return) is filed with the **Finanzamt** (tax office). For most employees, tax is already deducted from salary as Lohnsteuer (depending on the tax class in your Arbeitsvertrag), and the annual settlement often results in a **refund**.

You are obligated to file a Steuererklärung, among others, when:

• you worked for **several employers simultaneously**,

• you had non-taxable income **above 410 €** (e.g., from rental),

• you received benefits subject to **Progressionsvorbehalt**, e.g., Elterngeld or Bürgergeld — these are tax-free themselves, but increase the tax rate on other income.

Income from Minijob (2026 up to 603 € monthly) is tax-free for you and you do not include it in the return.

Deadlines 2026 and Grundfreibetrag

• For tax year **2025**: deadline **31.07.2026** (if obligated). With a **Steuerberater** (tax advisor) — until **02.03.2027**.

• **Voluntary** return (if you expect a refund) can be filed retroactively for **4 years** — for 2025 therefore until the end of **2029**.

Grundfreibetrag (personal allowance): **12,096 €** for 2025 and **12,348 €** from 01.01.2026 (for married couples — doubled). Up to this amount you do not pay income tax.

How to file — Elster and deductions

The easiest way is online via the free portal **Mein ELSTER**. It's worth deducting **Werbungskosten** (business expenses) — a standard allowance of **1,230 €** is automatically applied, but actual expenses (commuting, equipment, training) may be higher. If you have children, check **Günstigerprüfung** between Kindergeld and tax relief — the Finanzamt chooses the more favorable option. For complicated matters, a **Steuerberater** or Lohnsteuerhilfeverein (tax relief association) can help.

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