

When to Apply for Unemployment Benefits

As soon as possible! It generally takes **two to four weeks** for your information to be processed and to get your first check in hand. An overload of applications may cause the processing of your application to be delayed. In addition, unemployment benefits are not retroactive, meaning that you will not be able to collect benefits for the time between your departure and when you apply for benefits. Therefore, file as quickly as possible.

Smart Suggestion: Be very careful when filling out your application form. ***Any mistake can delay the processing of your claim.*** In California, up to 30% of forms have some sort of error (as minor as using a check to fill in a circle or forgetting to answer a question)!

Here are the *key questions* on the application form that you will want to pay attention to and answer carefully:

- **Reason No Longer Working:** You will be given a few answers to choose from when responding to this question: “laid off / lack of work,” “discharged / fired,” “voluntary quit,” “strike or lockout,” or “still working part time.” If you answer this question with any option other than “laid off / lack of work” they will expect an explanation.
- **Explanation of Reason No Longer Working:** Here, you will be able to write a response as opposed to choosing from a list of answers. If you were discharged, be sure to specify that it was not because of willful misconduct. Similarly, if you quit, be sure to explain that you quit for good cause (if this indeed was the situation). There is no need to expand upon your explanations here; saying too much may jeopardize your claim.
- **Self-Employment:** If you answer “yes” to the question: “Are you currently self-employed or working as an independent contractor?” you will likely be deemed ineligible, as the unemployment office will classify you as not “available for work.”
- **Attending School or Training:** Similar to self-employment, if you answer “yes” regarding attending school or training, you will again be considered to be unavailable for work. Note: You can still be “available for work” and attend school or training during non-work hours (e.g. at night).