GET YOUR BOOKS READY

Before you pay an accountant: 10 things you can do yourself.

Whether you file your own tax return or pay someone to do it, organised records make it quicker, cheaper and less stressful. Work through these in order. Tick them off as you go.

Please note: this is general information, not tax advice.

For the 2025/26 tax year (6 April 2025 to 5 April 2026). Online return and payment due by 31 January 2027.

1 Check you've got the right tax year

The return due on 31 January 2027 covers the tax year **6 April 2025 to 5 April 2026**. If your business accounts run to 31 March, HMRC normally accepts them for that tax year, with no adjustment for the five-day difference. If your accounts end on another date, check how the dates work before you start.

☐ **I know which dates I'm working with**

2 Get every bank statement for those dates

Every account the business money went through: business and personal accounts, credit cards, savings. Download them as PDF or spreadsheet from online banking.

☐ **All statements, every month, every account**

3 List all your income

Sales, fees, rent, tips, and payouts from apps and platforms such as PayPal, SumUp, Stripe, eBay, Etsy, Vinted or Airbnb. Download each platform's yearly report.

☐ **One list with every source of income**

4 Gather your expense invoices and receipts

Paper and email. If something is missing, ask the supplier for a copy now, before they get busy too. Keep a note of anything you genuinely can't get.

☐ **Receipts gathered, missing ones requested**

5 Write down your cash

Cash you took and cash you spent on the business don't show on a bank statement. Write them down with dates and amounts, from your notebook, diary or invoice book.

☐ **Cash in and cash out listed**

6 Separate business from personal

If you use one account for everything, mark each business item. Personal spending isn't a business expense, even if it's paid from the business account.

☐ **Every transaction marked business or personal**

7 Flag the unusual items

Loans, money you put in or took out, equipment or vehicles bought or sold, grants, insurance pay-outs, refunds. These are treated differently, so list them separately.

☐ **Unusual items listed with a short note**

8 **Match your records to your statements**

Does every payment in and out of the accounts appear in your lists? Does every item in your lists appear on a statement or have a receipt? Tick them off one by one.

☐ **Records and statements match, or the gaps are noted**

9 **Make a list of questions and missing information**

Anything you're not sure about, anything you can't find, anything that doesn't add up. A clear list is far quicker for you, or anyone helping you, than guessing.

☐ **Questions and gaps written down**

10 **Put it all in one labelled pack**

One folder, paper or digital, with clear names: "Bank statements", "Income", "Expenses", "Cash", "Unusual items", "Questions". Note your UTR (Unique Taxpayer Reference). If you'll file yourself, check you can sign in to your HMRC online account. **Never give your HMRC password to anyone**, including a bookkeeper or accountant: they should ask you to authorise them through HMRC's official process.

☐ **One pack, clearly labelled, ready to use or hand over**

Please don't: guess figures, make up receipts, or force your records to balance. If something is missing or doesn't add up, write it down and say so. A professional can deal with an honest gap; an invented number causes problems later.

WHY BOTHER?

It saves time, and often money.

Doing it yourself? With the pack ready, filling in the online return is much easier. The hard part is working out the right figures, so if anything is unclear, get help with that part.

Paying for help? Most bookkeepers and accountants spend a lot of their time chasing and sorting paperwork. If you pay by the hour or by how messy the records are, a tidy pack can mean a smaller bill, and a faster answer.

Records very incomplete, or years behind? Get help early rather than struggling alone. Sorting records is a job in itself, and it takes longer the closer January gets.

Take the Books Ready Check to see how your records look overall, or read the 10 questions to ask before choosing help.

OFFICIAL GUIDANCE

Useful links

Business records if you're self-employed
GOV.UK: what to keep, and for how long

Expenses if you're self-employed
GOV.UK: what you can and can't claim

Simplified expenses
GOV.UK: flat rates for vehicles and working from home

Trading and property allowances
GOV.UK: the £1,000 allowances

Free resources: mrsbookkeeping.co.uk/taxready · Prepared by Martin Schmalenbach, MRS Bookkeeping, Dolton, Devon · T: 07427 931179 · E: martin@mrsbookkeeping.co.uk · Last reviewed 11 November 2026 · General information, not tax advice.