# New Business Bookkeeping Starter Kit: 12-Step Checklist

Work through the steps in order and check each one off. The full guide explains each step in detail.

| | Step | What to do |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ | **1. Choose your business structure** | Compare sole proprietorship, single-member LLC, multi-member LLC, S-Corp and C-Corp for tax filing, liability and how you pay yourself. Most new businesses start as a sole proprietorship or single-member LLC and restructure later. Make a decision so you can move on. |
| ☐ | **2. Get an EIN** | Apply free on IRS.gov. You need it for a business bank account, hiring and business returns, and it keeps your Social Security number off invoices and W-9 forms. Save the confirmation letter (CP 575). |
| ☐ | **3. Open a business bank account** | Run every business transaction through a dedicated account. Bring your EIN, formation documents if any, and photo ID. Choose a bank with easy statement downloads and accounting software integration. |
| ☐ | **4. Open a business credit card** | Use it for recurring subscriptions, supplies and travel, link it to your accounting software, and pay the balance in full each month to avoid interest. |
| ☐ | **5. Choose your accounting method** | Cash basis records income and expenses when money moves. Accrual records them when earned or incurred. Most small businesses start with cash basis. Once you choose, use the same method consistently: switching later needs IRS approval on Form 3115. |
| ☐ | **6. Set up your chart of accounts** | Start from a template for your business type and keep it simple. Standard numbering: 1000s assets, 2000s liabilities, 3000s equity, 4000s revenue, 5000 to 6000s expenses. Starter files are listed at the end of this kit. |
| ☐ | **7. Choose a bookkeeping tool** | Options include QuickBooks Online, Xero, FreshBooks and Wave. Pick on business type, budget and needs such as inventory, payroll or multi-currency. Try two or three free trials, connect your bank and card, and load your chart of accounts. |
| ☐ | **8. Set up receipt tracking** | Photograph every receipt when you get it, using a receipt app or the capture feature in your accounting software. Forward emailed receipts to the app's address. Keep one folder per month or per category. |
| ☐ | **9. Understand your tax obligations** | Know your income tax (federal and state), self-employment tax (15.3% rate on net profit for sole proprietors and LLC members), quarterly estimated taxes, and sales tax if you sell taxable goods or services. With employees, add payroll taxes, FUTA and SUTA. Set aside a share of every payment in a separate tax savings account; ask your CPA what share fits you. Use Form 1040-ES for quarterly payments. |
| ☐ | **10. Create a monthly bookkeeping routine** | Book a recurring monthly appointment. Reconcile bank and card statements, categorize transactions, follow up on late invoices, file missed receipts and review your profit and loss statement. Use the monthly bookkeeping checklist in your starter files. |
| ☐ | **11. Find a CPA or tax professional** | Look for a CPA or enrolled agent who works with small businesses in your industry. Get referrals, check reviews and interview two or three. Build the relationship early and schedule a mid-year check-in. |
| ☐ | **12. Set calendar reminders for key deadlines** | Add reminders two weeks before each date below, plus a monthly reminder for your bookkeeping routine and a quarterly one to review your cash flow forecast. |

## Deadline calendar

| Date | What is due |
|---|---|
| **January 15** | Q4 estimated tax payment (January 15, 2027 for 2026) |
| **February 1 in 2027 (January 31 falls on a Sunday)** | 1099-NEC filing deadline and W-2 deadline for tax year 2026 |
| **March 15** | S-Corp and partnership returns due (March 15, 2027 for tax year 2026) |
| **April 15** | Sole proprietor and LLC individual returns due (April 15, 2027 for tax year 2026); Q1 estimated tax payment |
| **June 15** | Q2 estimated tax payment |
| **September 15** | Q3 estimated tax payment |

## Your starter files

| File | Link |
|---|---|
| **Chart of accounts: service business (Excel)** | https://bookkeepingflow.com/downloads/chart-of-accounts-service-business.xlsx |
| **Chart of accounts: e-commerce (Excel)** | https://bookkeepingflow.com/downloads/chart-of-accounts-e-commerce.xlsx |
| **Chart of accounts: restaurant (Excel)** | https://bookkeepingflow.com/downloads/chart-of-accounts-restaurant.xlsx |
| **Chart of accounts: all templates (CSV)** | https://bookkeepingflow.com/downloads/chart-of-accounts-all-templates.csv |
| **Monthly bookkeeping checklist (PDF)** | https://bookkeepingflow.com/downloads/monthly-bookkeeping-checklist.pdf |
| **Full 12-step guide** | https://bookkeepingflow.com/resources/guides/new-business-bookkeeping-setup/ |

This checklist is for information only and is not tax or financial advice. Last reviewed October 2026.