

THE FINFORCE PICTURE BOOK

Series One

Money First Steps

Complete set · 12 stories

Twelve short illustrated stories about first pay, super, budgeting, investing, study debt, tax time, a new baby and a first home, told in plain English.

FinForce

SERIES ONE · COMPLETE SET

Before you begin

Money First Steps is the first series of FinForce picture books. Each story takes one idea and explains it in six small pictures, with a short plain-English note underneath.

The twelve stories are grouped into six themes, so you can read them in order or dip into the one that fits the moment: earning, saving and budgeting, investing, tax and study, family, and home.

The stories are deliberately simple. Real life isn't. Rules change, and what suits one person can be wrong for another. If a story makes you think "that sounds like me", that's a good moment to talk to an adviser.

Looking for something to read at bedtime? Every story in this series also has a gentle read-aloud version in **FinForce Bedtime Stories**, and a colouring-in edition for little hands.

Earning
Your first pay and your first super

Saving and budgeting
Plans, cushions and the quiet cost of rising prices

Investing
Spreading your eggs across baskets

Tax and study
Study loans and tax time

Family
A new baby, and money for the kids

Home
Saving for a first home

General advice warning. This book is general information only. It does not take into account your objectives, financial situation or needs, and it is not personal advice. Rules and thresholds change; figures are as stated in each story (checked 10 November 2026). Before acting, consider whether it is right for you, read any relevant Product Disclosure Statement and our Financial Services Guide, and seek personal advice. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

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Series One: Money First Steps, complete set. First published November 2026. © 2026 FinForce. All characters are fictional.
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SERIES ONE · MONEY FIRST STEPS

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Your first payslip

What the numbers on your first pay actually mean.



1 Meet Mia. She's 19 and has just started her first part-time job at a Brisbane cafe.



2 Before her first shift she fills in a tax file number declaration, so the right tax comes out of her pay.



3 She claims the tax-free threshold with this employer. You generally claim it with only one employer at a time.



4 Her payslip shows her gross pay, the tax withheld, and what lands in her bank account.



5 On top of her pay, her employer pays super for her. The super guarantee rate is 12%.



6 Mia keeps her payslips. They make tax time, and checking her super, much easier.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Your payslip is the first place to check you're being paid correctly. It should show your gross pay, any tax withheld under PAYG withholding, and your super. Super guarantee is paid by your employer on top of your wages at 12% of qualifying earnings. If you don't give your employer your tax file number, they must withhold tax at the top rate, so it's worth sorting before your first pay. Most people only claim the tax-free threshold with one payer at a time; claiming it with two can mean a tax bill at the end of the year.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): ATO: Tax file number declaration; ATO: About Payday Super (SG rate 12%)

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Super on payday

From July 2026, your super keeps pace with your pay.



1 Meet Raj. He's 34 and works full time as an electrician.



2 Until July 2026, many employers paid super every three months.



3 Since 1 July 2026, employers must pay super for each payday, under Payday Super.



4 Super must reach his fund within 7 business days after payday, with some longer times for new employees.



5 The rate is still 12%, now worked out on what the law calls qualifying earnings.



6 Raj checks his super app every so often to make sure each payday's super has arrived.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Payday Super changed when employers pay the super guarantee. From 1 July 2026, super must be paid for each payday and received by the fund within 7 business days (longer in some cases, such as new employees). If it is late, the employer may owe the super guarantee charge, which the ATO now assesses. For employees, the practical step is simple: compare your payslip with your super account now and then. If super stops arriving, raise it with your employer first, then the ATO.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): ATO: About Payday Super; ATO: Payment deadlines for Payday Super

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The fund that follows you

Why changing jobs no longer means a new super account.



1 Meet Grace. She's 27 and has just changed jobs, from retail to an office role.



2 In the past, a new job often meant a new super fund, and fees on two accounts.



3 Now, if she doesn't choose a fund, her new employer asks the ATO for her 'stapled' fund.



4 A stapled fund is an existing account that follows her from job to job.



5 She can still choose a different fund by filling in a choice form for her employer.



6 Grace compares funds on fees and performance before she decides to stay or switch.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Since November 2021, when a new employee doesn't nominate a super fund, the employer must request their stapled fund details from the ATO before paying super. Only if there's no stapled fund does the employer's default fund apply. This helps stop people collecting several accounts, each charging fees and possibly insurance premiums. You can still choose your own fund at any time. The ATO's YourSuper comparison tool can help you compare MySuper products on fees and returns.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): ATO: Stapled super funds for employers; ATO: Superannuation standard choice form

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The rainy-day jar

A simple budget, and a little set aside for the unexpected.



1 Meet Tom and Lani. They've just moved into their first rental together on Brisbane's northside.



2 Each payday they sit down with a cuppa and a simple plan: bills, food, fun and saving.



3 A small amount goes into a separate savings account every pay. They call it the rainy-day jar.



4 Months later, their little car gets a flat tyre, and it needs two new ones.



5 The jar covers the bill, so nothing goes on the credit card.



6 They top the jar back up a little each pay, ready for the next surprise.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

A budget is simply a plan for where your money goes: what comes in, what must go out, and what's left for saving and fun. An emergency fund is money kept aside, in an account you can reach quickly, for things you can't plan for, like car repairs, a big bill or time off work. A common rule of thumb from Moneysmart is to work towards cash equal to about three months of household expenses. Setting up an automatic transfer the day after payday makes saving easier, because the money moves before it can be spent. Keeping emergency money separate from everyday spending also makes it less tempting to dip into.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): Moneysmart: Investing between the flags (emergency funds); Moneysmart: Budget planner

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Interest is income

Savings interest goes on your tax return.



1 Meet Ken. He's 52 and has been building up his savings account.



2 The interest his bank pays him counts as income, just like wages.



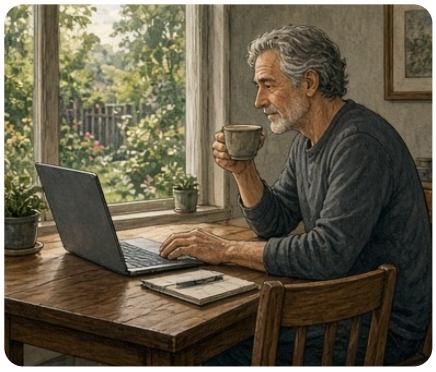
3 It goes on his tax return and is taxed at his marginal rate.



4 If he never gave the bank his tax file number, it would have to withhold tax at the top rate.



5 Any amount withheld is claimed back as a credit when he lodges his return.



6 Ken gives his TFN to each bank, and the ATO usually pre-fills the interest for him.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Interest from bank accounts, term deposits and similar is assessable income in the year it's paid or credited to you. Banks usually report it to the ATO, so it often pre-fills in myTax, but it's your job to check it's complete, including joint accounts (each holder declares their share). If you don't quote your tax file number, the bank must withhold tax at the top marginal rate; you can claim that amount back as a credit in your return.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): ATO: Investing in bank accounts and income bonds; ATO: myTax 2026 Interest

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The shrinking dollar

How inflation quietly changes what money can buy.



1 Meet Dot. She's 71 and keeps a little cash in a tin for treats.



2 When prices rise over time, each dollar buys a little less. That's inflation.



3 The Reserve Bank aims to keep inflation between 2% and 3% a year, on average.



4 Money that sits still slowly loses buying power, even when the balance looks the same.



5 Growth assets like shares and property have historically been one way to try to keep pace, with more ups and downs.



6 Dot keeps her treat tin, and talks to an adviser about the rest of her savings.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Inflation is the general rise in prices over time. The Reserve Bank of Australia's target is for annual inflation to average between 2% and 3%. At 3% a year, prices roughly double in about 24 years, so cash that earns less than inflation loses buying power. That doesn't make cash bad: it's stable and ready when you need it. The point is balance: near money for the short term, and a plan for money you won't need for years. Past performance isn't a reliable indicator of future performance.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): Reserve Bank of Australia: Inflation target

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Eggs in different baskets

Why spreading your money out can help you sleep at night.



1 Meet Ruby. She's 26 and has saved her first $5,000 to invest.



2 At a family barbecue, her uncle says to put it all into the one company everyone's talking about.



3 Ruby remembers her grandma's market rule: never carry all your eggs in one basket.



4 Spreading money across different investments means one bad result doesn't sink everything.



5 A diversified fund can hold many companies, and often shares, bonds and cash, in one place.



6 Ruby chooses a mix that suits her goals and her nerves, and sleeps a little easier.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Diversification means spreading your money across a number of different investments so that one poor result has less effect on the whole. Different types of assets (shares, fixed income such as bonds, property and cash) tend to do well at different times, so a mix can smooth out the ride. You can also spread money across industries, countries and fund managers. A diversified managed fund or a broad exchange traded fund can hold many investments in a single product. Diversification lowers risk but doesn't remove it: all investments can fall in value, and buying more of what you already own (including through your super) doesn't make you more diversified.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): Moneysmart: Investment diversification; Moneysmart: Questions to ask before you invest

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Your HELP debt

How study loans are repaid, and why the balance moves.



1 Meet Lachlan. He's 24, finished his degree and now works as a graduate engineer.



2 His HELP debt has no interest charged, but it is indexed each 1 June.



3 Indexation uses the lower of CPI or wage growth. In 2026 it was 2.8%.



4 Repayments only start once repayment income is over $69,528 (2026-27).



5 Above that, repayments are worked out only on the income over the threshold, starting at 15c per dollar.



6 Lachlan tells his employer he has a HELP debt, so extra is withheld from his pay.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

HELP debts don't charge interest, but on 1 June each year the part of the debt older than 11 months is indexed by the lower of CPI or the Wage Price Index (2.8% in 2026). From 2025-26, compulsory repayments use a marginal system: nothing is due below the minimum repayment income ($69,528 for 2026-27), then 15c for each dollar above it, with higher rates further up. Repayment income includes more than taxable income, such as reportable super contributions and net investment losses. Voluntary repayments made before 1 June reduce the amount that gets indexed.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): ATO: Study and training loan repayment thresholds and rates; ATO: Study and training loan indexation rates; Study Assist: Loan repayments

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Lodging your tax return

Deadlines, pre-fill and getting help.



1 Meet Helen. She's 45, works as a teacher, and does her own tax return.



2 The financial year ends on 30 June. Returns open from 1 July.



3 She waits until late July so her employer and bank information has pre-filled.



4 If she lodges herself, her return is due by 31 October.



5 If she uses a registered tax agent and joins them before 31 October, she can usually lodge later.



6 Helen keeps receipts for work expenses as she goes, not in a rush at the end.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

For most individuals the tax year runs from 1 July to 30 June. If you lodge your own return, it's generally due by 31 October. If you use a registered tax agent and are on their client list before 31 October, you can usually lodge later under the agent's lodgment program. Waiting until pre-fill information has come in (usually by late July) helps avoid amendments. Only a registered tax agent can charge a fee for tax return help.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): ATO: Preparing your tax return; ATO: Lodge with a registered tax agent

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Parental leave, now with super

Government Parental Leave Pay now comes with a super contribution.



1 Meet Priya and Tom. Their baby girl was born in August 2026.



2 For babies born from 1 July 2026, families can get up to 130 days of Parental Leave Pay, about 26 weeks.



3 With a partner, some days are reserved for each parent, so both can take time at home.



4 For children born from 1 July 2025, the ATO adds a 12% super contribution on Parental Leave Pay.



5 It's paid automatically to their super fund after the end of the financial year.



6 Priya checks her super fund has her tax file number and current details.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Parental Leave Pay is a government payment based on the national minimum wage. For children born or adopted from 1 July 2026, families can receive up to 130 days (26 weeks), with days reserved for each parent in a couple. For children born or adopted from 1 July 2025, the ATO also pays a Paid Parental Leave Superannuation Contribution of 12% of the payment, as a lump sum after the financial year ends. It counts towards your concessional contributions cap. Keep your details matching across Services Australia, the ATO and your fund.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): Services Australia: Paid Parental Leave scheme changes; ATO: Paid Parental Leave Superannuation Contribution

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FAMILY · STORY 11 OF 12

Money in a child's name

Why investing for kids isn't as simple as it sounds.



1 Meet Ana. She wants to start investing for her two young sons.



2 Some parents put investments in a child's name, hoping the child pays less tax.



3 But a child under 18 has special rates on investment income like interest and dividends.



4 In 2026-27, the first $416 is tax-free. Above that, tax rises quickly, up to 45% of the whole amount over $1,307.



5 Income a child earns from their own job is taxed at normal rates.



6 Ana weighs up the options, including holding investments in her own name for the boys.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Under Division 6AA, most 'unearned' income of a resident child under 18, such as interest, dividends, rent and trust distributions, is taxed at special rates. For 2026-27, up to $416 is tax-free; from $417 to $1,307 it's taxed at 66% of the excess over $416; above $1,307, the whole amount is taxed at 45%. Excepted income, such as wages from a child's own job, is taxed at normal rates. Investing for children can be done in several ways, each with trade-offs for tax, control and Centrelink.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): ATO: Tax rates if you're under 18 years old

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A 5% deposit

How the First Home Guarantee works.



1 Meet Jordan and Sam. They're 31 and renting in Brisbane, saving for a first home.



2 Banks usually want a 20% deposit, or charge lenders mortgage insurance.



3 Under the First Home Guarantee, eligible buyers can purchase with as little as 5% deposit.



4 The Government guarantees part of the loan, so they don't pay lenders mortgage insurance.



5 There's a property price cap. In Brisbane it's $1 million.



6 They apply through a participating lender and get advice on whether a small deposit suits them.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

The First Home Guarantee is part of the Australian Government's Home Guarantee Scheme, run by Housing Australia. Since 1 October 2025 there are no place limits or income caps. Eligible first home buyers can buy with a deposit as low as 5% without paying lenders mortgage insurance, because the Government guarantees part of the loan. Property price caps apply; for Brisbane and Queensland regional centres it is $1 million. A smaller deposit means a bigger loan and more interest over time, so it's worth weighing up carefully.

Sources (checked 10 November 2026): Housing Australia: Unlimited places, higher property price caps (from 1 October 2025); firsthomebuyers.gov.au: Property price caps

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SERIES ONE · MONEY FIRST STEPS

About FinForce

FinForce is a Brisbane-based financial planning practice working with business owners, families and professionals across Australia. We help with retirement planning, super, investments, SMSFs, insurance, the Age Pension and tax for business owners.

We make these picture books because good decisions start with understanding.

Want this for your situation? Every situation is different. Book an appointment with one of our advisers at finforce.com.au, or call 07 3262 6585.

More stories: finforce.com.au/picture-book

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