

Different Admission Plans

There are two main categories of admission options: **non-restrictive** and **restrictive**.

Non-restrictive application plans don't restrict students from applying to other institutions. You'll have until May 1 to consider your options and confirm enrollment. There are three application plans under non-restrictive:

- Regular Decision
- Rolling Admission
- Early Action.

Regular Decision means that you turn in your application by the college's deadline and they let you know by a specified date.

For **Rolling Admission**, schools review applications as they're submitted and make decisions throughout the admission cycle (usually within four to six weeks of submission of the application). It is usually wise to send your application as soon as possible since some colleges fill their classes by early winter.

With **Early Action**, you send your application by the early deadline and the college sends you its decision earlier. Some colleges do have additional restrictions on their early action programs, so make sure to read carefully the instructions from each college.

There are two types of restrictive application plans:

- Early Decision
- Restrictive Early Action.

When you decide to apply **Early Decision**, you are committing yourself to going to that school. Early Decision is for those early-bird students who already have a clear first-choice college. If you're still comparing colleges and don't want to limit your choices yet, Early Decision isn't for you. Why? Early Decision is a contract between you and the college. You agree that if the college accepts you, you'll withdraw all other college applications and attend the early decision college. Because of this commitment, you can apply Early Decision to only one college.

The other restrictive option is **Restrictive Early Action**. This means that you apply to your school of choice and get a decision early. Be aware, though, that some schools restrict applicants from applying to any other early plans at other schools. If you go this way, you'll have until May 1 to confirm that you'll attend.

These early options can be confusing—some schools even have more than one of these options—so talk to your school counselor if there's anything you don't understand.

Colleges respond to early applications in one of three ways: acceptance, rejection, or deferring applications over to regular decision.

Are You Ready to Commit?

If several of your classmates are working on Early Decision applications, you may feel some pressure to do the same. But resist the temptation to apply Early Decision unless you truly are ready to commit to one college.

The only way you can be 100 percent sure is if you've done the work that leads to a good decision. Ask yourself these questions:

- Have I thoroughly researched this college and other colleges that may interest me?
- Have I visited this college while classes are in session and met with someone at the admission office?
- Have I explored my academic, extracurricular, and social options at this college?
- Have I talked to a financial aid officer to get an estimate of college costs and to find out how Early Decision could affect my aid package?
- Have I discussed this decision with my family and/or school counselor?
- Is this a true first choice or are there other colleges that still interest me?

If you're at all unsure about your first choice, applying Early Action (which doesn't require a commitment and allows you to apply to other schools), Rolling Admission, or Regular Decision are your best options. There is no need to limit your college choices this early, unless you truly want to.

Do Early Application Plans Affect Financial Aid?

If you need financial aid, you'll probably need to complete a CSS Profile or the college's institutional form at about the same time as the early decision application. The college financial aid office can then send you a tentative financial aid package (tentative until you can send the college your tax return and other supporting documentation). Each college does this a little differently, so check with the financial aid office or admission office of the college to be certain of their procedures.

Advantage to Applying Early?

Many students make an effort to apply through one of the early application programs because they hope to beat the competition of regular decision. Although most colleges have a smaller number of applications in their early programs, whether it's easier to get accepted early than later depends on each college's policy.

One factor to consider is whether your academic record will be stronger later in your senior year. If you had stellar junior-year grades, this may not be a concern. But if you think that your application would be stronger with the addition of your grades for the fall of your senior year, waiting for regular decision may be the way to go.

A possible advantage to applying early, especially Early Action, is that you receive admission decisions early. If you're accepted to one or several colleges, you may feel a bit less stress about the rest of the college admission process. (And if you're accepted Early Decision, your college search is over). If your application is declined at one or more colleges, you have some time to reassess your college choices, if necessary. Colleges can also neither accept nor reject, but rather hold over your application to regular decision. If this happens, make sure to send updated information in time for the regular decision deadline (such as senior-year grades and activities) to bolster your application.

In the end, the decision of whether or not to apply Early Decision or Early Action is yours alone. Do your research, think about your options, look at your fall schedule, and talk to your school counselor and family. Then decide for yourself.