

# Early Decision and Early Action

Students should be informed about the differences between early decision and early action before sending in his or her applications. The exact rules may vary somewhat by college.

**Early decision plans are binding.** Students can apply to only one college for early decision, he or she may apply to other colleges through the regular admissions process. If accepted by the first-choice college early, the student must withdraw all other applications. Usually, colleges insist on a nonrefundable deposit well before May 1.

**Early action plans are similar, but are not binding- unlike early decision.** If the student has been accepted, he or she can choose to commit to the college immediately, or wait until the spring. Under these plans, the student may also apply early action to other colleges. Usually, the student has until the late spring to let the college know his decision.

**Single-choice early action is a new option offered by a few colleges.** This plan works the same way as other early action plans, but candidates may not apply early (either early action or early decision) to any other school. The student can still apply to other schools and is not required to give a final answer of acceptance until the regular decision deadline.

Application Type	Binding	Can Apply Early to Other Colleges	Can Apply to Other Colleges Under Regular Admissions
Early Decision	Yes	No	Yes
Early Action	No	Yes	Yes
Single-Choice Early Action	No	No	Yes

## Early Decision versus Early Action

Early decision plans are binding—a student who is accepted as an ED applicant must attend the college. Early action plans are nonbinding—students receive an early response to their application, but do not have to commit to the college until the normal reply date of May 1.

About 400 colleges have early decision or early action plans, and some have both. Some colleges offer a nonbinding option called **single-choice early action**, under which applicants may not apply ED or EA to any other college.

### ED Applicants

- Apply early (usually in November) to first-choice college
- Receive an admission decision from the college well in advance, usually by December
- Agree to attend the college if accepted and offered a financial aid package
- May only apply to one college for early decision
- May apply to other colleges under regular admission
- Must withdraw all other applications when accepted by ED
- Must give a nonrefundable deposit well in advance of May 1

### EA Applicants

- Apply early
- Receive an admission decision early in the admission cycle, usually in January or February
- Do not have to commit to an EA college
- May apply to other colleges under regular admission plans
- Must give the college a decision no later than the May 1

## Who Should Apply Early?

**Applying to an ED or EA plan is most appropriate for a student who:**

- Has researched colleges extensively
- Is absolutely sure that the college she is applying to early is a first choice
- Has found a school that is a strong match academically, socially, geographically, and so forth
- Meets or exceeds the admission profile for the school for SAT scores, GPA, and class rank
- Has an academic record that has been consistently solid over time

**Applying to an ED or EA plan is not appropriate for a student who:**

- Has not thoroughly researched and visited colleges
- Is applying early just to avoid stress and paperwork
- Is not fully committed to attending the schools to which she is applying
- Is applying early only because friends are
- Needs a strong senior fall semester to bring her grades up

## The Benefits of Applying Early

For a student who has a definite first-choice school, applying early has many benefits besides possibly increasing her chance of getting in.

Some of the benefits of applying early:

- Reduces stress by cutting the time a student spends waiting for a decision
- Saves students the time and expense of submitting multiple applications
- Gives students more time, once accepted, to look for housing and otherwise prepare for college
- If student is not accepted, having this information gives that student time to reassess options elsewhere

## The Drawbacks of Applying Early

**Pressure to decide:** Committing to one college puts pressure on students to make serious decisions before they've explored all their options.

**Reduced financial aid opportunities:** Students who apply under ED plans receive offers of admission and financial aid simultaneously and so will not be able to compare financial aid offers from other colleges. For students who absolutely need financial aid, applying early may be a risky option.

**Time crunch for other applications:** Most colleges do not notify ED/EA applicants of admission until December 15. Because of the usual deadlines for college applications, this means that if a student is rejected by her early-decision college, she will have only two weeks to send in other applications. Encourage those of your students who are applying early to prepare other applications as they wait to hear about admission.

## Does Applying Early Increase the Chance of Acceptance?

Many students believe applying early means competing with fewer applicants and increasing their chances for acceptance. This is not always true. Schools vary in the proportion of the class admitted early and in the percentage of early applicants they admit.

## The Ethics of Applying Early Decision

The Common Application and some colleges' application forms require the student applying under early decision, as well as her parent and counselor, to sign an ED Agree