



To Apply or Not to Apply... That is the Question

The Ins and Outs of Early Decision and Early Action

At Collegewise, we get a lot of questions about Early Decision and Early Action and whether it will improve a student's chance of being accepted to a particular college. We don't like to think about early decision as an application strategy, but as an option for some applicants. Many students and parents are told that applying to a binding early decision program can improve their chances of admission. They don't want to miss out on that advantage, so they feel pressured to apply early. The truth is that the extra stress may not be worth it unless you know beyond the shadow of a doubt that this is your first choice school.

Some questions to consider in deciding whether to apply Early Decision:

- Am I absolutely sure I want to attend this school?
- If paying for college is a concern for your family, does this school provide generous financial aid packages?
- Are my standardized test scores in a competitive range for this school, or should I retake exams in the fall to try to improve my scores?
- Does my transcript reflect the degree of excellence this school desires, or should I apply regular decision, so that my fall term grades can enhance my academic record?
- Are my essays ready?
- Are my letters of recommendation ready?



Bottom Line

If you feel you can prepare a very strong application by November and you know you want to attend a particular college, applying early may improve your chances since it signals your commitment and interest in the school.

Remember that you are applying to your first-choice school and that early application pools are highly competitive. Any advantage you may have as an early applicant will not overcome the damaging effects of an underprepared application. If your essays are not ready, or you could improve your GPA or test scores given the extra time, it may be a good idea to wait until the regular decision deadline.

If you are considering applying early decision to a college, talk through your options with your counselor and parents first.



Admission Options

Early Decision

- Applicants make a binding promise to the college—if you are accepted, you **MUST** enroll.
- In fact, if you are accepted, you are required to withdraw all your other college applications.
- You can apply to as many other schools as you'd like, but because of this binding agreement, you can only have **ONE** school using Early Decision.
- Don't mess around with ED commitments. As part of an ED application, you, your parents, and your counselor all sign a document saying you understand the terms of the agreement. Backing out will always have consequences.

EDI vs. EDII

- These are essentially the same programs. Both are binding and both expect an applicant to enroll if admitted; the only difference is the deadline.
- EDI - applications are due November 1st or 15th and colleges release decisions by Dec. 15th
- EDII - applications are due at end of December or January 1st and colleges release decisions by late January or early February.

Single Choice Early Action or Restrictive Early Action

- Some schools like Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Stanford offer the option to apply to one college without any obligation to attend. If the college accepts you early, you can wait until the spring to make your final decision. This allows you to compare financial aid awards from all the colleges you've been admitted to.
- As with ED, you can only apply to **ONE** college SCEA or REA.
- While not binding, SCEA does prohibit you from applying to any other early programs, binding or non-binding.

Early Action

- Just like early decision, but without the binding commitment.
- Since there is no commitment, you can apply to as many EA schools as you like and admissions decisions are released in December.
- Admit rates for EA are usually equal to Regular Decision, unlike the boost you get from Early Decision. This still isn't a reason to apply ED, but it is important to be aware of.

Regular Decision

- This is the basic, no-frills, just hit the deadline and we'll let you know in March option. You must submit your application by the deadline, and then the college will evaluate all of the applications and send out decisions by a specified date.
- Whether you submit your application two months or two minutes before the deadline won't affect your chances of admission (though submitting early lowers your stress which improves your life!).
- Decisions are usually sent out mid-March, and you have until May 1st to decide whether or not to attend.

Rolling Admission

- This looks a lot like regular decision with one crucial difference - rolling admission schools evaluate applications as they are received. Colleges send admissions decisions back throughout the admissions cycle (sometimes as soon as 4-6 weeks later).
- The earlier you apply, the sooner you get your answer and the more access you have to scholarships.
- Rolling admissions isn't something you choose; it's just something that certain colleges do.

