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Which College Admission Plan Is the Right One for You?

Everybody knows life is full of choices! And, if you're a high school senior, you're probably in the midst of making some very important choices right now...like choosing the colleges you'll apply to this fall. On top of that, you also have to decide when to submit your applications. It's a *lot* to think about — especially with so many colleges and admissions plans to choose from, right?

Types of Admission Plans

In order to pick the admission plan that's best *for you*, start by learning about the various options — including the *deadlines, benefits, drawbacks, and rules* that apply to each. To find out which admission plans are available at a particular college, visit the school's website and contact the admissions office.

Here's what you need to know about the four types of admission plans:

1. **Rolling Admission:** Some colleges offer a Rolling Admission (RA) plan allowing you to **apply within a window of time. This window usually opens in September and runs through May or until** all available spots for incoming freshmen are filled. Under this plan, admissions representatives review applications as they come in. Typically, applicants are notified of the admission decision within 4 - 8 weeks after applying. (*For more information:* [Colleges with Rolling Admissions.](#))

RA can be a good option if you're applying to college late in the regular admissions cycle. And, of course, it's a great way to find out *early* whether you're accepted to the college. Plus, if you aren't accepted, you'll still have plenty of time to apply to other schools.

Yet, although these schools may accept applications as late as May, many of them fill their freshman class spots by early winter. So, submitting a later application may jeopardize your acceptance, even if you're a great candidate for the college.

2. **Regular Decision:** Every college offers a Regular Decision (RD) admission plan. The vast majority of students who apply to a given post-secondary institution do so through this plan. RD requires that you submit your application by a certain deadline — typically in January or February (so that your first semester grades for senior year can



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be factored in). And, in most cases, notification of the admission decision arrives in late March or early April.

RD can be a good option, particularly in cases where:

- better grades during fall semester will strengthen your college application, and / or
- you're dependent on a strong financial aid package, and / or
- the colleges you've applied to on the Rolling Admissions plan have filled their freshman class slots already.

In addition to the RD plan described above, about 450 colleges in the U.S. provide Early Action (EA) and/or Early Decision (ED) admission plans (and some of these schools offer both options). EA and ED plans allow you to submit your application prior to the Regular Decision deadline. Notification of the admission decision occurs about 4 - 6 weeks after the application deadline.

It's important to note EA and ED plans are appropriate *only if*:

- you've researched the college thoroughly,
- you're absolutely certain that you would attend if accepted to the school,
- you meet or exceed the school's admission profile (e.g., test scores, GPA, class ranking, etc.) and your academic record has been solid *throughout* high school, and
- the college is a good fit for you academically, socially, and emotionally and offers major(s) / program(s) aligned with your career goals.

The information below provides a general overview about EA and ED options. Plan rules vary based on each college's specific admission policies. So, be sure to visit the school's website and contact the admissions office to get the details on their EA and ED admissions plans.

3. *Early Action I and II:* There are two types of Early Action plans: *non-restrictive* and *restrictive*. Applications for both are due in November, with most schools notifying applicants of the admission decision in mid- to late-December.

Most often, an EA acceptance is ***non-binding*** (meaning that *you aren't required to enroll* if accepted *and you don't have to submit a deposit prior to May 1*). EA may be a good option if you think you'll be less stressed by knowing early in the college application process that you've been accepted to one of your favorite schools.



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- **Non-restrictive Early Action:** This plan is just as the name implies — you can apply to other schools at the same time.
- **Restrictive Early Action:** In contrast to non-restrictive EA, a restrictive plan differs in that the college places limitations on *where else you can apply simultaneously*. You can't apply to any other private, domestic college (whether for ED or EA).

4. Early Decision I and II: When you apply for Early Decision (ED), you're making a **binding commitment** to the institution that you'll definitely attend the college if you're admitted. So, talk to your parents and school guidance counselor before applying under an ED plan. While this option has its appeal, you need to be certain that you've chosen the right college for you!

It's important to note that, if you've applied for financial assistance at your ED school, you may wait to receive their offer of any financial aid awards (which typically occurs at or near the time you get the admissions offer). If the award is not enough to make your attendance possible (*as defined by [Federal Student Aid calculations](#)*), you may decline it, thereby releasing you from the ED commitment. Your family should consult with the college's financial aid officer first to see if the gap can be closed. And, most importantly, because it's a binding agreement, you shouldn't apply under an ED plan if you think you'll be better off comparing financial aid packages from your RD schools later in the spring!

You may have only one ED application *pending* at a time (but can also apply simultaneously to other colleges through a Regular Decision plan only). ED I applications are due in November. Most schools will notify you of their decision by the middle of December. ED II applications have a deadline in early January with notification in February.

Some colleges accept a higher percentage of Early Decision students, often because these applicants have outstanding academic records from junior year and top ACT or SAT scores. As such, it may be to your benefit to apply to your stretch school on Early Decision (assuming, of course, that you've thoroughly researched the college and its majors, have an exceptionally strong application, and you're absolutely certain the school is your "number one" choice).



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In most cases, you must confirm your enrollment and submit a non-refundable deposit well before May 1. Once accepted under the ED plan, immediately withdraw other applications you've submitted to other institutions under Regular Decision.

Summary

The chart below provides a comparison the key differences between admissions plans. Carefully consider the benefits and drawbacks of each in order to choose the plan that's best *for you!*

Admission Plan	Do I have to submit my application early	Will I receive the admission decision early?	Is acceptance binding?	Can I apply to other schools at the same time?	Typical Application Deadline	Typical Deadline to Accept Admission Offer
<i>Early Action / Non-restrictive</i>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	November	May
<i>Early Action / Restrictive</i>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (but some limitations apply*)	November	May
<i>Early Decision I</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (but under Regular Decision only)	November	N/A (offer is considered automatically accepted)
<i>Early Decision II</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (but under Regular Decision only)	January	N/A (offer is considered automatically accepted)
Regular Decision	Optional	N/A	No	Yes	January / February	May
<i>Rolling Admission</i>	Optional	N/A	No	Yes	May (or until freshman class slots are filled)	May (or until freshman class slots are filled)

*Cannot apply to any other private, domestic college (whether for ED or EA). Check with the College's Admissions Office for details.