



Ocean Educational Consulting

Early Decision/Early Action Guide

Early Decision and Early Action

One thing to consider before filling out the actual applications is whether or not your schools use Early Decision or Early Action plans. You also need to decide if these plans are a good fit for you. Although most college admissions deadlines run from November 30 to January 1, some colleges use Early Decision or Early Action plans.

These plans require an early application to a college—usually due in early November—and provide a response by mid-December. Early Decision is a binding decision. In other words, if you apply to a school under Early Decision and you are accepted, you are required to attend. Also, you may only apply to one school under Early Decision.

The other program—Early Action—similarly requires an early application, but it is not binding. If you apply under Early Action, you can generally also apply to other schools. Also, you do not have to make a decision until the spring.

Single-Choice Early Action

But some schools—like Boston College, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale—practice what is called Single-Choice Early Action. This means that you can only apply early to one college, but are not required to attend if you are accepted. At this point, over 400 schools—primarily highly selective schools—offer one of these options for admissions.

¹ Jacques Steinberg and Rebecca R. Ruiz, “The Early Admissions Fray,” *New York Times*, January 20, 2012.

Is Early Admission a Good Choice?

The first thing that you have to do is figure out if any of your schools have an early admission policy. Review your College List to see if they do. Also, keep in mind that college policies about early admission do sometimes change. For example, some schools—like Harvard and Princeton—canceled their early admission programs in 2006. In 2011, however, they reinstated them. If your schools don't use early admission, then you can skip this.

If some of your schools do use an early admission process, you will need to determine if it is a good choice for you. If you truly want to attend a school that is on that list and it offers early admission, you should consider it. So how does this work? Basically, you apply early to your first-choice school and, if accepted, you go. The benefit of this is that you do not need to wait until March to find out if you have been accepted.

At the same time, if the college rejects you or defers you, you still have time to apply to other colleges. Also, applying early gives you a leg up in the application process. Some colleges accept early admission applicants at rates of 2 to 3 times those of regular applicants. Keep in mind if you choose to apply early admission to the school, you must be absolutely sure that that is your first-choice school. If you have even one other school on your list of that you would love to attend, early admission is not for you.

²Tamar Lewin, "Harvard and Princeton Restore Early Admission," *New York Times*, February 24, 2011.

³Daniel Golden, *The Price of Admission: How America's Ruling Class Buys Its Way into Elite Colleges—And Who Gets Left Outside the Gates* (New York: Crown Books, 2006), Epilogue

So why wouldn't you apply for early admission if your number-one choice offers it as an option? The early admission process has a number of critics. The main issue that people have with the early admission process is what it means for financial aid. Critics argue that early decision programs do not take into account students' financial needs. If you choose to apply to early admission and you're accepted to your first-choice school, you will have to commit to attending that school without being able to view any financial aid offers from other schools. As a result, early admission programs tend to attract students whose families can foot the entire bill. If your family needs to consider different ways to pay for college, early admission may not be the best choice.

Quiz - Is Early Admission Right for Me?

If you can answer "yes" to all of the following questions, you should consider early admission.

1) I have a first-choice college that I want to attend over all other schools on my list.

yes no

2) I will not have to compare financial aid offers with other schools. If my early-admission school offers me aid, I can accept it.

yes no

3) I do not have to take the SAT or ACT again. My scores are high enough to report my scores now.

yes no

4) My GPA and test scores fit within the range of acceptance rates.

yes no

5) I will be able to complete all parts of my application (letters of recommendation, personal statement, filling out the application) by the deadline.

yes no

6) I would like the early admissions boost.

yes no

7) I would like to know as early as possible where I am going to college.

yes no