

A Note on Application Fees

Many colleges charge a flat fee to submit your application for review. These fees typically range anywhere from \$35–\$120 per application, and are sometimes higher for international applicants. These costs can quickly add up as you consider applying to multiple colleges. High school counseling offices, colleges, and NACAC (via the *NACAC Request for Application Fee Waiver Form*) all offer processes to assist with application fee waivers if the fees would be financially burdensome to you and your family. Check in with your counselor about your eligibility and the best course of action for qualifying for application fee waivers.

Application Decision Plans

Now that you have a solid idea of *where* you're planning to apply and the components you need to complete in your application, the next step is to figure out when you're going to apply by selecting the application decision plan that makes most sense for your goals and workflow. Each college determines which decision plans and subsequent deadlines they want to offer, and those policies can shift and change from year to year. Below are the most common decision plans you'll encounter during the application process:

Open Admission: Some colleges do not practice selective admission and offer admission to virtually all students who apply.

Rolling Admission (RA): Applications are reviewed as they are submitted and admissions offices render and release decisions throughout the admission cycle. Typically, with rolling applications, the earlier you apply, the earlier you hear back. Some institutions may have a final cut-off deadline late in the spring or summer, but many institutions keep rolling admissions open and available until they have filled their incoming first-year class, sometimes up until the start date of the term for which you are applying.

Early Action (EA): Students apply by an earlier deadline—usually in November or early December—to receive a decision in advance of the college's Regular Decision notification date. Decisions for Early Action applications are usually released between December–February. Given the common deadlines, most Early Action applications will only include your grades from freshman, sophomore, and junior year. There are some exceptions where colleges may ask for mid-term or mid-semester grades from senior year with an Early Action application. If admitted under an Early Action plan, you will typically have until May 1 to make your final enrollment decision.

Restrictive/Single Choice Early Action (REA): Similar to Early Action, REA applicants apply by an earlier deadline—usually in November—to receive an admission decision in advance of the Regular Decision notification date. In addition to the earlier deadline, REA applications come with specific regulations and restrictions the applicant must abide by. The most common restrictions prohibit students from submitting either a) any Early Decision applications, b) any other Early Action applications, or c) both a and b. Given the application deadline, most Restrictive Early Action applications will only include your grades from freshman, sophomore, and junior year. There are some exceptions where colleges may ask for mid-term or mid-semester grades from senior year with an REA application. Very few colleges use REA plans and you should always consult their individual websites to confirm what their specific restrictions are. If admitted under a Restrictive Early Action plan, you will typically have until May 1 to make your final enrollment decision.

Priority Admission: Students submit their application by an earlier deadline—usually November or December—in order to be considered and prioritized for scholarship opportunities or admission to special academic programs, such as Honors Colleges. If admitted under a Priority Admission plan, you will typically have until May 1 to make your final enrollment decision.

Early Decision (ED): ED is a **binding** admission plan that requires you to commit to a first-choice college at the time of application and, if admitted, you agree to enroll and withdraw your other college applications. You, the student, a parent or guardian, and your high school counselor are all required to sign an Early Decision Agreement as confirmation that you understand the binding, restrictive nature of this decision plan and that you commit to the Agreement's components.

Colleges may offer ED I and II options with different deadlines. Most ED I deadlines fall in November and applicants will receive their decision by mid-to-late December, while most ED II deadlines fall in January and applicants will receive their decision by the end of February. You may only have one active Early Decision application at a time. If admitted under an Early Decision plan, your deadline to officially enroll will be approximately two to four weeks after you receive your acceptance letter.

Given the common deadlines, Early Decision I applications may only include your grades from freshman, sophomore, and junior year. It is more common for colleges to ask for mid-term or mid-semester grades from senior year with an Early Decision I application.

As stated in Chapter 3, given the binding commitment it requires, applying Early Decision is essentially the ultimate demonstration of interest for those schools that track it, and can sometimes (not always) come with an advantage as a result. That being said, you should not apply Early Decision for the potential advantage alone. **An Early Decision application should be the result of a thorough research process and thoughtful conversations with your family and counselor where you have determined that this particular school is indeed your first choice and that you are comfortable not being able to compare other offers of admission or financial aid packages.** If you are uncomfortable with a binding commitment, it is important to your family to be able to weigh different offers and financial aid packages, or you just simply don't have a clear first choice, Early Decision may not be the appropriate decision plan for you.

Regular Decision (RD): Students submit their applications by a specified deadline—usually in January or February—and are typically notified of their decision by the end of March or in early April. If admitted under a Regular Decision plan, you will typically have until May 1 to make your final enrollment decision.

How Applications are Reviewed and Decisions Are Made

As with most facets of the college admission process, there is not one set way that applications are reviewed and final decisions are made; those processes are unique to each individual college and university. Even so, there are some unifying themes when it comes to application review to be aware of as you begin submitting yours.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, some colleges and universities have explicit GPA and/or standardized testing (if required) thresholds that, if met, you will be admitted. These colleges may not require essays, extracurricular lists, or letters of recommendations; their review process is entirely quantitative. This is most common at large public universities that admit the majority of their applicants.

Conversely, colleges that are more selective in their application process often employ a practice called **holistic admissions review**. Holistic review tasks admission counselors with considering the whole student when reviewing applications. In a holistic admission process, decisions are not made solely based on grades and testing, rather, all of the qualitative factors mentioned previously, including essays, extracurriculars, interviews, letters of recommendations, etc., are considered as an admission decision