

Early Action vs. Early Decision

Do you want to get your college applications in before everyone else? You can! Consider applying early action and early decision.

WHAT ARE EARLY ACTION AND EARLY DECISION?

Early action (EA) and early decision (ED) are programs many colleges have in place that let you submit your college applications early (usually in November) and get an admissions decision early (usually by January). If you have done your research and know there are schools you would attend above all others, then EA and ED could be great options for you. Be careful, though — although they sound similar, each program has different rules.

WHO OFFERS EARLY ACTION AND EARLY DECISION?

In addition to the schools listed above, there are many others that

offer EA and ED programs. The College Board counts more than 400. For example, Cal Tech, MIT, University of Chicago, Notre Dame and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor all offer EA programs. Duke, Northwestern, Johns Hopkins, Wake Forest and NYU all offer ED programs.

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO HAVE THE BEST CHANCE OF GETTING IN EARLY?

Early applicants have a higher percentage of admission than regular applicants, mostly because early applicants are sending a very clear message to the admissions office. They are saying, “Your school is my first choice!” Admissions officers want enthusiastic students, and early applicants are just that.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

1. Make a calendar of important dates and deadlines.

2. Take your standardized tests early. Don’t leave the ACT or SAT to the last minute.

3. Ask for your teacher recommendations as soon as you get back to school. Teachers are busy and will need time to complete this important part of your application.

4. Start working on your application essays as soon as the applications become available. You need to brainstorm, draft, and edit these essays carefully in order to present the best, most polished version of them possible.

Once you’ve submitted your applications, sit back and try to relax.

Have questions about applying to college? Explore college application articles at NextStepU.com/college-application.cat.

EARLY ACTION OR EARLY DECISION

Early Action programs are:

1. Non-exclusive. With a few notable exceptions, you can apply to as many schools via EA as you want.
2. Non-binding. If you get accepted via EA, you don’t have to attend that school. You also don’t have to withdraw all other college applications. EA programs are a good fit for students who have a few schools they would love to attend, but don’t have a front-runner.

Both Early Action and Early Decision programs are:

Early Action and Early Decision both have earlier deadlines than regular decision programs. With either program, you will get an admission decision much earlier than if you apply via regular decision.

Early Decision programs are:

1. Exclusive. You can only apply to one college via ED. You can still apply to other schools, but they all have to be via regular decision. With ED, students apply to their first-choice school early and promise to attend if accepted.
2. Binding. If you apply to a college via ED and you get in, you have to go. You will also have to withdraw all other applications to all other schools.