

The Pros and Cons of Early Admissions

Each year, more students file for early admissions. This is particularly true of those competing for entrance to the most selective institutions. But does it always make sense to file for early admissions-where in exchange for acceptance in November or December of your senior year in high school you guarantee to attend the college during the coming year? Here are some of the pros and cons about filing for early admission.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It helps you show the institution your strong and sincere interest.• Eliminates the hassle of filing for admissions to a number of schools, including the inevitable fallback institutions where your real interest may be minimal.• An early decision allows you to concentrate on high school senior year activities without having to spend so much time on college admissions.• If you are turned down for early admissions, you may still apply to the same college for the regular spring admissions cycle.• Even if you are rejected, you may still have time to apply to other schools.• You get references from teachers and transcripts from your school before the mid-winter crunch when everyone else is applying.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An early admissions decision locks you into a college, sometimes 10 or more months before school begins.• The college knows you are coming and may be less generous when awarding financial aid.• Your ideas about what you want in a college may change during your senior year.• Many colleges are swamped with great early admissions candidates. Your record might stand out more when competing with those in the regular admissions cycle.• You can't compare and negotiate financial aid offers unless you receive them from several schools.• Early on, it's much harder to tell where close friends (or even enemies) may be going to college.• If your grades are on the upswing, you'd do better applying when you know your fall term, senior year grades.• Many colleges are so swamped with early admissions candidates that they may take a harder line on their admission.

SHOULD I APPLY EARLY DECISION?

Early decision plans are designed for students who have evaluated their college choices at an early date, have determined which school is their first choice and want to settle their college decision relatively early in their senior year of high school. The rule for early decision is simple. Use it only if you are certain of the college that you want to attend. If a student decides to apply for early decisions, he should understand he is entering a binding agreement with the college. If he is admitted, he will attend and pay a non-refundable commitment deposit up front.

Therefore, if a student is not absolutely certain that she wants to attend a particular college, she may be able to opt for early action (she will find out early, but it's non-binding) or regular decision.

Some colleges will say that students have a better chance of admission if they apply early using early decision, but it really depends upon the applicant pool and how selective the college is overall. A student shouldn't count on early decision to increase his chances of admission greatly, but if he is sure that this college is the one, it won't hurt his chances if he lets them know that he cares enough to make this early commitment.

A couple of caveats: If a student's senior grades or SAT/ACT scores from his/her senior year will help his/her case, early decision or early admission probably isn't for him/her. If financial aid is a major consideration, students will only be able to get an estimate of their financial aid package-rather than a firm offer-if they apply for early decision. Students should keep these factors in mind when making their decision.

(Adapted from Kaplan's Guide to College Selection)

ADVANTAGES OF EARLY DECISION

You don't have to wait around as long to find out if you're in.

You don't have to spend time and money filling out applications.

You have more time to plan how to pay for college.

DISADVANTAGES OF EARLY DECISION

If you're accepted, you're obliged to attend.

You may discover a more suitable college later.

The early deadline may force you to submit a less polished application, unless you begin your application well ahead of time.

As with many aspects of the admissions process, there isn't one single answer that satisfies everyone. But if there aren't unusual circumstances or conditions, six applications should be sufficient. There's no advantage to applying to an excessive number of colleges-students can attend only one college at a time. It's important that students apply to colleges with varying degrees of selectivity: "reach", "level" and "safety".

REACH COLLEGES ARE THE MOST SELECTIVE AMONG THE CHOICES, AND OFTEN REPRESENT A STUDENT'S FIRST CHOICES.

LEVEL COLLEGES ARE THOSE THAT USUALLY ACCEPT STUDENTS WHOSE ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS TEND TO MATCH THOSE OF THE APPLICANT.

SAFETY COLLEGES ARE THOSE THAT WILL USUALLY ADMIT APPLICANTS WITH PROFILES LIKE THE STUDENT'S. THEY SHOULD EMBODY ALL QUALITIES THAT SHE WANTS FROM COLLEGES, EVEN THOUGH THE SCHOOL IS LESS SELECTIVE.

If a student selects two reaches, two or three level choices, and one or two safeties, he is well covered. If a student is seeking scholarships or other special opportunities, he may choose to apply to more schools. But for most the "rule of six" applies.

(Adapted from A Parent's Guide to College Admissions.)