



How Early Action and Priority Deadlines Work

Early Action, in contrast to Early Decision, refers to a non-binding application plan, but with some schools offering Restrictive Early Action or Single Choice Early Action plans, and others offering Early Action in lieu of or in addition to Early Decision options, it is easy to become confused.

“Early Action” refers to a college admissions plan that allows students who apply by a specific fall date (usually November 1 or November 15, but occasionally later) to receive a decision in the winter instead of having to wait until the spring. Sometime in December or January, they will hear that they have been admitted, denied, or deferred, the latter indicating that their application will be reconsidered along with the Regular Decision pool.

“Priority” deadlines are similarly non-binding, but schools providing this option render decisions on a rolling basis (sometimes every two weeks, for instance, beginning as early as September or October).

Why apply Early Action or Priority? The obvious answer is that receiving an offer of admission earlier than March of your senior year from a college you wouldn't mind attending reduces much of the stress high school students experience from the college admissions process.

Another reason is that doing so may increase your chances of being admitted either because it signals your enthusiasm to the school or because in the case of schools with rolling admissions, if you submit your application later, they may have already filled most of the class by the time they read it. In fact, some years ago The University of Maryland in College Park revealed that well over 90% of the students they admitted applied by the Priority deadline, so to be admitted from the regular decision pool, especially if coming from out of state, applicants had to be outstanding.

Furthermore, eligibility for the honors programs at many of these schools requires a priority application.

Traditionally, most schools have offered either binding Early Decision plans or non-binding Early Action plans, but lately some are offering both. In these cases, the

Early Decision applicants will have an advantage because their commitment to attend does wonders for the school's statistics. Remember, that every admissions office wants to be able to report a high yield (percentage of admitted students who attend) and consequently low admit rate because that's one of the ways they move up in the rankings published in magazines.

The vast majority of schools with Early Action or Priority plans don't care how many other places you submit your application early, so students applying to one school Early Decision commonly also apply Early Action or Priority to other schools as well. If they are admitted to their Early Decision school, they simply notify the others that they wish to withdraw their applications.

However, a small number of schools, among them Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Stanford, offer Restrictive or Single Choice Early Action, meaning that you will have until May 1st to declare your intentions even if they admit you in December, but they will not allow you to apply Early Decision elsewhere and they impose certain restrictions with respect to where else you may apply Early Action or Priority. You will need to read the colleges' websites carefully to understand the restrictions each school imposes. Take this, for example, from Stanford's website:

“Restrictive Early Action Policy

- Applicants do not apply to any other private college/university under their Early Action, Restrictive Early Action, Early Decision or Early Notification program.
- Applicants may apply to other colleges and universities under their Regular Decision option.

Exceptions

- The student may apply to any college/university with early deadlines for scholarships or special academic programs as long as the decision is non-binding and in order to be considered for the program, the student must apply in the early round or by an early deadline.
- The student may apply to any *public* college/university with a non-binding early application option.
- The student may apply to any college/university with a non-binding rolling admission process.
- The student may apply to any foreign college/university on any application schedule.

If you are considering applying to another college/university whose early application option does not appear to qualify as an exception, please contact the Office of Undergraduate Admission for clarification.”

Some prestigious state universities, among them University of Michigan and University of Illinois, receive many early applications from topnotch students who tend to view them as back-up options. In the past, students with top GPA's test scores, and extracurricular records were often admitted early, only to ultimately turn the offers down when they were admitted to Ivies or other highly prestigious

universities. This has been changing, though, especially this year, when many high flying students have been shocked to have their applications to Michigan, Illinois and the like deferred.

Nobody knows for sure why this is happening, but within the counseling community there is strong suspicion that it has nothing to do with the early application pool's having grown so much that the admissions offices had insufficient time to review all the applications; more likely these universities are seeking to protect their yield. If the students they defer opt to keep their applications in the pool, they have an excellent chance of being admitted in the spring. Meanwhile, though, they are seeing classmates with somewhat lower numbers being admitted early, most likely because they were deemed more likely to attend.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that demonstrating interest, especially by visiting the campus, can increase your chances in both the early and regular decision rounds even at these large universities, which in the past have denied that it mattered to them.