

COLLEGE APPLICATION TYPES: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



How are you applying to the schools on your college list — early decision, early action, early decision II, rolling admission or regular admission? Before making your selection, be sure you understand the differences, benefits and drawbacks of each option.

| | EARLY DECISION | EARLY ACTION | EARLY DECISION II | ROLLING ADMISSION | REGULAR ADMISSION |
|---|---|---|--|--|---|
| WHEN ARE APPLICATIONS DUE? | Early to mid-November | Early to mid-November | Mid-December to Mid-January | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varies by school Applications can be accepted as early as July and as late as April | Mid-December to Mid-January |
| WHEN DO YOU LEARN ADMISSION STATUS? | Mid-December | January or February | Mid-February | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varies by school Typically two to six weeks after receipt of application | March or April |
| IS ADMISSION BINDING? | Yes | No | Yes | No | No |
| CAN YOU APPLY TO MORE THAN ONE SCHOOL USING THIS METHOD? | No | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varies by school If early action is "restrictive," you can only apply to one school. | No | Yes | Yes |
| ARE ACCEPTANCE RATES HIGHER WITH THIS METHOD? | Yes | Yes | Yes | The earlier the application is received, the higher the acceptance rate. | No |
| WHEN DO YOU NEED TO ACCEPT ADMITTANCE? | Immediately | Typically May 1 | Immediately | Typically May 1 | Typically May 1 |
| CAN YOU COMPARE FINANCIAL AID PACKAGES? | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| BENEFITS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to finish application season early Learn admittance decision early Increased admittance odds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn admittance decision early Increased admittance odds Ability to compare financial aid packages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn admittance decision early Increased admittance odds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to finish application season early Potential to learn admittance decision early Potential to increase admittance odds Ability to compare financial aid packages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More time to complete applications Ability to compare financial aid packages |
| DRAWBACKS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to research, apply and decide on top choice school early Must commit to school early No flexibility with financial aid package | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to research, apply and decide on top choice school early | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must commit to school early No flexibility with financial aid package | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gain greatest advantage, need to research and apply early | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long wait for admission decision |

You're probably already familiar with early decision and early decision's less binding cousin, early action.

But you may not be aware that there's another member of the early application family—early decision II (ED II). Read on to learn what it is, how to apply for it, and whether ED II is an option for you.

What Are Early Decision and Early Action?

Before diving into ED II, here's a quick review on early decision (ED) and early action (EA). Like the names suggest, early decision and early action applications must be submitted early in the application process, typically in early November. ED is restrictive, which means you can only use it for one school, so it should be reserved for your top choice.

Applicants who choose one of these two early routes should learn their admission status by mid-December for ED and January or February for EA. An ED application is binding, meaning that you are committing to attend that school if admitted, regardless of the financial aid package offered. EA admission is non-binding, meaning you have a guaranteed spot at the school if admitted, but you're not obligated to attend.

What Is Early Decision II?

ED II is a relatively new application option offered by nearly 100 colleges and universities. What makes ED II different from ED? Essentially, it boils down to timing.

"With early decision II, the name is a little bit silly because it's not really that early," says Mandeel Heller Adler, founder of International College Counselors and author of *From Public School to the Ivy League*. "It's sort of like 'regular binding decision' if we wanted to give it a good name. It means that when you apply in the regular round, you're willing to bind yourself to the school." ED II is very similar to ED in that you're committing to attend the school should you get in, but the application

submission deadline is roughly when the regular round of applications are due.

When Are ED II Applications Due and When Will I Find Out?

ED II application deadlines vary by school, but they tend to fall in late December or early January, which coincides with the due dates for regular applications. Students who apply ED II should learn their admission status by mid-February, ahead of the regular decision letters, which are typically sent out in March and April. ED II is a good option for a student who wasn't accepted at their ED or EA school because it offers another chance to gain admission to college ahead of the regular decision process.

Is Early Decision II Binding?

Yes. When you apply ED II, it's just as binding as ED. You sign a contract that commits you to attending that school if admitted.

While neither the ED nor ED II contract is legally enforceable, opting not to attend your ED II school without extenuating circumstances—such as a major change in your life or financial situation—can negatively impact your admission at other colleges. Schools occasionally share lists of ED and ED II students with other schools, so if you appear on the early admitted list, you may not be admitted to other schools that have been made aware of your status.

What Are the Benefits of ED II?

The greatest advantage for students applying ED II is that it can improve their odds of admission. Applying ED or ED II won't help you get into a school that you're not qualified to attend, but it can put you ahead of the hundreds—or thousands—of regular decision applicants with similar credentials. The reason? It shows the school that you're committed to it, which can make you a more attractive applicant.

“From the college perspective, the huge benefit is that you find kids who are binding themselves to the school,” Adler says. “The

school knows that those kids will accept if the offer is given, which significantly benefits their yield.”

In addition, applying ED II has an advantage over applying through the regular timeline simply because so many spots have been filled through EA, ED, and EDII. There are fewer spots available once regular admission decisions are made.

Why Wouldn't I Apply ED II If It's Available?

You should only apply ED II to a particular school if you're certain that it is the one for you. If you're still undecided, ED II isn't a path you should pursue.

The other major concern with ED II is financial aid. Similar to ED, applying ED II means you're committing to a school if accepted, no matter what your award letter offers. If you're considering ED II, you must be sure that you're able to pay the full sticker price of that school. Being dissatisfied with your financial aid package is not an adequate reason to renege on your ED II admission.

If your top-choice school—or what emerges as your top choice once you learn your ED or EA admission status—offers ED II, it's definitely worth considering. First, be sure that you'd attend if admitted, and second, that you could afford the school no matter what financial package is offered. If you can check off those two criteria, applying ED II could be a smart move that boosts your chances of admission and brings the college application process to an early conclusion.