

Project Access USA

Early Action, Early Decision, and Regular Decision

What are the differences?

Early action is non-binding, whereas early decision is binding. Therefore, if you apply to a college through early action and you are accepted, then you still have the option whether to attend or not. If you apply to a college through early decision and are accepted, then you must attend the college. You can also apply to universities through single-choice early action (or “restrictive early action”), meaning that you are not required to commit to the university if accepted, but can only apply to one university through early action. You can either be accepted, denied, or deferred (not immediately accepted, but considered again with those applying regular decision) through these programs. All colleges offer the option of regular decision.

What are the advantages of each type?

Early decision acceptance rates are often significantly higher, so you should apply to a college as early decision if you feel strongly that this is the best university for you and you would 100% attend if admitted. Early action and early decision rates are typically higher than those of regular decision, although universities say this often reflects the quality of candidates applying rather than easier admission frameworks. Early decision admissions also do not allow the applicant time to hear back about financial aid, so an applicant should strongly consider what their typical financial aid offer would be (with an online financial aid calculator) before applying. More helpful information on the benefits and drawbacks can be found through the College Board [here!](#)

What are the typical deadlines?

Early action and early decision deadlines are typically in early November, and applicants will typically hear back sometime during December or January. Regular decision deadlines are typically in early January, and applicants will typically hear back sometime during March.

Which universities use which types of admissions?

- i. Early action: MIT
- ii. Single-choice early action: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Stanford,
- iii. Early decision: Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, University of Pennsylvania.
- iv. Regular decision: Berkeley, All universities.
- v. UChicago offers early action, early decision I and II, and regular decision.

Sources

College Board, "Early Decision & Early Action;" University admissions websites.

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