

Early Decision (ED) is the application process in which students make a commitment to a first-choice institution, where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. While pursuing admission under an ED plan, students may apply to other institutions, but may have only one ED application pending at a time. Should a student who applies for financial aid not be offered an award that makes attendance possible, the student may decline the offer of admission and be released from the ED commitment.

Early Action (EA) is the application process in which students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date. Students who are admitted under EA are not obligated to accept the institution's offer or to submit a deposit prior to May 1. Under non-restrictive EA, a student may apply to other colleges.

Restrictive Early Action (REA) is the application process in which students make application to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date. Institutions with REA plans place restrictions on student applications to other EA policies and agreements with students. Students admitted under the REA plan are not obliged to accept the offer prior to May 1.

(NACAC textbook. Fundamentals of College Admission Counseling)