

How to Handle a College Admissions Deferral

Most students who apply early-decision (ED) or early-action (EA) dream of receiving an admissions offer in the early application round.

With early decision and early action there are three typical outcomes. Students can be (1) admitted, (2) denied or (3) deferred.

The first two actions are straightforward and certain. You know for sure whether you are “in” or “out”.

The third outcome, admissions deferral, means that your application will be reconsidered and a decision will be rendered at a later date. For many students, being deferred feels like living in “limbo land”.



Some students who are deferred consider themselves rejected. While disappointment is a reasonable reaction, being objective and constructive can help you make the best of a less-than-ideal situation.

A good start is to look at the matter objectively. Until a few years ago, relatively few students were denied admission during the early round. That’s changed as many schools have recognized that deferring a student, who is almost certain not be admitted, is giving the candidate false hope. As a result, many colleges that offer ED and EA have started to deny a significant percentage of applicants in the early round.

As a deferred applicant, while you are clearly not a top choice candidate, keep in mind that the college’s admission team was sufficiently impressed with your credentials and application to want review your application a second time, comparing you to the larger applicant pool. Further, don’t forget that not all the students currently attending the university were top-choice candidates! Many were admitted during the regular round, and some were accepted off the wait list. After a student is admitted, how and when an offer of admission was made, is a moot point.

While a deferral usually means additional months of waiting, there is still a reasonable chance of being granted admission. In addition, since admission during the regular decision is not binding, deferred students who are subsequently admitted can consider others offers of admission and compare financial aid packages.

Here are some things deferred applicants should do to enhance the likelihood of admission and maximize college options:

1 – Carefully follow directions from the admissions department. You may be asked to submit mid-year grades, additional test scores or other information.

2- Review your college list and apply to other schools. For many students a deferral is a wake up call! Make sure you are applying to the right mix of schools including a sufficient number of colleges where there is a good or better likelihood that you will be offered admission.

3- Share updated information and new accomplishments, with the admissions staff. While the admissions team is not likely to appreciate a barrage of disparate information promoting your candidacy, a well-written update letter and other carefully selected correspondence may be well received. Often the admissions staff will provide advice on desirable opportunities to strengthen your application.

4- Touch base with your interviewer and let the person know you were deferred. Your interviewer may offer some worthwhile suggestions, or may even send a letter or email to the admissions office further recommending you.

5- Keep your grades up. Many colleges give strong consideration to first semester grades from senior year!

6- Consider submitting no more than a few letters of recommendation from people who can provide objective input regarding your abilities, character, strengths, etc. Check with the college first to see if these types of letters are welcome before pursuing additional recommendations.

7- Stay involved. Continue to be active in clubs, sports and other activities. Some colleges and universities are randomly auditing applications to promote honesty.

Finally, don't panic or give up hope. Maintain a positive outlook as you pursue other colleges, complete applications and communicate with people from the college that deferred you.