

College Admission Glossary

What's a transcript? What's the difference between early action and early decision? When applying to college, you are bound to come across unfamiliar terms. This glossary can help you make sense of all the information you're sorting through.

ACT

A standardized college admission test that features four main sections: English, math, reading, and science—and an optional essay section.

Admission Tests

Also known as college entrance exams, these tests are designed to measure students' skills and help colleges determine if students are ready for college-level work. The ACT and the College Board's SAT® are two standardized admission tests used in the United States. The word "standardized" means that the test measures the same thing in the same way for everyone who takes it.

Articulation Agreement

An agreement between two-year and four-year colleges that makes it easier to transfer credits between them. It spells out which courses count for degree credit and the grades needed to get credit.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA)

An agreement many colleges follow that gives applicants until May 1 to accept or decline offers of admission. This agreement gives applicants time to receive responses from most of the colleges to which they have applied before deciding on one.

Class Rank

A measurement of how your academic achievement compares with that of other students in your grade. This number is usually determined by using a weighted GPA that takes into account both your grades and the difficulty of the courses you've taken.

Coalition Application

A standard application form accepted by members of the Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success. You can use this application to apply to any of the more than 90 colleges and universities that are members of the Coalition. For more information, visit: coalitionforcollegeaccess.org

College Application Essay

An essay that a college requires students to write and submit as part of their applications. Some colleges require applicants to answer specific questions, while others simply ask them to write about themselves. Colleges may refer to this as a "personal statement."

College Credit

What you get when you successfully complete a college-level course. You need a certain number of credits to graduate with a degree. Colleges may also grant credit for scores on exams, such as those offered by the College Board's AP Program and CLEP®.

Common Application

A standard application form accepted by all colleges that are members of the Common Application association. You can fill out this application once and submit it to any one—or several—of the nearly 700 colleges that accept it. For more information, visit: commonapp.org

Deferred Admission

Permission from a college that has accepted you to postpone enrolling in the college. The postponement is usually for up to one year.

Early Action (EA)

An option to submit your applications before the regular deadlines. When you apply early action, you get admission decisions from colleges earlier than usual. Early action plans aren't binding, which means that you don't have to enroll in a college if you are accepted early action. Some colleges have an early action option called EA II, which has a later application deadline than their regular EA plan.

Early Decision (ED)

An option to submit an application to your first-choice college before the regular deadline. When you apply early decision, you get an admission decision earlier than usual. Early decision plans are binding. You agree to enroll in the college immediately if admitted and offered a financial aid package that meets your needs. Some colleges have an early decision option called ED II, which has a later application deadline than their regular ED plan.

Financial Aid

Money given or loaned to you to help pay for college. Financial aid can come from federal and state governments, colleges, and private organizations.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

A number that shows overall academic performance. It's computed by assigning a point value to each grade you earn. See also Weighted Grade Point Average.

Legacy Applicant

A college applicant with a relative (usually a parent or grandparent) who graduated from that college. Some colleges give preference to legacy applicants (also called "legacies").

Need-Blind Admission

A policy of making admission decisions without considering the financial circumstances of applicants. Colleges that use this policy may not offer enough financial aid to meet a student's full need.

Open Admission

A policy of accepting any high school graduate, no matter what their grades are, until all spaces in the incoming class are filled. Almost all two-year community colleges have an open-admission policy. However, a college with a general open-admission policy may have admission requirements for certain programs:

Placement Tests

Tests that measure the academic skills needed for college-level work. These tests cover reading, writing, math, and sometimes other subjects. Placement test results help determine what courses you are ready for and whether you would benefit from remedial classes.

Priority Date or Deadline

The date by which your application—whether it's for college admission, student housing, or financial aid—must be received to be given the strongest consideration.

Registrar

The college official who registers students. The registrar may also be responsible for keeping permanent records and maintaining your student file.

Rolling Admission

An admission policy of considering each application as soon as all required information (such as high school records and test scores) has been received, rather than setting an application deadline and reviewing applications in a batch. Colleges that use a rolling admission policy usually notify applicants of admission decisions quickly.

SAT

The College Board's standardized college admission test. It features three main sections: math, reading, and writing, including an optional written essay.

For more information, visit: sat.org

SAT Subject Tests

Hour-long, content-based college admission tests that allow you to showcase achievement in specific subject areas: English, history, math, science, and languages. Some colleges use SAT Subject Tests™ to place students into the appropriate courses as well as to make admission decisions. Based on your performance on the test(s), you could potentially fulfill basic requirements or earn credit for introductory-level courses.

For more information, visit: satsubjecttests.org

Sophomore Standing

The status of a second-year student. A college may grant sophomore standing to an incoming freshman if they have earned college credits through courses, exams, or other programs.

Transcript

The official record of your coursework at a school or college. Your high school transcript is usually required for college admission and for some financial aid packages.

Transfer Student

A student who enrolls in a college after having attended another college.

Undergraduate

A college student who is working toward an associate or a bachelor's degree.

Universal College Application

A standard application form accepted by all colleges that are Universal College Application members. You can fill out this application once and submit it to any one—or several—of the more than 3,044 colleges that accept it. For more information, visit: universalcollegeapp.com

Waitlist

The list of applicants who may be admitted to a college if space becomes available. Colleges wait to hear if all the students they accepted decide to attend. If students don't enroll and there are empty spots, a college may fill them with students who are on the waitlist.

Weighted Grade Point Average (GPA)

A grade point average that's calculated using a system that assigns a higher point value to grades in more difficult classes. For example, some high schools assign the value of 5.0 (instead of the standard 4.0) for an A earned in an AP class.