

College Admission Glossary

ACT: a college admission test with 4 main sections (English, Math, Reading, and Science) as well as an optional essay section.

Admission Rate: the percentage of applicants who are admitted to a college.

Advanced Placement (AP): a College Board program that offers college-level classes and tests to high-school students. Students with high scores on AP tests might receive college credit or advanced standing.

College Application Essay: an essay that students write and submit as part of their application. Most schools provide a prompt that you respond to.

College Board: an organization that creates and administers standardized tests used in school admission and placement (SAT, SAT Subject Tests, PSAT/NMQST, AP, and CLEP tests).

College Credit: when a college level course is passed, the student receives credit for the course. A set number and type of credits are needed to graduate.

Common Application: an admission form that applicants use to apply to over 700 member colleges in the United States, as well as in Canada, China, and many European countries.

Cooperative Education (Co-op): when colleges combine classroom-based education with practical experience.

CSS/Financial Aid Profile: financial-aid application form used by private colleges and scholarship programs to award non-federal funds. Used as a supplement to the FAFSA, it's much more detailed.

Demonstrated Interest: when student shows a college (through visits, contact with personnel, etc.) that they are considering the school.

Deferred Admission: when a student who's applied for early admission is deferred to the regular pool of applicants and will be considered for admission with regular-decision applicants.

Dual Enrollment: when students are enrolled in 2 separate but academically-related institutions (such as high-school students taking college courses).

Early Action: when a student applies before the regular admissions date and generally receives a decision by January 1st. The student isn't obligated to attend if accepted. Students are not limited to the number of schools that they may apply to this way (though there are schools with restrictive early action).

Early Decision: when a student applies to their top-choice school before the regular admissions date and generally receive a decision by January 1st. If accepted, the student is obliged to attend only that college. Students may only apply via early decision to one school.

Early Decision II: early decision, just with later deadlines.

Expected Family Contribution (EFC): a measure of a family's finances, calculated according to a formula established by law. The family's taxed and untaxed income, assets, benefits (such as unemployment and Social Security), family size, and the number of current college students in the family are all considered.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): the official form used to request federal, state, and school assistance in paying for college. The FAFSA is used to determine the student's level of need and establish their expected family contribution (EFC).

Federal Work-Study: a type of financial aid that a school awards to a student who has demonstrated financial need according to the FAFSA. The student works for, and is paid by, the school (up to a dollar limit).

Financial Aid: any scholarships, loans, or employment offered to help a student meet college expenses.

Gap Year: a one-year break between high school and college, or school and work.

Grade Point Average (GPA): the average value of the final grades earned in courses during high school.

Grant: a form of aid that does not have to be repaid.

Interview: an opportunity for a student to share their goals and experiences as part of the admission process.

Legacy Admission: a preference in admission practiced by some institutions for an applicant related to any alumni of the school.

Need-Blind Admission: when a college doesn't consider a student's ability to pay as a factor in admission.

Open Admission: an admission policy of accepting any high-school graduate, regardless of grades or standardized test scores.

Pell Grant: a federally-funded grant awarded solely because of financial need.

Priority Deadline: the date by which an application must be received to be given the strongest consideration.

PSAT/NMQST: a test administered by the College Board and cosponsored by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. High-school juniors are screened for the National Merit Scholarship Program. The top 1% of students generally qualify as semi-finalists.

Recommendation Letter: a letter used by colleges to discover a student's personal qualities, including academics, personal traits, and contributions to the student's high school and community.

Registrar: a college administrator responsible for student records and class enrollment.

Regular Decision: Students apply by January / February and receive a decision by early April. There is not a restriction to the number of schools to which the student may apply, and acceptance is not binding.

Rolling Admission: when applications are reviewed as they arrive. Applicants are generally notified within 6 to 8 weeks. Places in the incoming class may be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

SAT: a college admission test meant to show how prepared a student is for college by measuring key skills such as reading comprehension, computational ability, and clarity of expression.

SAT Subject Test: a college admission test focused on particular topics to demonstrate a student's particular strengths and interests.

Score Choice: an option for students who have taken any SAT more than once that allows them to submit only their best test score to colleges.

Stafford Loan: a federal student loan that's either subsidized (the government pays the interest while the student is in school at least part-time) or unsubsidized (paying the interest is optional while the student is in school and all unpaid interest becomes part of the loan after the student leaves school).

Test Optional: when colleges are willing to make an admission decision without using SAT, ACT, or other test scores.

TOEFL: a standardized test to measure the English language ability of non-native speakers seeking to enroll in English-speaking colleges.

Transcript: the official record of coursework at a school. May also include honors and activities. It is required for college admission.

Waitlist: a group of potential students held in reserve after a college makes its admissions decisions. If openings occur, students on the waitlist may be offered admission.