

College Preparation Glossary of Terms

ACT (AMERICAN COLLEGE TESTING PROGRAM)

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

ADMISSION TESTS

Also known as college entrance exams, these are tests designed to measure students' skills and help colleges evaluate how ready students are 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.

APPLICATION FEE

Many colleges will require a non-refundable application fee. Waivers are available for students who are unable to pay the fee.

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 you need to earn to get credit.

ASSOCIATE DEGREE

A two year degree granted after satisfactory completion of study at a community/junior college or some four year colleges.

CANDIDATES REPLY DATE AGREEMENT (CRDA) (or "DEPOSIT DAY")

An agreement many colleges follow that gives applicants until May 1 to accept or decline offers of admission. This agreement gives students time to get responses from most of the colleges they have applied to 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

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.

COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY

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

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. Go to the Common Application.

CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

A process of allowing high school students to take college-level courses that can be transferred to a college for credit.

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CREDIT HOURS

The number of hours assigned to a class. 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.

CSS/FINANCIAL AID PROFILE

A financial aid form required by many colleges, universities and private scholarship programs in addition to the FAFSA. CSS/PROFILE is used in awarding private financial aid funds. Students pay a fee to register for the CSS/PROFILE and have reports sent to institutions and programs that use it

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.

DEFERRED DECISION

A delay by a school in making a decision to accept or deny a student. The applicant will be notified if they have been deferred.

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 are not binding, which means that you do not 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.

EXPECTED FAMILY CONTRIBUTION

The amount a student's family is expected to pay toward the cost of college.

FAFSA

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a form that all students to be considered for federal financial aid. Many colleges also require it for their in-house aid. For more FAFSA terms and information see [How to Complete Your FAFSA](#).

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.

FINANCIAL AID AWARD LETTER

A letter from a college or other financial aid sponsor that tells the student how much aid is being offered. The award letter also usually explains how a student's financial need was determined, describes the contents of the financial aid package, and outlines any conditions attached to the award

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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.

HIGH SCHOOL CODE NUMBER

The six-digit code number assigned to every high school by the American College Testing Program (ACT) and the College Board (SAT) for purposes of school identification. The number is required on all ACT and SAT registration forms, as well as college applications and many scholarship applications.

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").

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

A letter written by a high school teacher, counselor, or other adult recommending the student for admission.

MERIT-BASED AID

Financial aid based on the student's achievements whether academic, athletic, musical, or other achievement.

NEED-BASED AID

Financial aid awarded based on the student's financial need.

NEED-BLIND ADMISSION

A policy of making admission decisions without considering the financial circumstances of applicants.

NET PRICE CALCULATOR

A tool on college websites that helps students calculate what they will actually pay each year for college at that school. The federal government requires schools to post this calculator.

OPEN ADMISSION

A policy of accepting any high school graduate, no matter what his or her grades are, until all spaces in the incoming class are filled. Almost all two-year community colleges have an open-admission policy.

PLACEMENT TESTS

Tests that measure the academic skills needed for college-level work. They 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.

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REGISTRAR

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

REGULAR DECISION

The standard admission process and timeline for a school.

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, which includes a written essay.

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 Subject Tests to place students into the appropriate courses as well as in admission decisions. Based on your performance on the test(s), you could potentially fulfill basic requirements or earn credit for introductory-level courses.

SOPHOMORE STANDING

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

STUDENT LOANS

A method of paying for college through borrowing money. For more information about student loans see The Complete Guide to Paying for College.

TRANSCRIPT

The official record of your course work 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. Go to the Universal College Application.

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WAITING LIST

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 waiting list.

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.