



College Waitlist

Sometimes instead of either admitting or rejecting a student, a college will offer the student a place on its wait list. Unfortunately, this can cause a lot of anxiety for students and their families because the process is unclear and there is no guarantee of a positive outcome.

Who Gets Waitlisted

There are various reasons why students are wait listed. Now that more students are applying to more colleges, it has become harder for colleges to predict which admitted students will enroll. Consequently, colleges are wait listing more students as a form of insurance. Colleges may wait list qualified students whose grade point average or test scores are a little lower than the students who received an offer. Then, the lower statistics do not bring down the average test scores of the new freshman class, but the college can accept such students if they absolutely have to in order to fill all available slots.

Other students may be wait listed because they have not shown enthusiasm for the school by visiting the campus, meeting their respective college admissions representative when they are in the student's area, conversing with their representative via other avenues such as email, or just not showing enthusiasm for attending the campus in the written format of the application. They may calculate that the student is not interested enough to enroll if the college admits the student.

In addition, even overqualified students are sometimes waitlisted because the college assumes the student has applied to many of the very competitive schools and will not choose them over one of these other schools instead. In both cases, by wait listing the student the college is acting to protect its yield—the percentage of accepted students who actually enroll at the college. A high acceptance rate makes the college look less exclusive or desirable and can hurt its ranking and prestige. Colleges like to show a low acceptance rate of students who receive an offer of admittance and a high yield of admitting those who do receive an offer.

Another factor is that colleges have to hedge their financial aid budgets. They can only accept as many students with financial need as their budget allows. When a college offers an early action or early decision plan, many admission offers have already been made by November. So when regular decisions are made in March, a wait list can serve as a way to play it safe until the college has acceptances in hand and knows how much financial

aid money is left.

Wait List Statistics

Colleges and universities vary widely in how many students they wait list and in how many wait listed students they ultimately admit. Not all colleges report their wait list statistics, but those that do are searchable on the [College Board website](#). Go to the College Board's website and type in the name of a school in the search box. After you are directed to the school's profile, click on the "Applying" hyperlink. Then look for "Wait List Statistics". The statistics are somewhat grim. It is not uncommon to have 100's to 1,000's of students on a wait list. Sometimes the number on the wait list even exceeds the number of spots in the freshman class. Do not infer that because a college accepted a high or low number from their wait list in the previous year that the same will hold true the following year. Circumstances vary year to year so while a college may report having taken 50 students from its wait list last year, this year that number may be zero.

Ranked Waitlists

Some schools rank their waitlists. Students should check with the college's admissions office to find out whether it ranks their list or not. If students can find out where they are ranked on the list they can better gauge their odds of admission. However, many schools do not rank their wait lists. Rather, they use the wait list as a means of replacing a student who declines admission with a student who is similarly situated, e.g. to fill an orchestra spot, to replace someone on a sports team, to admit another student within a particular major, etc.

First Decisions: TAKE ACTION

The first thing wait listed students should do is accept an offer from one of the colleges or universities that did accept them and pay the enrollment deposit to that school by May 1. The student must then decide whether or not to accept a place on the wait list of the other school. *Students are advised to only accept a place on the wait list if the student intends to enroll at the college if admitted.* If the student decides to accept a place on the list, the student should follow the college's instructions for accepting the wait list invitation, usually mailing in a card or electronically accepting via the student's online portal with that college. *It is important to keep in mind that colleges may have very little financial aid left for students admitted from their wait list.*

Strategies for Getting Off the Waitlist

Most students will not get off the wait list, but there are ways to improve the odds. Most

importantly, a wait listed student needs to be proactive; the student should be eager and creative without appearing distraught or desperate.

1. The student should mail an eloquent “letter of enthusiasm” to their assigned college admissions officer. If appropriate, this letter should state that the college is the student’s first choice and that the student will definitely enroll if admitted. The letter should also state why the college and the student are a great fit, identifying specific academic programs or activities. The letter should point out what the student will contribute to the campus community. If the student is able to pay for the college without financial aid, this is the time to let it be known with wording such as, “My parents have been saving and investing for years so that I could attend my dream school- Your College Name. My enrollment is not contingent upon receiving financial aid.”

Some sources also suggest having the school counselor contact the college’s regional admissions officer on the student’s behalf. It may also be a good time to send an extra letter of recommendation if it will add a perspective they have not already heard. It could be from a teacher different than the one who submitted a recommendation at the time of the application, or anyone else who knows the student well and can speak of their recent accomplishments, character, academic abilities, or special talent.

2. The student should update the college with any recent accomplishments, e.g. took the SAT/ACT again and scored higher, won an academic competition, founded a new club, nominated for a special honor, raised a grade in a class, etc.
3. The student should study hard to maintain strong grades and stay involved in high school and community activities.
4. The student should continue to periodically (every two weeks) touch base with the admissions officer, indicating continued interest and enthusiasm. Some students continue to communicate with colleges even after the official date for consideration is closed.
5. If the student is still on the wait list after graduation, the student should update the college with a final transcript and any new AP and IB test scores.

What Students Should Not Do

- Do not ask alumni of the school to make calls on their behalf.
- Do not let their parents interfere. The student needs to be the point of contact.
- Do not tell the admissions officer stories such as how they have attended every football game with their family since preschool and simply can’t imagine

attending any other school. Keep the reasons for wanting to attend related to special programs and academic opportunities.

- Do not pester the admissions office—don't call/email them over and over again, don't show up at the admissions office. Keep the communication on task as described above.
- Do not try gimmicks such as sending the admissions office cookies, etc. It won't work and might even backfire. This is a matter to handle maturely.

If accepted off the wait list, be ready to make a decision very quickly. Typically the offer will be made via a phone call and the timeframe to respond will be very short; 24-48 hours is common.

If a student changes their mind, and no longer wants to be on the wait list, the student should immediately contact the admissions representative for their region and ask to be removed from the list and/or do so via the student's online portal with that college.

In the End

Be prepared not to be accepted. Be prepared to attend elsewhere. Move forward. There is more than one good fit. The student can find happiness elsewhere!