

# 5 Myths About Early College Applications



Stanford University offers Restrictive Early Action and Regular Decision options to first-year applicants.

High school seniors across the country are beginning to feel the pressure of impending college deadlines. Although the application deadline of most U.S. colleges and universities is January 1, the ‘early round’ of admissions ends on November 1 (or sometimes 15th). At my college consultancy, we encourage all of the students we work with to apply to an early decision school and a few early action schools. I’ve found that many students have misconceptions about the early decision process based on things they read online or heard from their peers and even guidance counselors. Here are the five worst myths and misconceptions I’ve come across:

## **Myth 1: Early decision and early action are basically the same.**

Early decision and early action sound pretty similar, and they do both mean that you apply early to a school, but getting accepted via these two routes holds vastly different implications. Early decision is binding: should you get accepted to your ED school, that is where you will spend your next four years. It means when you apply ED you should have absolute certainty that the school is your dream school and you are 100% certain you want to attend. Its binding nature

means early decision is more of a boost—schools want to protect their yield rate, and an easy way to do that is by admitting more students in the ED round. Early action, in contrast, is non-binding, and should you get accepted you can still consider your other college options. Unfortunately, because it's non-binding, it has far less of an impact on your admissions chances.

**Myth 2: I can break my early decision agreement and go to a different school.**

This misconception usually comes directly from the students' misunderstanding of the agreement they sign in order to apply ED. The general thinking is, "They can't force me to go, so what's the worst that can happen?" This is absolutely the wrong thinking — breaking your ED agreement is not only unethical and unfair to your peers, but also an excellent way to torpedo your chances at any other school. Yes, your ED school can't force you to attend — but you can't go to a different school instead. When (not if) any other school finds out, either through the Common App or from your guidance counselor, they will rescind your acceptance.

**Myth 3: They accept me before I get my fall grades, so my senior grades don't matter.**

This is another misconception based on a simplified understanding of the early decision process. Yes, many high schools don't report senior grades in time for colleges making decisions in the early round — but many do or send mid-year reports that you may not be aware of. Moreover, if your grades slip too badly, or if you drop all your AP classes in favor of easier ones, it's entirely possible that your acceptance will get rescinded.

**Myth 4: I shouldn't apply early decision unless I've visited the school.**

Don't get me wrong — you should only apply to a school early decision if it is one of your top choices and you would be absolutely thrilled to attend. But many students, especially international students, step onto campus for the first time at the beginning of their freshman year and have amazing experiences. College is what you make of it, so no campus tour is ever going to give you a full picture of what your experience would be like. Nowadays, there are plenty of online resources that will give you as much of a sense of a school as visiting it. You can look through the school's hashtag on Instagram and Twitter, watch YouTube videos made by current students, and even go on virtual tours using a website like [www.campusreel.org](http://www.campusreel.org).

**Myth 5: I shouldn't apply early decision if I need financial aid.**

In my view, this is the most pervasive and most damaging myth about the early decision process. Because students only learn their financial aid package after being accepted, many students understandably avoid committing to a school that they may not be able to afford. However, most colleges have extremely detailed calculators on their websites that can predict your EFC (expected family contribution) with startling accuracy — and if what you get after applying ED is significantly different from this calculation, you will be able to back out of the ED agreement.

Early decision isn't for everyone, but for most students, the potential benefit of increased admissions chances outweighs the potential negative of regretting your school choice. Being completely done with the college process by around December 15th has emotional and mental

benefits that can't be overstated. The best way to avoid regret, not just in ED but in life, is to be completely sure of your decision, so think carefully before applying to a school early decision, and make sure that you aren't basing your decisions on misinformation. [Christopher Rim](#)

Tags Early action, Early decision, College admission, High school seniors