



The College Search Handbook

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Making the Final Decision

It is April, graduation is in sight, and you have received decisions from all the colleges to which you applied. You might think that the worst of the decision process is over. And you might be mistaken.

Every spring, several seniors will state that they wish they had only received one acceptance because making the final

decision is so difficult (of course, they would be deeply disappointed if they had actually been accepted by only one school). Others are stressed out because they are in limbo, on a waiting list at the college they want to attend. And others will be dealing with the hurt and disappointment of being rejected.

Here are some steps you should take in making the final decision:

- May 1 is the National Candidates' Reply Date, the date by which you must decide where you will enroll. You must make a deposit to one, and only one, college by May 1, even if you are still waiting to hear about getting off a wait list.
- You may not make a deposit at more than one college. It is considered unethical to send more than one deposit, and colleges do not look kindly upon the practice. The one acceptable exception is if you are admitted off a wait list, in which case you will lose the first deposit. You should make a decision by May 1, but if you get caught in a bind you may request an extension from the colleges involved.
- Once you have determined where you will attend, you have an obligation to inform any college where you have been accepted but will not be attending. If the college does not provide a reply card, write a thank you note to the admissions office thanking them for their consideration and telling them where you plan to enroll.



If You Are Having Trouble Deciding

- You might want to go and revisit the schools you are still considering. Even if you have visited before, you will look at things differently because of the fact that the decision is much closer. Many colleges have special visitation programs for accepted students during the month of April.
- Talk through your options with your parents, friends, or the guidance counselors.
- Make a list of pros and cons for each school. Writing them down may help clarify your own thinking.
- Go with your instincts. If you have done your homework and thought through the choice carefully, trust your feelings. Every year some students struggle with the decision, then wake up during one of the final days of April knowing what they are going to do. Don't second guess yourself; it is unlikely that you will make a bad decision.

If You Want to Get Off a Wait List

- Read carefully the information that comes with the Wait List letter. Many colleges will provide information on Wait List activity during the past five years as well as an explanation of how the Wait List works.
- Send in the reply card immediately to indicate your intention to stay on the Wait List.
- Meet with your guidance counselor to discuss a strategy for getting off the Wait List.
- Contact the admissions office if there is additional information to update your file.

If You Are Rejected

- One of the difficult things about the college admission process is that you face the possibility of true rejection for perhaps the first time. You can do everything right and still not end up with the result you want, and that's a hard lesson to learn.
- If you are rejected, it's important to deal with your feelings. Colleges almost never change decisions unless there is additional information to add to your file. If you don't understand the decision, talk to your guidance counselor.
- It's easier said than done, but it's more productive to focus on your options than worry about the options you don't have. You almost have to adopt the attitude, "If they don't want me, then I really wouldn't want to go there anyway."

Stay Out of Trouble

- All college acceptances are conditional, based on an expectation that your credentials will not change significantly after you are accepted. Keep your grades up, as colleges do not buy into “senior slump” as a legitimate condition. Your final transcript will be sent to the college where you plan to enroll, and it is not unheard of for a college to rescind the acceptance of a student whose grades drop significantly.
- The other thing you must avoid is getting into disciplinary or honor trouble. If you are suspended after college applications have been sent, you will be required to write to every college and inform them of the situation. In most cases, they will be understanding if the offense isn’t serious and if you are remorseful and learn from your mistake, but recently several students have put their acceptances in jeopardy not from the disciplinary or honor offense itself, but their attempt to explain it. In the unpleasant event that you find yourself in this situation, your guidance counselor will likely work with you in dealing with the consequences.

