

I've Been Waitlisted. What Now?

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Question: I've Been Waitlisted. What Now?

Waitlists. In the spring, college applicants begin discovering those fat and skinny letters in their mailboxes. They tend to begin something like this: "Congratulations! . . ." or "After careful consideration, we're sorry to inform you . . ." But what about that third type of letter, the one that is neither acceptance nor rejection? Thousands upon thousands of students find themselves in college admissions limbo after having been placed on a waiting list. (Related article: ["How to Get Off a Waitlist"](#)¹)

Answer: What should you do now? Should you accept a position on the waitlist? Should you get angry at the school for waitlisting you and decide you didn't want to go there anyway? Do you go ahead and put down a deposit at a school where you've been accepted, even if your waitlist school is your first choice? Do you simply sit around and wait?

The answers to these questions, of course, vary depending upon your situation and the schools to which you applied. In general, however, you should move forward as if you've been rejected. Why? Because the math generally isn't in your favor.

Here's how waitlisting works: All colleges want a full incoming class. Their financial well-being is dependent upon full classrooms and full residence halls. So, when admissions officers send out acceptance letters, they make a conservative estimate of their yield (the percentage of admitted students who will actually enroll). In case the yield falls short of their projections, they need some students on back-up who can fill out the incoming class. These are the students on the waitlist.

Most schools send out a letter asking you if you will accept a position on the waitlist. If you refuse, that's the end of the story. If you accept, you then wait. How long you wait depends on the school's enrollment picture. Students have been known to receive acceptances from the waitlist a week before classes start. May and June are more typical notification times.

It's important that you have a sense of the math, for in most cases the numbers aren't encouraging. The examples below vary widely, from Penn State where 80% of waitlisted students were admitted, to Middlebury College where 0% were offered admission. The norm tends to be in the 10% range, which is why you should move on with other options rather than pin your hopes on the waitlist.

Sample Waitlist Data

- [Cornell University](#)²
 - Number waitlisted: 3,213
 - Number who accepted a place on waitlist: 1,976
 - Number admitted from waitlist: 279
 - Percentage admitted from waitlist: 14%
- [Grinnell College](#)³

- Number waitlisted: 740
 - Number who accepted a place on waitlist: 279
 - Number admitted from waitlist: 16
 - Percentage admitted from waitlist: 6%
- **Haverford College**⁴
 - Number waitlisted: 732
 - Number who accepted a place on waitlist: 305
 - Number admitted from waitlist: 10
 - Percentage admitted from waitlist: 3%
- **Middlebury College**⁵
 - Number waitlisted: 1,231
 - Number who accepted a place on waitlist: 603
 - Number admitted from waitlist: 0
 - Percentage admitted from waitlist: 0%
- **Penn State University, University Park**⁶
 - Number waitlisted: 1,828
 - Number who accepted a place on waitlist: 1,704
 - Number admitted from waitlist: 1,356
 - Percentage admitted from waitlist: 80%
- **Skidmore College**⁷
 - Number waitlisted: 1,584
 - Number who accepted a place on waitlist: 522
 - Number admitted from waitlist: 59
 - Percentage admitted from waitlist: 11%
- **University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**⁸
 - Number waitlisted: 8,385
 - Number who accepted a place on waitlist: 2,776
 - Number admitted from waitlist: 525
 - Percentage admitted from waitlist: 19%
- **Yale University**⁹
 - Number waitlisted: 728
 - Number who accepted a place on waitlist: 204
 - Number admitted from waitlist: 56
 - Percentage admitted from waitlist: 27%

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