

What to Do if You're Wait-Listed

You've sent in your applications. Now you're waiting for a letter from each college you applied to, either offering you admission or turning down your application. And there's another possibility: a college may put you on a waiting list.

This can happen when you meet the admission requirements, but the college has already accepted the number of applicants it has room for. If a spot becomes available later on, you may be offered a place.

The college won't make you this offer, though, until after the May 1 decision deadline has passed. If you're on the waiting list, it's hard to know what your chances of acceptance are.

If you get wait-listed by one of your top choices, let admission officers know why you're a great fit for their college.

Your next step is to respond and let the college know whether or not you want to stay on the waiting list. It makes sense to keep your spot on the list only if you're really interested in going to the college.

Before you decide, find out whether there are any conditions attached to being wait-listed. For example, since you're notified later than other applicants, you may have fewer housing and financial aid options.

Even if you decide to remain on the waiting list, prepare to attend another college. Choose the best fit from the colleges that accepted you, fill out the paperwork and send a deposit. You'll

forfeit this deposit if the college that wait-listed you offers you a place and you accept. Still, you need to be sure you have a place in an incoming freshman class next fall.

If you decide to stay on the waiting list, be proactive. Here's what you can do to boost your chances of being accepted.

Get a sense of your chances of admission. Contact the admission office to find out if the college ranks wait-listed students or if it has a priority list. Most are willing to let you know your status. The higher you rank on the list the better your chances of being accepted.

Write a letter to the admission office. The college has already decided that you have the academic credentials for admittance. Now's the time to mention any additional nonacademic factors that might help your case — any new achievements or supplemental information. Emphasize your strong desire to attend the college and make a case for why you're a good fit. You can tell them that you'll enroll if they accept you, but only if you're absolutely certain you will.

Study hard. This is no time to slack off. If you're wait-listed, you may be reevaluated based on your third- and fourth-quarter grades.

Stay involved. Show admission officers you're committed to sports, clubs and other activities.

Request another (or a first) interview. An interview can give you a personal contact — someone who can check on the status of your application. You can also enlist the help of your high school counselor or someone you know who graduated from that college.

Realize that you've already achieved something. You were wait-listed, not turned away. Many students were not as successful.

Reconsider the colleges that accepted you. If you would be just as happy at one of your other choices, send in a deposit and plan to attend that college. Then turn down the spot on the waiting list. You'll be surprised how much better you feel after your decision has been made.