



US Admissions Jargon

No one likes jargon. These special words and expressions often overwhelm and confuse newcomers. But don't worry; we're here to turn College Admission jargon into plain, clear English.

College vs University

In the US, University is widely known as “College” in regards to undergraduate studies. The word “University” can refer to the same institute, but it is mostly used for graduate studies.

American schools have specific terms for students in each year of high school:

- **K12** is an expression that indicates the range of years of supported primary and secondary education found in the United States
- **Freshman** for a student currently in Grade 9 (Year 10 in UK)
- **Sophomore** for a student currently in Grade 10 (Year 11 in UK)
- **Junior** for a student currently in Grade 11 (Year 12 in UK)
- **Senior** for a student currently in Grade 12 (Year 13 in UK)

When referring to students who have just completed a grade in high school, and are about to start another grade at the end of summer, the word “**Rising**” is used. For example, a rising sophomore is someone who completed Grade 9, and will enroll in Grade 10 (their Sophomore year) starting the autumn.

Middle School vs High School

In the US educational system, middle school refers to grades 5-8. High school refers to grades 9-12.

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses vs. Honors Classes

Both of these are types of courses students can take in high school, and they are available in most subjects. The main

difference is that AP courses allow students to reduce their amount of coursework during college. In other words, AP courses can give college credit. In order to receive college credit for an AP course, a student must receive a score of 3 or higher (out of 5) in the AP exam. However, most colleges require a score of at least 4.

GPA

Short for Grade Point Average, it is a number that indicates how highly a student scores in their courses on average. It is used as one of the criteria for college admissions.

Traditionally, GPA is calculated on an unweighted scale, from 0 to 4.0. This means it does not take into account the difficulty of a student's coursework. For example, a score of A in a specific subject will give a GPA of 4.0, regardless of the type of class it was earned in -- an honors class, AP class, or lower-level class.

Weighted vs. Unweighted GPA

Weighted GPA is often used by high schools to better represent students' academic accomplishments. It takes into account course difficulty, rather than providing the same letter grade to GPA conversion for every student. Usually, weighted GPA is measured on a scale of 0 to 5.0. An A in an AP class may translate into a 5.0 weighted GPA, while an A in a regular-level class will give you a 4.0 weighted GPA.

Class rank

Class rank is a measure of how a student's performance compares to that of other students in their class.

PSAT

The Preliminary SAT is a practice version of the SAT exam. It can be taken once per year, and many students take the test in

both 10th and 11th grade. The PSAT is 2 hours and 45 minutes long and tests skills in reading, writing, and math. Unlike the SAT, the highest score possible on the PSAT is 1520. It is not used in the College Admissions process.

ACT/SAT

ACT and SAT are tests designed to forecast a student's ability to perform in his or her first year in college.

The SAT test consists of two portions, one measuring students' mathematical skills and the other their verbal skills. The ACT covers four areas: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science reasoning. All Colleges that accept ACT scores accept SAT Scores and vice versa. Either test can be taken several times. Please see ESM Prep's ACT vs. SAT for a more thorough analysis.

SAT Subject Tests

Formerly called "SAT II's", SAT Subject Tests are designed to assess knowledge in specific subject areas, aligned with common high school courses. SAT Subject Tests are available in 21 different subject areas. Generally, the student gets to decide which ones to take. All are multiple-choice, include negative marking and each one takes an hour. The primary reason to take SAT Subject Tests is that some colleges require them of applicants. Students typically take these subject tests in May/June of their Junior year.

Superscore

Superscoring is the process by which colleges consider the highest section scores across all the dates a student took the SAT or ACT. This means taking the highest Math score and the highest Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) score across all test dates, and using those to calculate the overall 'superscore'.

Test Optional

A test-optional policy leaves the decision up to the student as to whether or not to send SAT or ACT scores to a school. In other words, SAT-optional colleges do not require SAT/ACT scores. Instead, the student can decide whether or not the test results are an accurate representation of their academic ability.

Early Action and Early Decision

Both are types of college applications, and they allow students to get an admissions decision early. Students can only apply to one school using **Early Decision**. If they are accepted, they are then committed to attending that school. Even if they receive offers from other schools, they cannot accept them. The advantage of ED is that students are more likely to receive an offer than by doing a standard application. **Early Action** allows students to receive their admissions decision, but then still have the flexibility to wait until "Decision Day" (usually May 1st) to commit to a school.

Regular decision

Regular decision is the normal process by which students apply by published deadlines, with promise of receiving an admissions decision no later than April 1 of their senior year.

Deferral vs Waitlist

A deferral means that a student has not yet been accepted by their university. Deferrals are a common outcome among early-decision applicants. In this case, their applications will simply be reconsidered during the regular admissions period.

Waitlisting usually differs from deferral in that prospective students who are placed on a waitlist have reached the end of the admissions process and are likely not going to be reconsidered

at a later date. Instead, the college has already decided that the student could be admitted, but only if some of its accepted students decide not to enroll.

Rolling Admissions

Under rolling admissions, candidates are invited to submit their applications to the university anytime within a large window. The window is usually over six months long, and some schools do not have a previously specified end date (the window simply closes when all spots are filled). The university will then review the application and notify the applicant of their decision within a few weeks from submission.

Yield

Yield refers to the percentage of students who accept a college's offer of admission.

Common App

The Common Application (Common App) is an undergraduate college application online system that applicants may use to apply to any of more than 800 member colleges and universities in 49 states and the District of Columbia, as well as in Canada, China, Japan, and many European countries.



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