



What To Do If... you're placed on a wait list

Between immediate acceptance and outright rejection there lies a confusing middle ground in college admissions: the dreaded wait list.

It's mid-March of your senior year. After sorting through what seemed like a zillion brochures, agonizing over the perfect essay, and driving hundreds of miles to go on college tours, the anxiety is really getting to you. You wake up every day wondering when you'll get the answer to the billion-dollar question: did you make the grade for your top-choice school?

You've been desperately hoping for an acceptance letter, but you've also tried to be realistic and prepare yourself for a rejection. You know not all students will be accepted where they most want to attend. However, when your long-awaited letter finally arrives, it offers neither congratulations *nor* regrets: it says (in effect), "Not right now, but maybe later."

Welcome to the confusing world of the wait list!

Deciding which college to attend isn't easy. Toss a wait-list letter into the mix, and the already difficult process can become downright depressing. But the fact is, even honor students with 4.0 GPA's, 1460 SAT scores, numerous activities, and full scholarships from similarly competitive universities land on waiting lists. The reason? Students now routinely apply to a number of schools, making it impossible for institutions to accurately project who will accept their offers. So admissions officers use wait lists as an insurance policy.

Is there a way to avoid being put on a wait list? Not really. But there are ways

you can lessen the disappointment. As a college enrollment expert with more than 30 years of experience, Robert Massa suggests that students be selective and apply only to schools they really look forward to attending.

"Choose your application set carefully, matching your personality, style, and objectives with the college's characteristics and strengths," says Massa. "The idea that there's only one perfect college for you is a myth; if you have other good choices, being wait-listed at one should not be the end of the world."

Good advice. But what steps should you take if it really *does* feel like the end of the world, if the school you most want to attend is the one that has wait-listed you?

First, learn the facts. Call the admissions office and politely ask how many students are on the college's wait list, how many were admitted in the previous two years, and whether the wait list has been put in an order of preference. Find out what factors will be taken into account when deciding who will be accepted from the list. Wait-list decisions are usually made before mid-April; then, depending on how many deposits are received from accepted students, admission offers are sent to wait-listed students before the national deposit deadline on May 1st.

"There is some wait-list activity after May, of course, but the longer you have to wait, the less chance

there is of admission," explains Massa. Arming yourself with this information will give you a general sense of your chances of being chosen.

Spaces are usually offered to students who admissions counselors feel are most likely to apply, so if this is the school you really, *really* want to attend, write a letter to the admissions office immediately after receiving notice of being wait-listed.

Massa suggests that you make yourself noticed in a sincere way. "Your letter should tell the school that you would definitely enroll if admitted," he says. "It should also state why you want to go to that college, specifically pointing out the match of your style and objectives to the college's program and educational approach."

Avoid being too pushy, Massa cautions. Don't send follow-up letters, ask to be reinterviewed, or have your parents call on your behalf. If you need an extra boost, have a trusted advocate—your high-school counselor, a teacher, coach, or college alum—call the admissions counselor to remind the school of your talents and desire to attend their institution.

Most importantly, don't take the final decision as a personal insult. Wait-list students are candidates who would be admitted if the school had the space. Quite honestly, deciding which students are accepted from the wait list depends more on a college's enrollment needs than a student's qualifications. If a school needs more students from out-of-region, more science majors, or more women, students meeting those profiles might be offered admittance from the wait list first.

Be realistic. Play the cards that are dealt. Begin to prepare yourself for your "next-best" school. And keep in mind that if you are wait-listed at one institution, odds are you've been accepted somewhere else very similar.

Knowing what to expect and how to handle the wait-list dilemma can make all the difference in the world. ■

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