

What Is “Provisional Admission” To College?

Sometimes, an acceptance letter isn’t an acceptance letter, but something else.

Congratulations! You just received your letter – you’re in!

Or are you?

More and more colleges are issuing what are called provisional acceptances – a promise of a slot, provided certain criteria are met.

These are often tactics to avoid slacking and/or senioritis – colleges want their students coming in on the same track that led to acceptance in the first place.

Not to mention, if you slack off your senior year, that could hurt the college’s ratings in lists that use student excellence as a grading tool.

That is leading many colleges to provisional acceptance – which often means a GPA requirement. University of California schools, for instance, demand at least a 3.0 GPA throughout senior year, with no Ds or Fs.

Still other schools are requiring that certain prerequisite courses are passed before college begins. This is especially common for students entering with majors already chosen, or going into a special track within a university (like pre-med, or even history).

Still other schools – like Clemson – are encouraging juniors to send in SAT scores and essays, and then offering provisional admission – provided the GPA you then submit is satisfactory.

What does all this mean for a high school senior? Sometimes... an extra bit of danger.

How Provisional Admissions Can Backfire

This is obvious, but bears stating: A provisional admission can be rescinded! (Hence, the term: provisional.)

But that’s not the worst of it. If you make plans on a provisional admission that you subsequently lose, you could find yourself in one of the worst positions possible.

Most notices of rescinded admissions occur in July or August the summer before school starts. In other words, after acceptance deadlines for your other schools has passed.

Should you lose your spot, not only will you not be attending your top choice – every other choice will have disappeared as well! You can try to finagle a spot somewhere... but your options very well could be limited at this point.

That’s why, if you decide you want to go to a school that practices provisional admission, make sure you don’t fall off. Know what the requirements are, and ensure that you meet them.

Of course, schools will make allowances for extenuating circumstances. If you suffer a prolonged illness or a death in the family, you’ll likely get a pass – or at least an opportunity to make up the work.

But short of a major catastrophe on that order, you could be out of luck. The lesson is simple: If you're provisional, take that very seriously. You still have to earn your place.