

I want to take a gap year

This can be a good choice if you're undecided about university, not sure what you want to do in the future, or if you just want a break from full-time education. A year out offers you the opportunity to gain skills and experiences, while giving you time to reflect and focus on what you want to do next, if that's what you need.

Step 1 – Why do you want to take a year out?

It's really important to set goals to make your time productive, so you need to identify what you want to achieve. You might want to:

- have a break from study
- gain new skills / experience

- earn money
- gain time to decide what you want to do
- do a combination of the above

While there can be good reasons for taking a year out, it's not an option that suits everyone. For some, it may be advisable not to take a break between studies.

Things to consider:

- How does a year out link with any longer term career or study plans you may have?
- What are the advantages of this pathway for you at this stage, and what are the possible disadvantages?

Pros	Cons
It's an opportunity to have a break from studying and return refreshed. You can volunteer, get valuable work experience, and travel.	Some people find a year out becomes a distraction from their longer term plans.
A productive gap year can be valuable on your CV – many employers value the skills and experiences students have gained if they've actively managed their time, set goals, and stretched themselves.	An unstructured year out may not add much value to your future applications – careful thought and planning is essential to get the most out of your year.
A gap year can enhance your higher education studies – you could relate experiences and activities to the subject area you plan to study. Admissions tutors know that many former gap year students are generally more focused and responsible.	It can be hard to return to study or work after a year-long break.
You can earn and save money towards your higher education costs or future plans.	It can be expensive – you could find yourself in a worse financial position at the end. You need to do your research and consider the costs.
You will develop maturity if you don't feel ready for higher education or getting out into the world of work. For some careers, it can be an advantage to be slightly older and have some life experience.	If you don't get organised, you may end up spending your gap year just 'thinking about it'!

Step 2 – Research your options

You need to form a plan of what you will do for the year, and you need to start planning well in advance. Some voluntary work schemes are popular and have deadlines, and you need to consider when you need the money to pay for any airfares or visas.

There are hundreds of ideas you could consider – some might fill an entire year, others a few weeks or months. You can also combine more than one idea. Have a look at **the ideas and tips** at the end of this document.

Step 3 – Get advice

- It's really worth checking forums and social media for tips and insight into other people's experience of a gap year, particularly if you are looking at going abroad. Weigh up carefully what you want to do, and get advice if you need help to talk your ideas through further.
- Be aware it may be possible to defer your acceptance of a place on a higher education course for a year – however, you may need to talk directly to the university or college concerned about why this would be beneficial.
- If you have any doubts, discuss your ideas further with a careers adviser.

What next?

You can use the 'Doing your research' template and the 'Research resources', which have suggestions and sources for your research. Once you have completed some initial research, you may find it helpful to discuss your findings with a careers adviser.

If you're also thinking about applying to university or college, take a look at the 'I want to go on to higher education' resource.

See also:

A model of good decision-making

Gap year ideas and tips

Ideas – here are just a few examples.

- **Volunteering** – support a worthwhile cause, either in the UK or abroad, and gain valuable experience. For instance, you could take part in a wildlife conservation project, teach children in an orphanage, or help build a school.
- **Travel** – explore the world, discover new cultures, and develop your independent living skills at the same time! You could go backpacking across South East Asia, Inter-rail through Europe, or buy a round the world plane ticket!
- **Paid employment** – earn money and gain new skills at home or abroad. You could work on an outback farm in Australia, as a ski lift operator in Canada, or at a backpacker hostel in New Zealand.
- **Work experience** – if you want to gain relevant experience and skills for a particular career interest, or a subject you plan to study at university, you could consider a work placement or internship. These can last from a few weeks to a year, and are offered by employers in sectors such as business, marketing, law, hospitality, and engineering. Depending on the type of contract on offer, you may or may not receive a wage. These are very popular and competition for places is high, so you will need to apply early.
- **Part-time courses** – why not take the opportunity to try something new? For instance, you could learn a new language, learn how to programme, try a new sport or musical instrument, or learn practical skills such as mechanics, carpentry, or cookery.

Tips

- **What do you want to achieve from a gap year?** New skills, experience, or more time to consider your future? Set goals to make your time productive. Think about getting the right balance between time spent and benefits gained.
- **How much time can you be away for and when?** What do you want to spend your time doing and where? Are you going to work, or are there interests or hobbies you can explore further or use to help others by volunteering? What value will it add to your study, your CV, or career?
- **What is available?** Research the wide range of gap year and volunteering schemes, or you could organise it yourself. If using an agency or scheme, check out how long they have been running, if they are financially sound, and are members of a reputable organisation such as ABTA or Year Out Group, where they agree to follow a code of conduct. Look at the reviews, articles, and advice from people who've 'been there and done it' for the sort of gap year you're considering.
- **How much money you will need?** Unless you are planning to work or have some financial help, you are going to need money. Set yourself a realistic budget that you can afford. Costs vary considerably, so research carefully and don't forget to add things like flights, visas, insurance, vaccinations, etc. (You can check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for information on vaccinations).