

Summer Planning Guide

School is almost over and summer break is fast approaching. Are your summer plans intact, or do you prefer to do little or nothing at all? To get the most out of your summer break, be active and spend your time doing something productive such as working, volunteering or planning for college. These things will not only help you to avoid being a couch potato, but will give you independence, help you acquire new skills and grow personally and professionally. Use this guide to start planning your summer experience.

Find a job or internship

If possible, find a job that you enjoy and will help you with your long-term career aspirations. For example, if your long-term career goal is to teach, look for jobs that will allow you to work with students in some capacity like a student tutor or camp counselor position.

An internship may be tough to come by on short-notice, but ask around. You may be able to find an unpaid internship with a local company, community organization or through employers of people you know. Internship experience will look good on a college application, help you gain confidence and help you discover your strengths and weaknesses. Visit www.fastweb.com and www.monstercollege.com to find full-time, part-time and internship opportunities in your local area.

Network

Start networking now to find a great summer job, specifically one that will help build your skills and credentials. Ask your parents, neighbors or friends for advice on where and how to look for job openings in your local area. If you are unsure of what you want to do, visit your guidance counselor. Your counselor will be able to help you identify the perfect job that best fits your skills. Your school's counseling office should also have books and other resources available to assist you in finding summer employment, and perfecting your resume.

Volunteer

Volunteering is a great way to help your community, enhance your skills, improve your resume, and enhance up your college and scholarship applications. You can find opportunities in food banks, homeless shelters, hospitals or anywhere else in your community. For example, organizations like Habitat for Humanity give its volunteers the opportunity to build homes for families in need. AmeriCorps enables students to earn an education award of up to \$5,550 to help pay for college.

Take a class

Get a head start on college, fulfill some needed requirements, and improve on a subject where you need help or acquire a new skill. Community colleges or nearby colleges or universities may have summer learning opportunities available for a relatively low cost.

Plan for College

The summer is a good time to research schools and narrow down your options, especially if you are going into your senior year of high school. Search various college and university websites for general information about schools, admissions requirements and tuition costs. Start a portfolio of schools you are interested in, and list them according to your top choices, by name, or classify them any other way you desire. Keeping a portfolio or notes on each school with key admissions and financial aid deadlines will help keep you organized and in good shape once it is time to apply.

Visit college campuses: If possible, visit your top choice schools to learn more about their academics, student and campus life, financial aid options and to get a more intimate experience. If your top-choice schools are too far, or you aren't able to visit due to financial constraints, visit schools in your state (even if you are not interested in staying in state) so that you will get a glimpse into the overall collegiate experience.

Improve your test score

Take an ACT or SAT prep course to help you achieve the best possible score on your standardized exams. Many standardized test prep courses charge fees so seek advice from your guidance counselor, do research at your local library, on the Internet or at local colleges to find the best possible and most affordable prep courses. Reading the newspaper daily can improve your vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Broaden your skills

Summer is a great time to engage in activities which will improve your professional skills and help build a strong foundation for future success. Consider joining Toastmasters to improve your public speaking skills, or a professional association which will enable you to network with others in your chosen field or discipline.

Be sure to visit:



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COLLEGE

Postponing College: Taking a Gap-Year

Upon graduating from high school this year, many students will be heading off to college in the fall to begin their undergraduate education. While attending college right after high school is the usual route for most students, taking a year off from studies to travel, volunteer or study abroad are also some options. If you are unsure what career you want, or if you need a break from formal education, you may want to look into taking a gap-year. We'll explain the concept of planning a gap year and show you some of the available opportunities if you decide to postpone your college education.

Search Your Soul, Search the Internet!

You will find a lot of resources on the Internet devoted to helping you plan your gap-year. Some of these include gap-planning sites, student articles and essays written by professionals with extensive knowledge on the gap-year experience. Although the Internet is a valuable tool to help you begin your planning, you will find it very beneficial to seek assistance from your school counselor, your local library and your parents. Also, try to speak with a former gap-year participant. Contact one of the many gap-year planning sites like, The Center for Interim Programs at www.interimprograms.com, and ask if they can match you with former gap-year participants who can share with you their personal gap-year experiences, likes, and dislikes and help you gain a better understanding of the entire planning process. After thorough research, you should be able to make the best decisions for you.

Focus on Your Finances

A gap-year of study can be expensive if you do not plan well and seek funding far in advance. Talk with your parents about your decision. If you plan on traveling during your gap-year, get travel insurance. Also, make sure to have enough money saved for medical emergencies or accidents. Try to work during the year as an intern or with a program or an organization that will pay enough to cover most or all of your expenses. They may be more than willing to assist you financially, especially if you can give valid reasons as to why you believe a gap-year is important (e.g., career exploration, maturity, etc.) and explain how the time away from the academic world will benefit you.

Get Accepted into a College

Many colleges allow you to defer for a year before beginning classes. Be sure the school you are interested in attending is open to gap-years and make sure to understand the associated requirements. Therefore, it may benefit you and is easier to gain admission into a college before beginning your gap-year. Submit your college applications prior to the completion of your senior year, and make sure you elect to defer enrollment for one year. This way, once your gap-year is complete, you can begin your education without the worry of having to get admitted to a school.

Gap-Year Programs and Resources

The following is a list of some of the organizations with programs available to students who are planning an interim or gap-year. You will find there are numerous opportunities available for you to study abroad, volunteer, complete an internship and much more.

AmeriCorps offers local and national community service opportunities to individuals who want to make a difference in the lives of others and in the world. AmeriCorps also offers its members a variety of benefits, such as a living allowance, education award, health coverage, loan forbearance and more. To learn more about the AmeriCorps program, benefits and eligibility requirements, visit <http://www.americorps.org>.

The Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) offers programs for college-bound graduates who want to volunteer, teach or live abroad learning and exploring different cultures during their gap year. To learn more about the benefits of the Council on International Educational Exchange programs and how to apply, visit <http://www.ciee.org>.

City Year offers its members a variety of benefits which range from educational and living stipends, health insurance and more in exchange for a year-long commitment to transform schools in the United States and Africa. Eligibility: Must be at least 17 to 24 years of age, a high school graduate and willing to dedicate at least 10 months to full-time service. To learn about additional eligibility requirements and benefits, please visit <http://www.cityyear.org>.

Gap-Year.com offers a wealth of information on taking time away from school to travel abroad, work, volunteer and more. Visit <http://www.gap-year.com> to learn more.

Studyabroad.com offers a wealth of information on opportunities to study in another country as well as volunteer and internship programs. Visit <http://www.studyabroad.com>.

STATravel offers gap-year travel and planning information. They also offer travel insurance packages. To learn more visit <http://www.statravel.com>.