

Gap Year Guide

For students & their families

2025



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A guide to gap years for school leavers, career changers, or anyone else looking for some time off. Created by Study Work Grow Pty Ltd in 2025.

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Due to the ever-changing nature of international travel, some of the advice listed in this Guide may be subject to change. We always recommend that you do your own research and contact organisations directly. You'll also need to double-check any requirements for visas, border controls, vaccinations, identification, etc. with the relevant authorities.

In this guide...

What is a gap year?

Is a gap year right for you?

Planning your gap year

Gap year ideas

After your gap year is over

Resources



What is a gap year?

A gap year is traditionally when students who have just finished high school take a year off before starting further study or full-time work.

But while it's most popular with school leavers, the truth is anyone can take a gap year.

Essentially, a gap year is simply taking some well-deserved time to rest, recharge, and reorient as you move from one phase of your life to the next.

You could take one after finishing your first degree, between changing jobs, or just because you need a change.

Done right, a gap year can encourage personal growth, independence, and resilience, as well as help you to decide what your next steps should be.

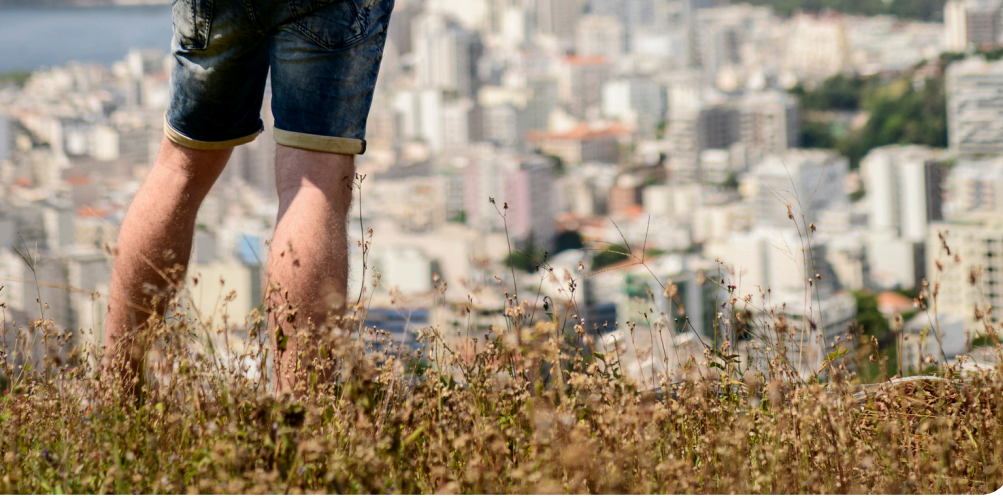
IF A YEAR SOUNDS LIKE A LONG TIME...

We use the term 'gap year' throughout this guide for simplicity, but the length of your break is totally up to you.

You might only need a couple of months before you find yourself itching to get back into study or work. Or maybe you need more than a year to decide what path to follow.

There is no right or wrong time or length. It's all about finding what works best for you.





The benefits of a gap year

If you or someone you know aren't 100% convinced that a gap year is a good idea, here are some of the reasons it might be.

BUILD VALUABLE SKILLS

Participants in the Gap Year Alumni Survey (GYAS) reported that their experience had helped them build some key skills, useful for both work and life.

EXPLORE YOUR PASSIONS

Just over 80% of people in the GYAS said that taking a gap year ended up influencing their choice of career.

GROW AS A PERSON

In many cases, taking a gap year can help you understand yourself better - and increase your interpersonal skills, empathy, and decision-making.

BOOST YOUR MOTIVATION

Many students who take a gap year actually end up returning to study feeling even more motivated than those who went to university straight out of school.

Is a gap year right for you?

Here are some of the most common reasons people take a gap year:



To take a break



To prepare for study



To travel and grow



To save money



To build skills



To gain experience

DO ANY OF THESE SOUND LIKE YOU?

If not, it doesn't mean a gap year is totally off the cards - but it might be worth taking some time to step back and re-evaluate your options and priorities.

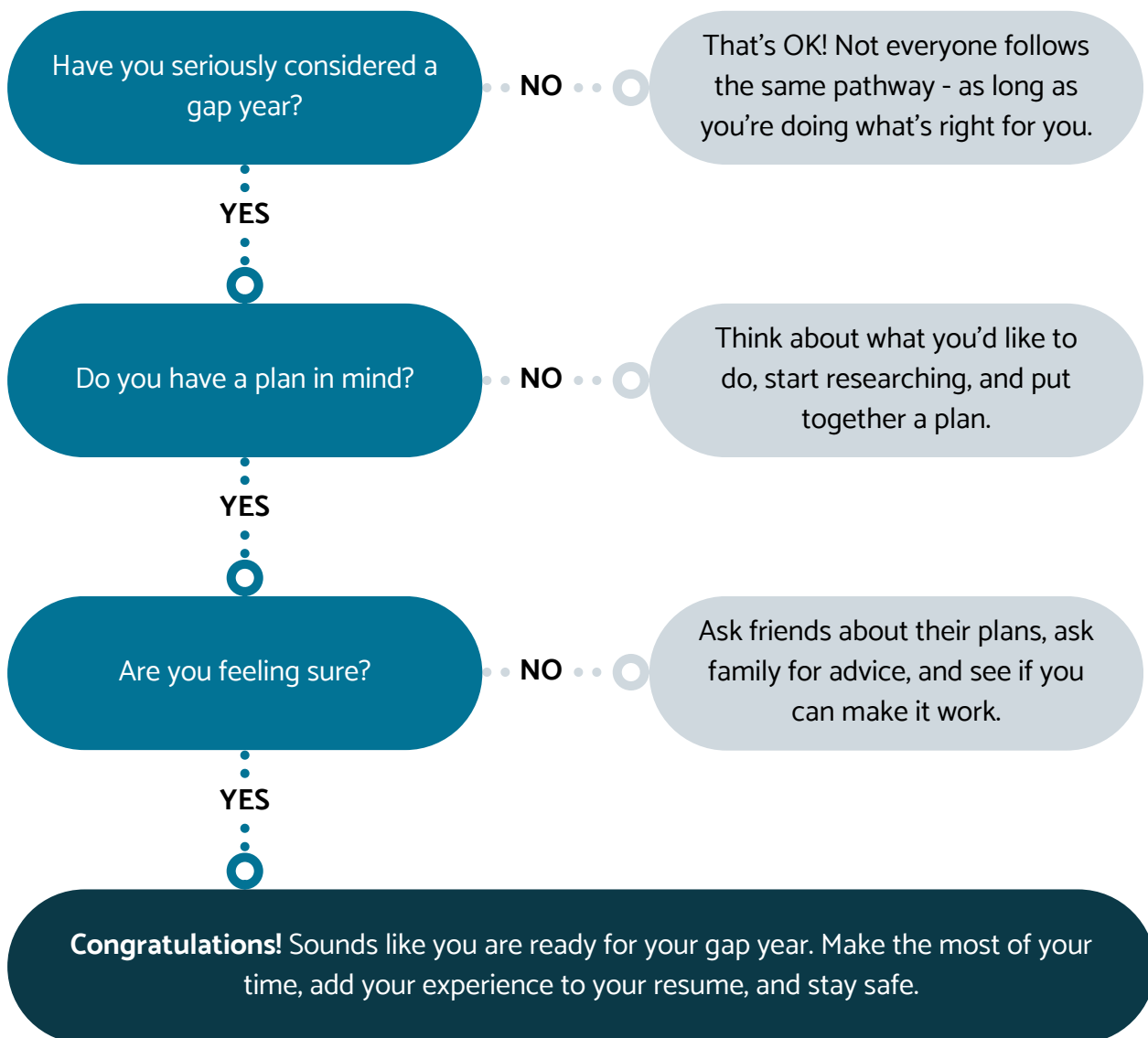
If yes, a gap year could be ideal for you. Later in this guide we'll take a look at some of your different options. We've broken them down into a few categories just to simplify matters, but if there's something you want to do that's not in this guide, that's totally OK.

Still not sure? [You might like to take the Gap Year Quiz on our website.](#)



The gap year flowchart

Need some more help to decide if you're ready for a gap year? Take a look at the flowchart below and see if it might be right for you, or if you need to do some more thinking.



Planning your gap year

Before diving in and committing yourself to a gap year, it's worth taking some time to figure everything out and ensure you have all your bases covered.

- 1** Even if you already have something in mind, it's a good idea to research all your options. Take notes as you compare programs, read reviews, attend webinars, or chat with friends.
- 2** Work out if a gap year is the best option for you at this stage of your life. How will you afford it, do you have family support, and can you defer any study or work plans?
- 3** Narrow down your options, then work out how much money you're going to need and where you're going to get it from.
- 4** Want to study after your gap year? Check if you can apply and enrol now, then defer your place for as long as you need so you'll have a spot to come back to.
- 5** Get any paperwork or documents together that you need to apply for the program or position you're interested in. If you'll be travelling, ensure you have a passport, visa, and any other requirements organised.
- 6** Work out your budget and start saving. We've created a template you can use to prepare your budget and track your savings - you can find it at the end of this guide.

Things to consider

Your gap year is all about you. So when you're weighing up your options, keep these things in mind:

DO YOU HAVE THE FINAL SAY?

What is it you really want to see, do, or experience during your time out? Base your decisions on your own interests and not what your friends are doing or what your parents did.

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU HAVE?

Decide what amount of time do you want to commit to, as this will impact what you can do, how much money you'll need, and other plans, such as deferring study or other commitments.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR LIMITS?

Do you have any health-related needs (either physical or mental)? Keep these in mind when you're planning your gap year. You may not have to rule anything out, but it could help you be prepared and set realistic expectations.

HAVE YOU STARTED PLANNING?

How organised and structured do you want your year to be? If you'd like to get the most of out of every moment you'll need to plan more. If you'd just like to go with the flow, it's still worth doing some research so you don't miss anything important.

WILL YOU NEED TO WORK?

What kind of work (if any) would you most like to try during your gap year? Chances are you'll need some money, so why not kill two birds with one stone and try out jobs that interest you, or that will provide you with transferable skills?

DO YOU HAVE THE FUNDS?

How much are you willing to spend and how will you get the money? We'll explore more about funding your gap year on the next page.

Funding your gap year

Even if you're already working or plan to live at home rent-free during your time off, you'll need a financial plan - without one you could use up all your hard-earned money and may not be able to achieve your post-gap year goals.

Travel, study, and most gap year programs all have costs associated with them. You'll need to figure out how much it's going to cost you - right down to the smallest details - then figure out how you're going to save up that amount.

If your parents or other family are helping you out, that's great. But you still need to know what costs you're going to incur, then plan a budget to make sure your money will last as long as it needs to.

Try to avoid getting into debt for a gap year. Paying back the costs (potentially with interest) could set you back once your time out is over.

Here are our top tips for funding your gap year:

PLAN

Work out what you want to do and where you want to go. You need these details so you can work out how much everything will cost.

BUDGET

Once you know how much you need, write a budget that lists every item. You'll need to know how you're going to pay for everything!

SAVE

It's time to set some goals and start saving. Having a backup plan is also a good idea in case you don't manage to save enough.

Finding support

If you're over the age of 18, you're an adult, regardless of whether you're just finishing school or not. And that means you are in control of your life. Some people can find this time in their lives liberating and exciting, while others might feel overwhelmed, uncertain, or even a bit scared about their next steps.

We recommend that before you even start planning your gap year, the first step should be to talk to your friends, family, or other trusted adults. Let them know what you're planning and tell them why.

They might be 100% supportive straight away, or they might be a bit worried. Either way, it's a good idea to talk it all out and make sure you're all on the same page.

Why? Because:

- Taking a gap year can be a big step and you'll feel more confident and happier about it if you have some support.
- They might have suggestions or ideas that you haven't considered.
- They'll be able to help you plan.
- If you're going to need to work, save, or defer study, your "go to" people could help you stay on track.

Even though the conversation is important, it can be a tricky subject to bring up, especially if you feel unsure. Here are some positive ways to start a conversation:

- Have some idea about what you'd like to do or achieve in a gap year.
- Talk about how you plan to afford it.
- Show that you've thought about the pros and cons.
- Create a list of reasons to show how a gap year is not a gap in learning but can be a really positive career move, as well as a great experience.
- Let them know about some really successful people who have also taken gap years.
- Explain that many universities and employers view gap years as a good thing - you'll be gaining life experience and coming back rested, energised, and motivated for what comes next.



Gap year ideas

Travel

Work

Volunteer

Learn

Ready to start planning your gap year or need some inspo? We have all the information you need on the following pages.

Find out about some of your options, see tips on making the most of your time, and learn about what you need to do to prepare.





I want to travel

Whether you've always dreamed of backpacking across Europe, hiking in South America, driving Route 66 in the USA, seeing wildlife on safari in South Africa, or just immersing yourself in another culture and experiencing something new, there are lots of options to consider. No matter what you want to do, you can make independent plans or book with organised tours.

You'll get to:

- See the world
- Build your networks
- Meet new people
- Gain valuable new skills

If you're planning to use a third party, it's really important that you:

- Choose a reputable company - check their reviews and testimonials, as well as their business registrations and insurance.
- Read all the fine print before you sign anything.
- Ensure before you book that they will refund your money if the trip is cancelled by something out of your control.
- Find personal insurance that can help you to recover any costs if things don't go to plan (just note that change of mind isn't usually covered).

Organising your own trip? Here are some tips:

- Make sure you have insurance that will cover all elements of your trip, from flight delays and lost luggage to illness or injury - it's well worth the money for peace of mind.
- Check the recommendations and updates from your government regarding, safety, vaccinations, visas, and ID requirements before you book, then again before you travel.
- Work out how you'll communicate with loved ones while you're on the move.
- Do your research on the location, from living costs to how you'll be getting around and work rights.
- Carry the details of your country's high commission or embassy - you could even contact them for advice before you go.



I want to work

Unless you're one of the lucky ones, chances are you're going to need to consider working during your gap year. This could be casual or part-time work when you need it, or periods of full-time employment where you save as much as you can. Some gap years include work as an integral part, such as working at the ski fields for a season, fruit picking around Australia, or working in a US Summer Camp.

Spending a year working might not be the first thing you think about when you're considering some time off. But for many it's a necessity, and there are certainly plenty of benefits to consider too.

You'll have the chance to:

- Learn new skills
- Build valuable networks
- Experience different jobs
- Earn money
- Make your resume dazzle
- Get professional references

There are plenty of ways you can find work. Some gap year specialists provide working holiday programs, or you can apply for jobs yourself (find them on online, local newspapers, networking, or even on social media). You could even sign up to an agency who will find opportunities on your behalf.

Here are just a few job ideas to consider:

- Working as a ski instructor
- Mentoring at a Summer camp
- Teaching a language or tutoring
- Looking after children as an au pair
- Tour guiding or outdoor adventure work
- Working in hospitality
- Starting a travel blog
- Working (and living) on a cruise ship
- Picking fruit and other seasonal work

Before you apply, you might like to:

- Create or update your resume
- Write tailored cover letters for each application
- Practise your interview skills
- Have a valid working visa organised (if required)
- Be aware of any tax obligations
- Set up a bank account



I want to volunteer

Volunteering can be a fantastic way to make a real impact in your gap year. You could learn a lot about yourself, gain skills, immerse yourself in different cultures, and make a positive impact on communities and individuals in genuine need of support.

Whether you're keen to explore the world, make a difference to someone's life, or just take a break from study or a career, volunteering offers plenty of positives:

- Step outside of your comfort zone
- Develop your global perspective
- Become more independent
- Learn new skills
- Meet like minded people

Many organisations run specialised volunteer programs for gap year seekers. If you choose to go this route, you might need to pay to take part in the program - costs can vary a lot, so do your research and plan how you'll get the money together.

Or you could contact those who work on the ground to see if there are any opportunities available. You may not have to pay, but you'll need to get yourself there and because you won't be earning while you're there, you'll need money to support yourself.

Check the history of organisations before signing up to programs and handing over money. Plus, it pays to read up about the destinations you'll be headed to - make sure they're safe and that you have an idea of what to expect when you arrive.

You can volunteer in almost every field you can imagine - here are some examples:

- Childcare
- Teaching
- Environment and conservation
- Medicine and healthcare
- Law and social services
- Humanitarian causes
- Animal welfare
- Community development

Another bonus is that you can pretty much choose where you want to volunteer and find projects and/or organisations to help out. So you could either stay on home soil or get out and explore the world.



I want to learn

On your gap year, the chances are high (unless you become a serious couch potato) that you'll be learning no matter what you do. But if you'd like to dedicate yourself to some study on your own terms, there are plenty of choices to satisfy every passion.

If you have ever been tempted to do a short course or intensive workshop program, now is the time to explore your options.

Perhaps you'd love to deep-dive into a hobby and get the chance to see if it's a potential career in the making for you or just have some fun.

If you're not sure about university and there's a short course in a similar area to one you're considering, why not give it a go? There's no better way to get a taste of a course you're tempted by.

Or maybe you'd like to upskill before moving into a new career - a gap year could be the perfect time to upgrade your skills.

Learn a language, take a patisserie course, learn to ride a horse, refurbish a vintage car, embrace your inner interior designer, gain landscaping skills, or get your pilot's license.

Want to combine your options? Look at microcredentials that are easy to do while you work or travel. These will give you knowledge and help you build skills to add to your resume.

Looking for a free or low-cost alternative? Download an app or find tutorials online that can help you learn a new language, play an instrument, learn to code, or just work on your life skills.

Still not sure what you'd like to do? Speak to lots of people, from parents and friends to teachers and organisations, or start an online search. You'll find out what's possible and maybe find a new idea that sparks your interest.

Don't underestimate where your passion could lead you. You could end up writing an award winning novel, heading off to the next Olympics, or inventing a life saving device.

After your gap year is over

We know it's hard to think about your gap year being over before it's even started, but thinking ahead can help you make the most of your experience.

Live in the moment and get every last bit of fun, adventure, and learning you can from your gap year, but keep in mind that it will eventually come to an end - so be prepared.

Even if you have the most memorable time, it's easy to forget some of the smaller details. So during your time away you might consider keeping a journal or blog - future you will appreciate the reminders, but it could also have practical applications. Keep track of:

- Places you visit
- People you meet
- New skills you gain
- Jobs you do
- Notable events you're a part of
- Things you want to do again or explore further
- Things you really enjoy (and things you don't)

All of these details could help you down the track when you're thinking about what to study, need to apply for a job, or want to plan your next holiday or adventure.





What to do when you return

Coming back from a gap year could have you excited, motivated, and ready for what comes next, but you could also find it hard to leave behind all that fun and freedom.

Here are some ways to make the most of what you learned and experienced during your gap year:

UPDATE YOUR RESUME

Add in all the new skills and experience you've gained, roles you worked in, and contacts you made.

RECONNECT

Get in touch with friends, family, and other people you missed while you were away. Catch up and share your adventures while they're still fresh in your mind.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Adjusting back to a "normal" routine can be difficult, so take your time and ease back in to things one day at a time.

REFLECT

What were the highs and lows? What went well or could have gone better? How could you have planned or reacted differently? Knowing the answers could be great for your next adventure, but it'll also help you better prepare for applications and interviews.

MAKE CHANGES

Find a way to incorporate some or of all the elements of your gap year that you enjoyed into your everyday life. This can help you find a purpose (and possibly a career) that you'll love.

What's next?

HEADING TO STUDY?

- If you deferred an offer, get in touch with your institution and make sure you're ready to enrol, or finish up any final details.
- If you didn't have an offer or didn't apply before your gap year, get in touch with the institution you'd like to study at and find out how to apply.
- Make sure you have any financial aid or scholarship applications completed, and know how you're going to pay any fees.
- If you're leaving home you'll also need to organise your accommodation, redirect your mail, and get packing.

STARTING WORK?

- Dive into to job searches and spend a decent amount of time crafting each application and cover letter.
- Make sure you're contactable - you'll need a current phone number and email address.
- Make sure your bank account, tax details, and other financial details are all up to date.
- Get your professional wardrobe sorted, and don't forget to organise your transport and accommodation.

NOT SURE WHAT TO DO NEXT?

If you didn't have a plan before you left, or things have changed, that's OK. Now is the time to decide what the best next step is for you and work out how you'll get there.

Whatever gap year you plan on taking and whatever path you choose after that, be safe and have fun.



LIFE IS NOT A DRESS REHEARSAL - THIS IS PROBABLY IT.

MAKE IT COUNT. TIME IS EXTREMELY LIMITED AND GOES BY FAST.

**DO WHAT MAKES YOU
HAPPY AND FULFILLED.**

DON'T DO STUFF THAT
DOESN'T MAKE YOU HAPPY.

DON'T LET YOURSELF MAKE EXCUSES FOR
NOT DOING THE THINGS YOU WANT TO DO.

SAM ALTMAN



Gap year budget

ONE-OFF EXPENSES		
ITEM		COST
DAILY LIVING COSTS		
SAVINGS		
Total amount needed:	Savings so far:	Savings to make:

Savings tracker

[illegible]

Planning your gap year

If you're thinking of taking a gap year, here are some pointers to help you with planning.

- ☐ Define your goals, e.g. travel/work/volunteer
- ☐ Research all of the opportunities available
- ☐ Work out the costs you'll need to cover
- ☐ Create a budget and start saving
- ☐ If travelling: check visa, health, insurance, and other requirements
- ☐ Plan everything you want to do/experience
- ☐ Know how you'll stay in touch with family/friends
- ☐ Keep notes and records for future reference
- ☐ Have a plan for when your gap year is over

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