

Taking Time Off After High School

You Have a High School Diploma — Now What?

Most students look forward to graduating from high school and beginning their college experience. But not every student starts college right away. If you've gotten your high school diploma but don't feel ready for college, consider taking a year off first.

This year may be called many things — a gap year, a year off, a deferred year, time off — but make sure it's not called a waste of time. Use this year to:

Save money. Many students cite financial concerns as the reason they put off college. Consider working for a year to make money for college tuition, books and living expenses.

Gain career experience. Not sure what you want to study in college? Spend a year working so that you can explore a field that interests you. You'll learn whether or not you want to pursue this career.

Travel. Have you always wanted to visit foreign lands? Travel around the world for a while. You'll gain valuable life experience and learn more about who you are.

Volunteer. Gain skills and experience by volunteering at a local hospital, tutoring, coaching a sport, offering to lead a local youth group, or performing other community service. Some colleges even offer academic credit for volunteer work.

Ease into college life. Not feeling academically ready for college? Think about starting with a couple of classes at your community college. You'll ease into college-level work without feeling overwhelmed. You may be able to transfer the credits you earn to a four-year program later on.

What Will Admission Officers Think?

It all depends on your particular situation and how you spend your time, but admission officers take into account how much maturity and life experience you've gained.

Deferred Admission

If you do plan to take time off, you can still apply to college while in high school. After you're accepted, you can ask for a deferred admission. In most cases, colleges will accommodate you as long as you enroll the following year.

For more information about how time off might affect your future plans, or whether it's right for you, talk to your high school counselor.