



How to: 6

How to...

prepare for a gap year

if you are 13-19



What's a gap year all about?

A gap year is not an easy option. Sitting around watching TV and going out with your mates for 12 months doesn't count as a gap year and would quickly become boring. Whatever you decide to do, you need to make sure you do something that you find exciting, fun, and challenging. This could mean travelling to learn a language, doing conservation work, or learning to ski.

The trick to a good gap year is to get organised and make sure you will get the most out of it and that you have visas if you need them. It will also give you plenty of time to check with the Foreign Office to ensure it's safe to travel. Your personal safety should always be top priority.

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What can it do for me?

There are many reasons for someone to take a gap year – what's yours?

- I want to explore exotic places and learn another language.
- I want to do a year in industry and learn new skills.
- I would like to improve my communication skills.
- I really like conservation work and want to develop my interest.
- I want to broaden my knowledge of the world and other cultures.
- I'd like to boost my confidence.
- I'd really like to meet new people from all over the world.
- I need a break from education.



Every 12 months around 50,000 people take a gap year.

What can I do?

Volunteering

Volunteering can be a really good way of gaining skills and trying out an activity you are interested in. You can do voluntary work in the UK or worldwide. There are agencies that will pay for your flights and upkeep in return for a year of your time. You can experience amazing things such as helping orphans in India or working in the rainforests of South East Asia.

Try to do at least two different things as this will look more impressive on your CV.

Work

Taking a gap year can be expensive when the trip is a long one. Working abroad is a great way to fund travel and doesn't require loads of skills. However, it can be another great way of getting new skills. You can either try to set up a job before you go, or try to find something when you're there. Don't forget to find out if you need work permits! The other option is to do a year in industry in the UK (www.yini.org.uk).



What do other people think?

Increasingly families, universities, and employers see gap years as an important step in personal development and a valuable experience. A good gap year will give you a chance to prove yourself and to stretch your personal boundaries.

Families may have mixed feelings and be worried about you. However, if you choose what you do wisely and plan well they will be happier, and may wish they could go themselves!

Universities recognise the benefits but expect to see how you've used your year out constructively. Keep the university informed and check their attitude towards gap years first. However, evidence suggests that students are less likely to drop out of their course if they've done a gap year first.

Employers like the initiative that a well-planned gap year shows. It helps develop non-academic skills that are vital in the workplace, e.g. the ability to work with others in new circumstances. A gap year will also help develop other key skills such as problem solving, communication, and self-reliance – all in great demand by employers.

Planning your gap year

A little organisation doesn't do anyone any harm; it will even help you be more confident when travelling. You will need to think about the finer details from having a first aid kit to jotting down the serial numbers of your tickets.

You can talk to your Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) about other sources of information and organisations to help get you started:

- Do you know what you want to do (travel, work, volunteer, etc.)?
- Do you know where you want to go?
- Do you have all the paperwork you need and made copies to leave with family/friends (passport, visas, tickets, insurance, etc.)?
- Have you visited your doctor for a last check up and/or any medication you may need?
- Have you budgeted for the whole time you are away?
- Are you taking an international debit card?
- Have you decided what clothes/toiletries/other personal items you are taking (think minimal)?
- Do you have a diary to record your experiences?
- Are you ready?

Additional sources of information

www.connexions-cd.org.uk
www.connexions-direct.com
www.gapyear.com
www.yearoutgroup.org
www.yini.org.uk

To get in touch...

with your PA or to find your nearest Connexions centre go online to www.connexions-cd.org.uk or give us a call on **0800 9755111**. Calls from a landline are free and you'll be connected to your nearest centre. Calls from a mobile may be subject to a network charge – you'll be connected to our head office, but we can redirect you to your nearest centre.

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