

The Ultimate

Gap Year Guide for High School Students

NSR
AUSTRALIA & NZ



OVERVIEW

It can be a tough crossroads to face; deciding what to do after high school. There is a lot to take into consideration with a career, higher education and travel all possibilities in your future.

One pathway that is becoming increasingly popular for school leavers across the world, is a gap year.

However, as a high school student, there is a lot to consider before deciding to commit to a gap year.

In this guide, I help break down some of the important considerations that you should factor into your decision making, which will help you determine whether a gap year is a good fit for you.



Harrison Burgess is a Placement Manager at NSR Australia and New Zealand, helping high school graduates pursue a future at college in America through their passion for sport and education.

Harrison enjoyed an alternative gap year before beginning his US college experience at Iowa Central Community College. After gaining personal benefits from his alternative gap year, Harrison was able to gain clarity and focus to embrace a future that combined sport, education and travel in one pathway.

What's included in this guide?

- Key Considerations Of A Gap Year
- Why Other Students Took A Gap Year
- The Alternative Gap Year
- Your Space To Think

What are the key concepts you should consider when thinking about a gap year?





Consider: Money

If your gap year is a last minute plan and you didn't get time to build some financial backing during your final year of school, don't stress, there are plenty of great tips out there to have a memorable year on a budget.

For students who wish to travel without having to sell an organ on the black market, Uncollege¹ suggests; "Make a list of your priorities and the comforts you can't live without and decide when to splurge and when you must be frugal."

Research cited by Hostelworld² in the UK advises that gap years don't have to cost an arm and a leg. Their study estimates that UK students spent an average of about \$4,000 to take a gap year that was focused on travelling.

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For those students who aren't set on travelling for the whole year and are willing to balance their year between a variety of activities, it's always possible to work to gather savings before setting off on an adventure.

Spreading your time evenly between work and travel can also help maintain your skills and focus for the future.

¹ Source: Uncollege, 4 Ways to Avoid Going Broke While Traveling, March 2015

² Source: The Leap, Gap Year Statistics to Broaden Your Mind, March 2016

✓ A gap year could be for you if...

You have a strategy in place to fund your gap year plans

*MY TIP

If you really value the freedom a gap year can offer you, take one. You can always adjust what you do in your gap year around your budget.

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Consider: Career Goals

If you are worried that a gap year will have a negative affect on your future career opportunities, then think again my friend. According to a gap year survey³, 88 percent of Gap Year graduates report that their Gap Year had significantly added to their employability.

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Additionally, The Independent⁴ mentions that graduate recruiters have recognised students who are productive in their gap year actually build more valuable qualities and boost their career opportunities;

'Constructive gap years help students stand out to employers and universities.'

Demonstration of character, ambition, achievement, key skills and life experiences trump a generic degree every time. Employers want young people keen to follow a well thought-out life path, not robotic exam-factory clones.'

Students who crave career security in their future but still value what a gap year has to offer, may benefit from spending some of their gap year partaking in an internship in their desired field, to build experience.

³ Source: American Gap Association National Alumni Survey, 2015

⁴ Source: The Independent, Constructive Gap Years Help Students Stand out to Employers and Universities, 2009

✓ A gap year could be for you if...

You don't feel a sense of urgency towards progressing your career

*MY TIP

Don't waste valuable time agonising over whether or not your career aspirations will be hindered by your choice to take a break from study or work. The evidence suggests the exact opposite is true. Enjoy your much-deserved time off and begin your career pursuit when YOU are ready.



Consider: Higher Education

People often think that by pursuing a gap year, their opportunity to follow higher education later will be impaired.

In reality, colleges now promote gap years for students, and there is evidence to reflect further academic benefits of postponing higher education. PBS NewsHour⁵ offers the idea that;

'Many colleges are encouraging the delayed entry to give students time to recharge after the stress of high school and build upon life or work experiences with a structured program of volunteer work, part-time employment or travel and internships in foreign countries.'

Research⁶ suggests that students who take a gap year have a 90% chance of beginning college within a year and actually boast higher GPA's than their non gap year classmates.

It's hard to decide what is right for you, so the key question you should ask yourself is; Do I need a break from education after year 12?

It's common for students who took a gap year to reflect on the positive way it impacted their future college experience. Students were quoted in Open Colleges⁷ claiming that a gap year helped them clarify what they wanted from their higher education and gain focus and direction in their education pathway.

5 Source: PBS News Hour, 5 Things to Know About a Gap Year, When Students Take Time Off, May 2016

6 Source: American Gap Association National Alumni Survey, 2015

7 Source: Open Colleges, Taking a Gap Year to Get Ahead: 4 Alumni Share Their Stories, October 2016

✓ A gap year could be for you if...

You value higher education, but you need a break after High School

*MY TIP

If you don't feel you have the motivation to reach your best standard at University right after high school, then trust your instinct and take the time to focus on building some life experiences. Maybe even spend some time working to maintain a routine so you can hit the following year of study at full capacity.



Consider: Family Reassurance

It's natural for a student to crave the support and encouragement of their parents, so when leaving high school, they can play an influential role in your decision.

It's hard for parents to understand and accept the concept of a gap year, as it wasn't such a popular pathway when they were in high school.

I would suggest clarifying whether or not the reassurance of your family is a determining factor in your likelihood to take a gap year.

The easiest way to get your parents on board, is to outline to them why it will be valuable for you and what your plan is. For example; researchers⁸ at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Texas at Austin have stated that the skills and life experience gained during a gap year can be beneficial for a young person. "There is a scientific consensus in the behavioural sciences that success in school and beyond depends critically on many attributes other than cognitive ability."

There is plenty of research to support the value of a gap year, some of which is outlined in this guide, it's just a matter of getting your parents on the same page as you.

8 Source: The Conversation, Starting College? Here's Why You Should Think About a Gap Year, May 2016

✓ A gap year could be for you if...

Your family see the value in your gap year plans

*MY TIP

Do your research about the benefits a gap year can provide you before approaching the topic with your parents. They will only get on board if they sense that your particular gap year has a purpose.



Consider: Social Circles

High School graduates commonly worry about drifting from the safety net of their social circle.

If this is a primary concern for you, you should weigh up what you value more; keeping in touch with your past or building new experiences.

Having a gap year and exploring your social boundaries is likely to help you clarify what you do and don't want in your future pathway. Philanthropist, Tony Robbins promotes the theory that change, or in his words, variety is one of six core human needs⁹. Variety is good for you, and gap year pathways can provide you with exactly that.

A key thing to remember is; an increasing number of students are choosing to embrace a gap year each year, (up 22% from 2014-15)¹⁰ so you won't be alone in your decision!

A lot of students are not only taking gap years and building new social circles, but they are benefiting from it on a large scale.

Ask yourself: do I value change and variety in my life?
The Huffington Post, for example, suggested that embracing change and learning to adapt is one of the key reasons why you should consider taking a gap year.

⁹ Source: Habits for Wellbeing, 6 Core Human Needs By Anthony Robbins

¹⁰ Source: PBS News Hour, 5 Things to Know About a Gap Year, When Students Take Time Off, May 2016

¹¹ Source: The Huffington Post, 10 Reasons You Should Take a Gap Year, December 2013

✓ A gap year could be for you if...

You value exploring opportunities outside your comfort zone

*MY TIP

Rather than focusing on what you will potentially be leaving behind if you travel in your gap year, look towards the future and concentrate on the valuable experiences a gap year travel pathway will provide for you.

So, why have students chosen to pursue a gap year in the past?



According to a study by American Gap Association, the following are the top responses from students before and after pursuing a gap year

Reasons for choosing a gap year

1. Opportunity for self discovery
2. Feeling burnt out from studies

Outcomes of a gap year

1. A clearer understanding of who they are
2. A deeper connection with other countries, people and cultures
3. Developed additional skills for future career or academic progress

American Gap Association cited evidence from Birch (2007), stating that ; Gap Year students are perceived to be 'more mature, more self-reliant and independent' than non-Gap Year students.

Influences Behind Gap Year Student's Decisions



Gain life experience/grow personally	92%
Travel, experience other cultures	85%
Break from academic track	82%
Explore study options	51%
Volunteer	48%
Explore career options	44%
Learn other language	41%
Parents/peer encouraged	31%
Gain work experience	28%
Other	11%

These are the most popular reasons why American students choose to take gap years according to a 2015 National Alumni Survey, and what opportunity they felt would benefit from some time off after school. It is particularly interesting to see how many different opportunities American students saw in their gap year and the increasing popularity, as America was slower to grasp the concept and benefits of a gap year than most countries.

The Alternative Gap Year That Has It All

A future pathway that thousands of Australian and New Zealand high school graduates have chosen to follow that embraces an alternative style of a gap year, is the opportunity to go to college in the US.

Choosing to go to college in the US allows students to experience a short-term variety of a gap year, as students will finish high school in November in Australia and New Zealand, and enter college in America in August the following year.

The US college opportunity affords students a well-deserved break from school and the chance to explore a variety of pathways, before entering an environment that combines multiple interests in one pathway.

If sport, education, travel, career development and personal growth are important to you in your future, becoming a US college student-athlete could be a perfect fit for you.

If you need some time to take these considerations into account, use your list of pros and cons on the next slide to help build further clarity. Create your own pros and cons into each section based on your circumstances, to help identify what is important to you.



Learn more about how
NSR can help you with
your US College pathway

Your Space to Think

What do you like and dislike about a gap year?

PROS













CONS













SUMMARY

What you choose to do in the year immediately following High School can have a significant impact on the rest of your life, so it is important that you give enough thought to whichever path you choose to follow. Hopefully this guide has helped you identify some of the benefits of a gap year and can now allow you to weigh up all the various elements that are relevant to your circumstances.

There is no general pathway that is right for every High School leaver, as everyone's circumstances are unique. While it may seem like a cliché, I believe in the importance of following your heart as your instincts can often guide you towards a future that will ignite your passions.

My pathway was one where I could use my passion for sport to help me secure an education at a leading US college. When I look back on that choice now, I am so glad that I followed my instincts as it has helped shape a unique future after embracing a valuable gap year.

I can only wish the same sense of future satisfaction for you.

Interested in the ultimate gap year?

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