

# The merits of a gap year

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Choosing not to go straight from undergraduate to graduate school was unexpectedly one of the best decisions I ever made. The summer prior to my final year, I had overextended myself with summer courses, beginning my thesis, working full-time and studying for the GREs. I was forced to face the reality that I was going to need to take a year in order to refuel and refocus. Initially, negative thoughts clouded my head: the trepidation of never going back to school, of being unproductive and of appearing to lack a sense of direction to potential graduate admissions committees. Despite increasing popularity of gap years, I had difficulty shaking the negative stigma. It wasn't until I put my research skills to good use that I started to appreciate the benefits of a gap year. I discovered that "gap years" are common practice in many countries and have the potential to provide serious benefits. A gap year is a prolonged period, typically a year, between life stages. The most common gap years occur between high school and university, undergraduate and graduate degrees, graduate school and a profession, or during a career change. When used productively, a gap year can enhance both professional and personal growth.

There are four main reasons to consider a gap year. First, if used effectively, a gap year can increase candidate competitiveness

for graduate school. With the increasing admission standards of graduate school programs in psychology, students who take a gap year have the advantages of 4th year grades being higher than 3rd year grades, additional research experience and being more likely to have posters and publications on their vitae. Not to mention that life experience outside of academics also boosts your CV and gives you a competitive edge. Additional time to write the GREs and fill gaps in your application is also beneficial. Second, a gap year can help reduce some of the financial burdens of applying to graduate school. Higher education is expensive and so is the application process. Working during a gap year helps students to cover some of these costs, pay off undergraduate debt, and save money for graduate school. Third, a gap year allows the time for purposeful and informed decision making. Lastly, after four years of hard work, taking time to refocus one's self is important. A gap year can afford the time to travel, volunteer abroad, or meet personal goals you may not have had time to achieve otherwise. After presenting my honours thesis research at an international conference, I rekindled my love for surfing in Bali after backpacking through South East Asia for 3 months! Having been successfully accepted to graduate school, I can officially say that there are definite advantages to taking a gap year worth considering.