



GAP YEAR TRANSITION GUIDE
WHAT NEXT?

Tips for a successful transition to post-gap year life, from fellow gap year alumni and expert gap year counselors

2nd Edition: Updated 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Photo: EF Gap Year

01

Unpack your year

Reflect on your experience and begin to articulate its impact

02

Share your story

Talk about your experience and help inspire others

03

Find your community

Connect with other gap year alumni and the broad gap year community

04

Join the movement

Become active in the gap year movement

05

Your education

Build upon your gap year experiences and apply them to ongoing education

06

Your career

Translate skills, growth, and insights from your gap year into a career path

07

Change for good

Move forward as a leader for your generation

08

Resources

Stay engaged and take advantage of available resources

01 UNPACK YOUR YEAR

Time to process! Intentional reflection is an essential step in processing your gap year experience, articulating the growth that occurred, and understanding what made it meaningful. Reflection is an ongoing process, and it doesn't happen all at once - you'll still be gaining new insights from your experience years down the road. That being said, there are some key questions you can ask yourself to help organize your thoughts and influence decision-making moving forward.

TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

- **Reverse culture shock is real!** Be mindful that it takes time to readjust—especially if you were immersed in another culture during your gap year—and be kind to yourself as you develop post-gap year routines and activities. Review the **aspects of reverse culture shock** detailed by the U.S. Department of State so you have an idea of what to expect.
- You might feel disconnected from your friends and family who experienced different things while you were away. Take time to consider the journeys they've been on, and to understand the different forms of growth and change that you've all experienced in different ways.
- It might be difficult figuring out how to convey your experiences at first. This is where intentional reflection is helpful! Spend time journaling, sorting photos, and finding ways of articulating your story that feel right to you.
- Watch this **Post-Gap Year Transition Webinar** (courtesy of Marion Taylor, GYA Emeritus Accredited Gap Year Consultant) to help validate the emotional and practical aspects of adjusting to change.



Photo: Alzar Gap



ASK YOURSELF

- What sorts of activities or experiences would have felt challenging or uncomfortable before my gap year, but now feel comfortable and easy for me?
- Who were the most impactful people I met during my gap year journey, and how did they influence me?
- What were the most challenging parts of my gap year experience, and how was I able to work through those difficult moments?
- What assumptions/expectations did I have prior to my gap year that were challenged/alterd by my experience?
- How have my interests, values, and passions evolved? What issues/skills/work would I like to spend more time addressing and developing?
- What have I learned about my own needs when it comes to support and relationships? What do I need in order to recharge and stay motivated? What do I need from the people in my life in order to feel connected and well-supported?

02 SHARE YOUR STORY

Intentional reflection will allow you to develop your gap year story in a meaningful way for different audiences. Your decision to take a gap year gave you a unique experience that likely offered you powerful insights about your values, personal growth, and the work you think it's important to pursue in the world. Sharing your story can serve to inspire others while also helping you make connections and build community.

PLATFORMS FOR STORY-SHARING

- Contribute to GYA's **Gap Year Stories** webpage, where you can provide inspiration to prospective gappers and read about the experiences of other gap year alumni.
- Take a few minutes to fill out GYA's **Gap Year Alumni Questionnaire** in order to contribute to ongoing data collection about gap year trends.
- If you were a participant in a structured program during your gap year, there may be several opportunities to participate as a program alum at a **USA Gap Year Fair** (contact fairs@gooverseas.com for more info).
- Pitch your unique gap year story to **Gap Year Radio** for a chance to be highlighted on the podcast.
- Share highlights and insights across social media! Common gap year hashtags include #gapyear #explorethegapyear #gapper #gapyearstudent #experientiallearning



Photo: Pacific Discovery



Photo: Irish Gap Year

BLOGGING & VLOGGING

- Write a blog post for a personal website, GYA, and/or a program blog (if you participated in a structured program). Submit GYA blog proposals to info@gapyearassociation.org.
- Write an op-ed for a local and/or school news outlet. GYA will be happy to work with you on editing an article or turning a blog post into an effective op-ed piece. This can be a great way to share the benefits you gained from your gap year and to encourage others to consider a similar path.
- Promote your experience with a written story or video for **Gap Year Exploration Month** (GYEM), which takes place every October. Join a large community of fellow gap year alumni participating in this annual awareness campaign.

03 FIND COMMUNITY

It can sometimes feel alienating to return home or start college after having an experience that was so different from many of your peers. Seek out ways of finding and connecting with other gap year alumni and advocates of experiential learning.



CAMPUS CLUBS

If you are attending college following your gap year, find out if there is a club or affinity group for gap year alumni. No club? Contact your campus student services center or the Gap Year Association to get support for starting one.



GYA ALUMNI COMMITTEE

The Gap Year Association is a large community of various gap year advocates, from educators, counselors, and program providers to students, families, and other general enthusiasts. All GYA members are invited to participate in one or more of GYA's **member-led committees**, which collaborate on different projects that support GYA's nonprofit mission. In particular, **GYA's Alumni Committee** is a great place to start for those gappers looking to connect with other alumni and contribute their skills and experiences to projects that support gap year advocacy for more students.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Look for stories about gap year experiences on social media. This can be a great way to start building a virtual community of people who have had similar experiences. We also invite former gappers to join the **Gap Year Alum Community Facebook Group** to share stories, post memories, share resources, and seek support from fellow alumni.

Reintegration was the hardest part of my gap year. GYA gave me a community with which to share and affirm my experiences, as well as tools to amplify my voice. Now more than a year after my gap year, GYA helps me to continue that spirit to support other gap year students who may be going through similar things.

- Ameena H.

04 JOIN THE MOVEMENT

As a gap year alum yourself, you're likely already aware that most students do not choose to pursue a gap year after high school. That being said, the gap year movement continues to expand, and the gap year option is growing in popularity as students think more critically about how they want to invest their time and resources, and how societal expectations measure up against their own goals. As an experienced gapper, you are well-positioned to help spread the word and assist others in planning their own gap years. Here are some ways you can become an active participant in the growth of the gap year movement:



Photo: High Mountain Institute

- Become a gap year “ambassador” or spokesperson at your high school alma mater in order to share your experiences and encourage other students to consider the gap year option. Let the counselors at your high school know you’re available as a resource for interested students.
- Contact local media sources—community newspapers and radio station(s) are great places to start—to share your gap year story.
- Get involved with Gap Year Exploration Month (GYEM) every October. There are ample opportunities during GYEM to share your story on different platforms and to participate in a collective effort to spread the word about gap years.
- Pitch your unique gap year story to [Gap Year Radio](#) for a chance to be highlighted on the podcast.
- Work with GYA to plan a local event for gap year alumni and/or prospective gappers in your hometown.
- Work with GYA to plan a webinar, interview, or other online video resource on a specific gap year-related topic.

05 YOUR EDUCATION

Your gap year provided an opportunity to learn more about yourself and how you fit into the world. How can your experiences inform your educational choices following your gap year?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF?

- What new passions and skills have you developed?
- Which aspects of your gap year did you find most inspiring?
- What did you learn about the boundaries of your comfort zone? What did you learn about how to tackle challenges?

Three years after returning from my gap year, I continue to apply my experiential education to my college education.

- Elle M.



Photo: ARCC

ENRICH YOUR CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

- Take a college course that relates to your gap year experience
- Take a college course outside your comfort zone
- Seek mentorship; build relationships with your professors, advisor(s), and older students
- Join clubs and continue exploring interests outside of your major

OFF CAMPUS

- Many gap year alumni choose to study abroad as part of their college experience
- Consider both domestic and international options for internships and off-campus study programs
- Consult options within your school's Study Abroad Office, Career Services, Outdoor Education Department, and/or other offices/services so you understand the full breadth of options for off-campus experiences.

My gap year time showed me the best version of myself by allowing me to explore the stories of the world, and giving me the wonderful gift of witnessing those stories become my own. ... I started to see different parts of the world as my home and my responsibility. That is why I chose to study sustainability in college.

- Jonah C.

06 YOUR CAREER

Build upon the impacts of your gap year. How can your gap year experience inform your professional path?

Did you know?

According to recent surveys of gap year alumni:

- **95%** reported that their gap year prepared them somewhat or very well for their next steps in life
- **82%** felt that their gap year gave them a competitive advantage when applying for college/jobs
- **81%** reported having a gap year experience that influenced their choice of career



Photo: Warriors Academy South Africa

EXPERIENCE

Which aspects of your gap year did you find enjoyable and energizing? Which aspects did you find to be onerous or uninspiring? Understanding the types of work you DON'T enjoy is just as important as understanding the work you DO enjoy. Do you thrive under heavy supervision and guidance, or do you appreciate more independence? Do you like to have clear, detailed, and specific instructions, or do you appreciate more creativity when completing tasks? What do you value most in a team setting? What do you need in order to be most receptive to constructive feedback?

SKILLS

Evaluate the soft and hard skills developed over the course of your gap year and consider how they translate into the work environment. Hard skills might include things like teaching, construction, research, or design experience. Soft skills could include initiative, flexibility, team work, decision-making, perseverance, risk management, and leadership.

RELEVANCE

Prepare to describe how your newly acquired values and skillsets can apply to your work environment with a future employer.

My gap time significantly impacted my career path. I learned that it is possible to combine personal interests and career, and that I didn't have to take the traditional path of getting a corporate job after graduation. If you are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to take a semester or year away from the classroom, do it! The personal growth I experienced on my gap semester was monumental and has positively impacted every aspect of my life.

- Anne K..

07 CHANGE FOR GOOD

As you move into your next chapter, take this time to intentionally align your values and beliefs with your day-to-day actions.

Photo: Amigos de las Americas



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Take the initiative to vote, stay actively and accurately informed, promote civic participation, and seek out diverse perspectives on the issues you care about. Engage in open-minded dialogue about issues at local, national, and global levels.

GIVE BACK

Understand the skills you have developed, and use them to responsibly volunteer your time in the community. Find an organization addressing issues you think are important, and inquire about how you can contribute your time and skills to their mission.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Travel responsibly and act with social consciousness. Take the time to understand the impacts of your actions on the larger world, and practice habits that benefit places and people beyond your immediate surroundings.

08 RESOURCES



Photo: CIEE

[GAP YEAR ASSOCIATION](#)

[GYA COMMITTEES](#)

[GAP YEAR STORIES](#)

[GAP YEAR ALUM
QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

[GAP YEAR ALUM
FACEBOOK GROUP](#)

[GAP YEAR EXPLORATION
MONTH \(GYEM\)](#)

[GAP YEAR TO COLLEGE
ADVICE](#)

[#EXPLORETHEGAPYEAR](#)
[#EXPLORETHEGAPYEAR](#)
[#EXPLORETHEGAPYEAR](#)
[#EXPLORETHEGAPYEAR](#)
[#EXPLORETHEGAPYEAR](#)



Photo: Carpe Diem Education

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS:

- Alison Sever, former Alumni Committee Co-Chair
- Sasha Landauer, former Alumni Committee Co-Chair
- Sandy Storer, Accredited Gap Year Consultant & GYA Board Member
- Marion Taylor, Emeritus Accredited Gap Year Consultant & former GYA Board Member
- Erin Aucar, former GYA Board Member
- Jonah Cedar, Gap Year Alum
- Katherine Stievater, Accredited Gap Year Consultant

STAY IN TOUCH

Gap Year Association

info@gapyearassociation.org | (406) 201-5389

P.O. Box 7335, Missoula, MT 59807

