



Purposeful Gap Year Planning Resource

Hello and welcome to the start of your gap year planning – how exciting!

At [Discover Year](#), we hear stories every day from successful people who identify their gap year(s) as one of the most important decisions they have ever made. They tell us how their travel, work and self-reflection enabled them to build the confidence, skills and self-awareness necessary to pursue a life of purpose.

We believe that purposeful gap year planning should be focused around building the two most important skills for success in life and work: **sense of agency** and **adaptability**.

A *Sense of agency* – the feeling that you have control over your decisions and your life - requires self-awareness, confidence and motivation to pursue activities and relationships that are meaningful to you. This is an important step in creating purpose in your life.

Adaptability means being able to pursue those things that are meaningful to you within the limits of the environment in which you live. It means being able to maintain your authenticity while being flexible in changing external conditions. This requires creativity, critical thinking, interpersonal skills and resilience.

A sense of agency and adaptability are developed through a combination of three types of activities:

- **Experiential learning** (work, travel and volunteerism);
- **Self-discovery** (self-reflection, coaching, mentorship) and
- **Transferrable skill development** (communication, organization, time management, problem solving, etc.)

We offer this guide as a tool for you to use in planning a purposeful gap year. In the pages that follow, you will find the following:

1. [Planning sheet](#) – outline your intentions and the activities you would like to pursue
2. [Goal-setting guide](#) – identify some key goals and the steps needed to achieve them
3. [Personal inventories](#) – explore your true interests, values, strengths and skills
4. [Reading list](#) – we offer some suggestions that may help you in your self-reflection
5. [Resources for parents](#) – review some additional gap year information and research

Congratulations on your decision to take a gap year. We wish you all the best in this wonderful adventure.

Planning

Use the following two pages to consider some of the activities and experiences you would like to explore during your gap year. Please keep in mind that this short exercise is meant to offer you a few suggestions as a starting point, and this list is by no means exhaustive. There may be many other experiences, questions, checklist items and thoughts you will want to consider. This is a starting point.

Experiential Learning			
Type of experience	Questions to consider	To-do list	My interests
Paid Work/ internship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What am I interested in? • What job skills do I want to develop? • Where can I develop these skills? • What skills do I have to offer? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Update resumé ✓ Create LinkedIn profile ✓ Visit businesses of interest to meet managers and deliver resumé ✓ Follow these tips to be an outstanding employee 	I would like to work in...
Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where would I like to visit and why? • What is my budget? • How long do I want to spend travelling? • What would I like to learn? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Decide on destinations(s) ✓ Research visa, immunization and other travel requirements ✓ Book travel arrangements well in advance 	I am fascinated by... (country/city/ territory)
Volunteerism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What am I interested in? • What skills can I learn while helping others? • What skills do I have that I can use to help others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Browse Volunteer Ottawa for ideas & opportunities ✓ Approach the owner/manager of a place where you would like to volunteer with your offer 	I would like to help with...

Self-discovery			
Type of experience	Questions to consider	To-do list	My interests
Self-reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are my true interests? • What is important to me? • What are my natural talents? • What skills have I enjoyed building? • How can I make use of these interests, values and strengths to serve others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings throughout the year ✓ Set time aside every week to think about the new experiences you encountered and what you learned about yourself and others 	I have my best thoughts when...
Mentorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What personal qualities do I want in a mentor? • What careers/ skills/ activities do I want to learn more about? • Who are some people who may be able to help me in these areas? • How can I reach those people? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Organize informational interviews ✓ Arrange to job shadow at least a few people who work in careers that may interest you ✓ Identify one professional you admire and ask them to mentor you for the year (we recommend 1-2 meetings per month) 	I want to learn more about...
Career counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could I benefit from the help of a career counsellor or coach in developing and pursuing my goals? • What personal qualities do I want in a coach? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Decide whether you would like to work with a coach or counsellor ✓ Search for a career coach that seems to be a good fit for you 	I want a coach to help me with...
Skill Development			
Skill	Questions to consider	To-do list	My interests
Transferrable skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills would I like to develop? • What skills will help me achieve my future goals? • What resources are available to help me build these skills? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Research training programs and online learning tools ✓ Build a plan for learning these skills ✓ Ask someone to help you stick to your plan 	At the end of the year, I want to be able to...

Goal Setting

To make the most of your year, it is important to identify what you would like to achieve at the outset. There are no right or wrong answers to this question, as your goals will reflect your unique personality and motivations.

To achieve a goal (achievement-oriented), it is important to clarify objectives (action-oriented) that will enable the accomplishment of the desired goal. Use the format below to describe 1-3 meaningful, achievable goal for each of the following areas: experiential learning, self-discovery and skill development.

We offer the following example to help clarify what is meant by the terms *goal* and *objective*.

(Example)

Goal: Save \$5,000 for my post-secondary education

Objectives:

- Update my resumé and make sure to include all important skills for the type of work I want to do
- Identify 10 companies where I would like to work and arrange a meeting with a manager at each of them
- Build a [personal budget](#) for myself for the year based on my salary and expenses

Goal: _____

Objectives:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Personal Inventories

Making decisions about your future should always involve reflection upon your own unique set of preferences, interests, values, strengths and skills. The questionnaires and inventories included below will help you clarify your understanding of who you are and what is important to you.

It is important to highlight a few points before you take these questionnaires:

- 1 – The results from these exercises offer a *snapshot of who you are today*, and these elements of your personality may change over time.
- 2 – It is always best to take these tests more than once. We recommend re-testing every few months, as the comparison of your results across time will help you gain more clarity around the most important aspects of your personality.
- 3 – We strongly recommend that you review and discuss the results from these exercises with a trained career counsellor or coach, as the results can be difficult to interpret and apply properly on your own. A good coach or counsellor will help you make sense of your results.

Questionnaires

[WATCH](#) a 3-minute overview of this compliment of inventories and questionnaires and the MentorU philosophy to start.

- 1 – **Vocational preferences assessment** [HERE](#) (complete online and print results upon completion)
- 2 – **Values identification & prioritization** [HERE](#) (print PDF and complete manually, then follow instructions)
- 3 - **VIA Character Strengths** [HERE](#) (complete online, download your results [link at top of results page] and print)
- 4 – **Skills Inventory** [HERE](#) (print PDF and complete manually)
- 5 – **Interests Worksheet** [HERE](#) (print PDF and complete manually)

Once you have completed all the questionnaires, list your highest preferences, interests, values, strengths and skills in the space provided on the following page. Seeing them all in one place should help you gain clarity on who you are and what is important to you.

You can browse other self-awareness exercises and resources at www.mentorU.ca/resources

Vocational Preferences (Onet Interest Profiler)	Interests (Common Characteristics)	Values

VIA Character Strengths	Skills (Choose one or two skills that are most important to you from each category)

Reading List

A purposeful gap year should help you better understand the world around you. It should also help you understand how your unique set of motivations and abilities can improve that world. We offer the books below as suggestions that may inspire you and help you gain valuable knowledge and practical tools to improve your life and the lives of those around you. Enjoy!

Personal Development

- [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#), Stephen R. Covey
- [Feel the Fear... and do it Anyway](#), Susan Jeffers
- [Why we do What we do](#), Edward L. Deci
- [Learned Optimism](#), Martin E.P Seligman
- [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#), Carol S. Dweck
- [Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance](#), Angela Duckworth

Career Development

- [What Colour is Your Parachute](#), Richard N. Bolles
- [The Element](#) & [Finding Your Element](#), Sir Ken Robinson

Interpersonal & Communication Skills

- [Emotional Intelligence](#), Daniel Goleman
- [Start with Why](#), Simon Sinek
- [Difficult Conversations](#), Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen
- [The 5 Love Languages](#), Gary Chapman

Creativity

- [How to Fly a Horse](#), Kevin Ashton
- [What Google Learned from its Quest to Build the Perfect Team](#), Charles Duhigg

Resources for Parents

We recognize that the concept of a year away from formal education can seem risky to parents. While this transitional approach has been common in other parts of the world for many years, the concept is still relatively new in Canada. Many parents are concerned that a gap year after high school will affect their child’s academic momentum and career motivation.

We often hear parents express worry that their teenager will lose the academic skills necessary to eventually succeed in post-secondary education. They also often mention the fear that their child will “get a taste” of earning a living, and lose sight of the purpose of post-secondary studies, thus limiting their potential future opportunities and earnings.

Since the idea of a gap year represents a departure from the status quo in Canada, it takes courage for parents to support their son or daughter in this pursuit.

We believe that this courage will ultimately help set your child on a path to a purposeful and fulfilling life.

In fact, as research and a considerable amount of anecdotal evidence shows, neither of the above mentioned parental fears are realized with any degree of significance for students who complete a purposeful gap year. The research – as well as our *Discover Year* participants and a plethora of our community members – have shown that an organized and meaningful gap year incites motivation and a sense of purpose. Not only that, studies show that “gappers” out-perform non-gappers who entered post-secondary studies with similar grades and test scores.

As you consider this option with your child, we wanted to offer you a handful of resources that may be of interest:

- Research and statistics
 - [American Gap Association National Alumni Survey, 2015](#)
 - [The Gap Year Dilemma](#), Canadian Journal of Career Development, 2017
 - [Addressing the Catch 22](#): RBC & CCDF recommendations for improving school-to-work transitions

- Popular media
 - [Rethink the Gap](#), Harvard Ed Magazine, 2017
 - [Discover Year: An Important GAP for Canada’s Youth](#), CERIC – contactpoint.ca
 - [It’sNotAcademic](#) (Podcast), Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2017

If you would like some help...

Gap years take a variety of different shapes, many of which are incredibly useful to those who carry them out.

At *Discover Year*, we recognize that gappers have a variety of different interests, budgets, challenges and needs as they plan their year of exploration. We believe that some young adults are best suited to arrange and carry out their own plans, while some could benefit from the assistance of experts.

For those interested in a helping hand, we offer structured and semi-structured programming. While there is structure to our services, it is important to note that our principal objective is to help our students build self-motivation, confidence, adaptability and self-awareness. Therefore, our team and programs aim to facilitate growth in our students through guidance and coaching, rather than authoritative education.

Here are two options for students looking for support:

- Apply to [Discover Year](#)
- [Contact us](#) for more information regarding a more flexible, personalized coaching program

Wishing you a life of action, openness and authenticity,



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