

# Graduates 2022





# Getting Ready

With graduation looming, the end of school is in sight. Here's how to get ready.

## TAKE IT ALL IN

While the excitement of graduation is undeniable, don't let the end of your tenure in school rush by unnoticed. There are still memories to be made, even late in your high school or college career. Take in the sounds and sights of every day. There's something special about the time you've spent and the friends you've made. Soon, all of it will be replaced by new and different experiences. So take everything in. Whether you walk across the stage as valedictorian or someone who just barely passed, you've shown the diligence to earn a well-earned degree. Celebrate it.

## CONTINUE NETWORKING

You may have already gotten an internship or new job, and made a few contacts in your industry. Take this opportunity to dig more deeply. Connect with movers and shakers on LinkedIn, join virtual communities, and ask people within driving distance to meet you for an informal getting-acquainted session. You'll gain valuable information about your field, while getting your name out there. Start building a mentors list, featuring contact information both from these new con-



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tacts and anyone who had an impact on you throughout your time in school. Stay in touch. You never know when they might have a transformative suggestion — or a connection that advances your career path.

## PACE YOURSELF

Understand that graduation

likely ends your life of regulated time. You and your classmates have spent the bulk of your lives tracking success on a class-by-class basis — all in service of getting to the point of graduation. Your life will move at a different pace now. Projects may take much longer to come to fruition. You'll build a career

over decades instead of semesters. Work life is a marathon, not a sprint.

## KEEP LEARNING

Education didn't start with high school and college, and it shouldn't end there. Sign up for industry-related seminars, conferences and continuing ed

classes. They'll spark new ideas, and provide more depth to your mentors list. Or switch it up entirely by going outside of your degree path: Try learning a new language. You'll be arming yourself with another powerful networking tool, while teaching yourself to think in a new way.



# Documenting your Day

All of your perseverance and hard work has paid off. But don't forget to properly document this special day.

## WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT

As you prepare to venture into college or the workforce, it's easy to overlook the notable achievement of graduation. You may be so excited about the next step that you don't properly celebrate this one. Document it all, anyway. Photographs and video from graduation will help set these memories in stone forever. One day, after you've gotten yourself established in the next phase of your life, these images will remind you of all that was accomplished back in school.

## WHAT TO DOCUMENT

Photographs with your cap and gown are standard, of course. But don't forget to get some shots with friends and family in an informal setting. Suggest an historic building on campus, or go off the beaten path to an outdoor garden or scenic waterway. Invite classmates too, since they've also played a big role in your academic journey.

Ask the photographer to take some environmental shots at graduation, not just your entrance and degree conferral. It'll be hard for you to take everything in during the busy ceremony. Then get



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plenty of images as you celebrate with friends and family members afterward. These are moments everyone will treasure forever.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Your parents will likely want to celebrate this watershed moment by hanging a few of these shots on the wall at home. But your new images

can also serve as a career-building tool.

Professional photos raise your game on business-focused websites like LinkedIn, while jazzing up your resume. And let's face it, the first years in college or on the job market are usually pretty lean. You may not be able to afford something like this again for a while.

## FINDING A PHOTOGRAPHER

Ask older friends or family members for recommendations on selecting a suitable photographer. Their experiences will likely be the most useful in deciding who's right for you. Do your own research by clicking through online portfolios, perhaps the best guide for determining a photographer's

approach. Create and follow a budget for this process, since some photographers are less affordable than others — and other expenses like apparel, invitations and graduation trips add up. Once you've hired someone, be honest about expectations, but listen for their input too. They may have a suggestion as an experienced pro that you've never considered.



# Should you Take a Gap Year?

Getting to the point of graduation is no easy task. That's why many consider taking some time away.

## DEFINING THE TERM

You may have reached this important day with a sense of exhaustion, after so many years spent studying, testing and writing term papers. Perhaps you see the time in between high school and college, or between college and work life, as a moment to reflect. Or maybe you'd like to travel or do the kind of community service work that is so much more difficult to schedule without a dedicated block of time. You're considering what's known as a "gap year," a period of time spent off the academic or career treadmill. There's a lot in front of you, and much of it is uncertain. Time away might help you reset.

## MAKE A PLAN

While there are officially no right or wrong justifications when considering a gap year, you should have a clear idea about why you're considering it — and a definitive plan on what you'll do. For instance, delaying your college enrollment because you haven't yet decided on a degree path might be beneficial. Use the gap year sharpening your life goals, and answers to questions like that will become clear. Gap years may be bene-



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ficial coming out of college, too. Time spent exploring new places, broadening your horizons and meeting different people can inform your future career path, too.

## IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Taking a gap year might mean leaving behind funds

associated scholarships or every day work. Part of the experience may be signing on for temporary or part-time work to make ends meet. Some jobs may actually qualify for college credit, and that can open the door for financial aid. The website [gapyear-association.org](http://gapyear-association.org) also includes information on scholarships

and grants. Note that taking a gap year may be more difficult if you've already been accepted into college. Ask if the school will defer admission, while placing a hold on any financial aid you may have received. Some universities will help smooth the way for your time off, but others may not. If there's no formal pro-

cess in place, discuss the issue in depth with admissions — and keep complete documentation of your communications in case they're needed when you return. Finally, remember that despite the name, you don't have to take an entire year off. Sometimes a semester is all you need to reset.



# Graduation Gift Ideas

Cash is fine. Who doesn't love cash? But it's not exactly the most memorable — or useful — graduation gift.

## CLOTHES

College graduates are moving into a whole new world of business — and that can mean wearing business attire. Comfy sweatshirts and old tennis shoes are out. A more professional wardrobe is in. High school seniors can always use new slacks, dresses, shirts and formal wear for those special occasions, too. But many grads at both levels wouldn't know where to start. That's where a savvy careerist can make a huge impact. If you're unsure of their sizes, purchase a gift card or fitting session at your favorite store.

## SMALL APPLIANCES

They might not be the glitziest of gifts, but small appliances have the notable advantages of being both very useful and the kind of thing a grad likely wouldn't immediately buy for themselves. Coffee makers, toasters, slow cookers and microwaves will play huge roles in their every day lives: They'll be saving untold dollars, since they won't be throwing money away at the local drive-thru, and they'll be eating healthier, too.

## HIGH-END ACCESSORIES

Graduates won't be able to

rely on a convenient bell to remind them where they're supposed to go next. So consider buying them a professional-grade watch. Necklaces and earrings are also great choices.

Just be aware that their style may change into college, and university graduates may have to conform to certain work-

place guidelines.

Splurge on a high-quality leather purse, wallet, briefcase or bag. These accessories will make life easier in between meetings or classes, while also helping to polish their look.

If your graduate's goals run toward gap-year travel, consider a well-made carry on.



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## THE RIGHT ELECTRONICS

The typical graduate probably has a sweeping collection of handheld electronics, from phones to ear buds to gaming systems. Instead, focus on upgrading their computer for the next level. College courses and new jobs will require faster, smarter machines, with more memory and the latest

connectivity options. Consider buying them a voice-controlled assistant for ease in moving to their own space, either at the college dorm or out in the world. If you're unsure of what tech they already own, buy a targeted gift card. It will be far more useful over a much longer term than one from their favorite coffee shop.

# Saving Money

You may or may not exit college with some student-loan debt, but you're almost assuredly going to be starting your career with entry-level pay. Saving money will be key.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Even into college, most of your finances might still have been managed by others. You were covered under your parents' insurance policy, and they may have helped out with certain bills. You shared rent with classmates, or lived in a dorm room paid through some form of financial aid. Tuition may also have been covered by grants or scholarships. But once you leave school, life's financial responsibilities become yours alone. Suddenly, there is a difficult monthly cycle to manage, and longer-term bills to remember. But don't forget to budget in savings. You'll need an emergency fund when the inevitable bump in the road arrives.

## HOW MUCH TO SAVE

Debt experts recommend that you have at least three months' worth of expenses in savings. Ideally, they suggest six months' worth in reserve. As these savings accumulate and you begin to build past an entry-level salary, consider splitting your emergency fund into short- and long-term accounts. Short-term expenses would include a vehicle breaking down, or the costs of repairing or replacing small household appliances. Longer-term funds wouldn't be accessed unless an extenuating circumstance like a major medical bill or job loss occurred.



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## STUDENT DEBT?

Perhaps the biggest impediment to saving when you've just graduated from college is any accumulation of student debt. Paying these loans down is critically important, since interest charges will continue to build. Try to pay above the minimum-required amount each time, in order to reach the end of the

billing cycle faster. Consider banking all of the cash you got for graduation. That can provide an instant foundation for your rainy day fund, without taking away funds needed to pay your student debt. The federal government also provides a payment-free grace period of six months following graduation. Create a monthly budget that takes this

expense into account, and save as much as you can in the meantime. Then start paying down the highest-interest loans first. It's a difficult juggling act, but an important one since we all experience every-day setbacks like a flat tire. Savings become even more important when the unthinkable happens.



# How to Pack Up

Whether you've been in a shared college apartment or still living with your parents, graduation leads to a time of transition.

Here's how to pack up in preparation for what comes next.

## FIRST QUESTIONS

Moving is always complex and stressful. Start with a few key considerations before putting the first thing in a box. Are you renting a moving van or truck, or relying upon your own transportation? Will there be hired hands, or are friends chipping in? Contracting with a moving service obviously involves some expense, but there are significant advantages. They'll know how to safely pack your belongings, and how to stack them for travel. That leads to less breakage, and fewer scratches and scrapes. Your move will also happen in one drive, rather than the multiple trips typically needed when graduates rely upon their buddies to help out. Finally, professional movers are insured, so you're covered in the unlikely event that something happens during transport.

## EARLY PREPARATIONS

Obviously, you'll need an array of boxes to pack away your belongings. Cardboard



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and plastic sealable versions are typically available for sale at your local hardware store, or sometimes through the moving company itself. These can be pricey, but they're also going to be free of the dents and tears typically associated with free boxes you might retrieve from convenience or grocery stores. Purchase

packing paper and bubble wrap to protect more fragile items, and tape to secure everything inside. If you are managing the move yourself, consider renting a dolly to help with heavier items including furniture and appliances. It's also handy for carrying numerous boxes in a single trip.

## ON MOVING DAY

Unpacking is made immeasurably easier if you gather and list items on a room-by-room basis. Labeling boxes with different marker colors — like red for a bedroom and blue for the kitchen — will also make moving and unpacking easier. You can quickly identify what's inside

and where it goes, without having to open the box — or even clearly make out the label. Assemble a separate box of needed essentials for the move, including snacks, phone charger, tools, first-aid items and medication. They'll come in handy on moving day, and ensure that important things aren't lost.



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# Hitting the Job Market

Graduating means turning your attention to a future in the workplace. But there's more to it than polishing up your resume.

## **EMBRACE VIRTUAL REALITY**

Job seeking officially joined the digital age when the pandemic began, as job fairs and interviews for new positions with hiring managers went virtual. Life has begun a return to normal, but virtual interviews — and virtual meetings, once you've landed the job after

graduation — appear to be here to stay. They'll still be used for initial interviews, before a company goes through the expense of flying someone to a far-away place to discuss an opening more seriously. Virtual career fairs have continued, and remote work is impossible without online connectivity. So download the needed software, invest in proper lighting, and build up your confidence by practice interviewing in front of your laptop.

## **STAY FLEXIBLE**

In today's competitive marketplace, you may need to broaden your horizons. Consider remote roles, since so many

companies have started allowing employees to work from home. At the same time, other organizations still require a local workforce, so stay open to relocating. But don't look at this kind of move as an end-point destination. Your first job is simply the first step in a long journey. You should also be ready to leverage transferable skills. The industry you intended to join may have been impacted in surprising ways over the last couple of years, and there could be fewer job openings for now. Consider jobs in adjacent fields, even if it's just on a temporary basis. Someone with a hospitality degree, for instance, can use a similar skill set in customer service.

## **NETWORKING STILL MATTERS**

It may sound old fashioned, but personal or professional connections still lead to the vast majority of new jobs. Nurture relationships that will advance your career when you're looking for a job, and even after you've secured one. Search out people, on professional sites like LinkedIn or in your every-day life, who have the kind of job you want — or work at firms where you can see yourself employed. Stay in touch with professors and other experts from your school days, since they may be able to open career doors. All of them will provide a well of informed advice along the way.