What is a gap year? A gap year is a span of time between the end of undergraduate education and the beginning of dental school. It can be longer than a year depending on your circumstances.

Are you thinking about taking a gap year? Make sure you have a clear vision of what you want to accomplish during this time away from school and plan wisely – a year (or two) can fly by.

Reasons to Take a Gap Year

- To strengthen your dental school application, or reapply
  - Increase your GPA
  - Gain more experience in the field of dentistry (volunteer, research, shadow)
  - Ensure the career path is right for you
  - Register for advanced courses
  - Study for the DAT or try to improve your score without the added pressure of classes

- To get your finances in order
  - Pay off undergraduate student debt in preparation for dental school
  - Save money to pay for your dental education

- To refocus after a busy undergraduate career

Preparing for a Gap Year

In order to maximize your gap year, focus on what motivated you to take one in the first place. What are your weaknesses as a dental school applicant, and how can you strengthen them? Meet with your health professions advisor or career counselor, and get feedback from admissions officers at the schools where you plan to apply. Ask them how you can strengthen your application and your ability to be a successful dental professional.

Discussing Your Gap Year during Interviews

Instead of worrying about how your gap year will be viewed by admissions, use your year(s) to prepare how you will describe your experience during dental school interviews. Talk about what you accomplished during your gap year that makes you a better applicant and future health professional. Explain how your gap year experience made you a better person overall. Be honest about how the year affected you beyond working through your dental and professional concerns, and highlight how your experiences strengthened your desire to become a dental professional.

Preparing Financially for Dental School

A gap year is a great time to get your finances in order, especially after incurring costs from undergraduate education. Some decide to use this time to determine how they will cover the cost of dental school. For more information about how to handle loans during your gap year, read “Student Loans and Gap Years: The Importance of Good Standing,” from The American Dental Education Association’s (ADEA) student loan consultant.

What Others are Saying about Gap Years

To see what an admissions officer thinks about students taking gap years, read “The Gap Year in the Eyes of Admissions,” from the Assistant Director of Admissions at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry. For advice from a current dental student who has a few gap years under her belt, check out “What About That Gap?”