



Welcome to CapYear

# Taking a Gap Year

The definitive guide to your pre health journey.

Written by:

Dr. Deborah Gutman, MD, MPH

**Chief Medical Educator**

CapYear



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Chief Medical Educator

## Welcome to CapYear

Deborah Gutman, MD, MPH is a practicing emergency physician with 25 years of experience in clinical practice at top academic medical centers. She trained at and served in a number of leadership and teaching roles at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, including program director for the Emergency Medicine Residency Program and has won several teaching and patient satisfaction awards. She is current faculty and pre health advisor at the Brown Gateways Master of Science in Medical Sciences Program. For the last 10 years she has been the sole proprietor of a successful advising practice providing individualized advising for students planning to attend medical school, PA school, and residency programs. She has spoken at numerous national conferences on medical schools admission and is author of several publications in medical education.

## What is a gap year?

The period of time between the end of your undergraduate education and the start of professional school (medical school or PA school). You might hear it called lots of different things including a glide year, a growth year, a bridge year, or an enrichment year, in an effort to highlight its true purpose. Taking a gap year is an increasingly common option. In 2022, 71.1% of matriculants reported taking more than 1 year off between college and graduate school, increasing from 68.5% in 2021, and 66.3% in 2020. The average age of a first-year medical student is 24 and a first-year PA student is 25. A decision to pursue a gap year is common and can only hurt you if you don't make good use of your time. Nontraditional is the new tradition. Take a gap year if you have any doubts. You can do anything. Think about what will boost your application but also what will improve your life.





## How should I plan my gap year?

Often the idea of a gap year originates after a discussion regarding improving your candidacy for medical school or PA school, but sometimes students just want to spread out the workload or take a break to pursue something they've wanted to do but could not accomplish in the time constraints of an undergraduate curriculum. Start by thinking about your original motivation. Identify your strengths and weakness in your candidacy for PA or medical school. Then identify some types of experiences that might help address those gaps. Use that list to identify opportunities and apply for them. Make sure to leave enough lead time to apply for jobs, fellowships, and internships that might appeal to you. During a gap year, students can pursue more than one activity such as working, volunteering, traveling, or taking additional coursework. You might do multiple things but you need to plan ahead to make it work.



# There are several reasons why students may choose to take a gap year before starting medical school or PA school

## Overwhelm & burnout prevention

Some students may feel burnt out after completing their undergraduate education and choose to take a gap year to recharge and gain a fresh perspective before starting medical school or PA school. Students may find that they want to spread out the prerequisite experiences and academics necessary to complete prior to application. Many will choose to use their gap year time to study for professional school entrance exams (52% of students taking the MCAT took it after college graduation) or take courses to fulfill prerequisites for their application. Maybe you don't want to be taking the MCAT, GRE or PA-CAT and applying to professional school during the Spring and Summer of your junior year and then spending your senior year working your way through secondary or supplemental essays and interviews in the middle of your school week.

## Gaining experience

Some students may use their gap year to gain valuable experiences in the healthcare field, such as working as a medical assistant, scribe, or research assistant. The average accepted PA school candidate has 2000 hours of patient facing clinical experience. This experience can help them stand out as an applicant and give them a better idea of what they are getting into before starting medical school or PA school. Some will use this time to gain research experiences they were not able to engage in or complete during their undergraduate years.

## Improving academic performance

Unfortunately, there are some who need to show a sustained upward trajectory in their academic skills and use the gap year to take additional coursework or study to retake the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) or GRE in order to increase their chances of being accepted into medical or PA school. Approximately 7% of matriculants pursue a non-degree post-baccalaureate program to strengthen their academic skills.



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## Exploring other interests or taking time for reflection

Some students use their gap year to explore other interests such as traveling, pursuing a hobby, or volunteering. This can help them develop a well-rounded perspective and bring new transferable skills and experiences to medical school or PA school. This time can help students reflect on career interests and ensure they are ready to commit to a health professions program.

## Financial, family or personal reasons

Gap years may allow students to save money before enrolling in graduate school to pay for application expenses, as well as tuition expenses, or begin to pay down undergraduate student loans.

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None of these reasons are necessarily exclusive of each other. Sometimes preventing burnout can be done by exploring your outside interests or things you temporarily put aside like travel. Improving candidacy might mean taking the time to get your academics in order or it might mean experiential readiness. Clarifying your career goals might mean getting more direct patient care experience to see if that is really a good fit or it could mean spending a year in consulting or research to really hone in on a specific niche you hope to develop as a future physician or physician assistant. Once you are on the medical education rollercoaster it is not impossible to take time off but it does become more difficult so a gap year is a valuable time for self-exploration and growth.

Two important qualities medical schools and PA schools are looking for are the ability to see something from someone else's perspective and the ability to work in a team. These competencies take time to develop and could be addressed by many different experiences during a gap year. You will be able to take the time to develop relationships and obtain stronger letters of recommendation.

## Let's plan out your Gap Year together!

Need more help? Sign up for a strategic planning session for an individualized review of your application readiness. During that conversation, we will discuss your academics, experiences & outline key opportunities to build your strengths to address any areas for improvement overcome your weaknesses during your gap year.

Scan the QR code or click the link below to [schedule a consultation](#) with our team of experts.



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