Taking a gap year

In many English-speaking countries and in Europe it is common to take a year away from your studies, usually between high school and further education or before starting a job. This is called a gap year.

1 **Read what the people say about their gap years. What did they choose to do? What benefits do they mention about taking a gap year?**

I found out about an organisation that runs volunteer programmes helping schoolchildren in Ghana. I was quite apprehensive about whether I could cope at first, but my parents supported me and I talked it through with a couple of my teachers too. The organisation put me in touch with a girl who had taken part in the programme the previous year. It made all the difference. I felt much better prepared and confident. I wouldn't have missed my gap year for the world. I got used to living away from home and it gave me the confidence to try new things and learn from every experience.

My friends were all taking a gap year so it seemed like a good idea. They all got themselves organised, but I didn't really know what I wanted to do. It took me six months to decide and make all the arrangements. I wish I had found out more before my year started – I could have done so much more with it.

I volunteered to help with sea turtle conservation in Mexico. I want to work in conservation so it was an obvious choice for me. I had already applied for my university place before I left. I'm so glad I did because I didn't have to stress about it while I was there. I'm at uni now and I'm so motivated to learn everything about conservation that I can. The best thing about being in Mexico was living with and helping the local people. I learnt so much about the culture that I would never have discovered as a tourist. Whatever you do with your gap year, make sure you enjoy it!

I was really burnt out when I finished college. I didn't really know what jobs to apply for. I'm really glad I took a gap year, not just because I had amazing experiences, but because I became so much more independent and assertive. I went on a four-week language course in Italy and then took a work placement in a hotel. It made a change to find out how the world works rather than just read about it. I'm back home and applying for jobs now and my CV looks so much better with my gap year experiences on it.