

GUIDE TO GETTING AHEAD DURING THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS



Contents

Introduction	3
Using the summer to get ahead	4
Suitable for those in sixth form:	4
Useful Link:.....	4
Ways to help your child stand out	5
Take an online course	5
• Futurelearn	5
• Harvard EdX	5
• Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)	5
Useful links:.....	6
2. Stay up-to-date	6
3. Listen to Ted talks	6
4. Enjoy some podcasts.....	6
5. Reading / audiobooks	6
6. Explore virtual work opportunities	7
Useful Links:	7
Final Thoughts:.....	8

Introduction

It has been an extraordinary year so far and your child has experienced significant disruption to their studies. School closures (for most students), online learning and schooling from home have presented challenges for both parents and children and there is still uncertainty about what will happen in September.

It can be hard not to worry how this has impacted your child and whether they are as far ahead in their studies as they would have been under normal circumstances. However, there has been learning of a different kind from this unique experience and this will be something they can build on positively going forward.

July marks the end of the academic year and the school summer holidays will start. This is a chance for your child to enjoy the better weather, make the most of outdoors, have additional free time to do the things they enjoy and to think about their future and what they might like to do next.

Depending on where they are in their academic journey, there's plenty they can do over the holidays that can help them prepare for the next stage of their life – and it can be fun too! Whether they're 15 and starting to think about what they might like to do when next year's GCSEs are over or whether they're 18 and making plans for adulthood, we've created this guide to help you understand what choices they have and what action they can take over the next six weeks to help them make their dreams a reality.

This guide is not written so you do the work for them! It's a source of ideas so you have plenty of suggestions to help encourage and direct your child when they are not sure what to do next. Every great journey starts with a first step.

Using the summer to get ahead

Depending on their age, there's a variety of things your child can do this summer to help them prepare for the next academic year. Here are some ideas:

- Expanding and developing their interests, which might be through reading, watching online talks, listening to podcasts, exploring new hobbies;
- Improving on existing sports, trying new ones or joining a local team (once lockdown allows);
- Learning more about lifeskills such as cooking, budgeting, home keeping etc;
- Taking a short course to improve their skill set – CV writing, touch typing, writing clear copy, creating presentations;
- Increasing their knowledge in what's happening in the news to find out what areas appeal to them – politics, environment, people, life stories, education, science etc;
- Exploring career options and planning out career paths for these jobs

Suitable for those in sixth form:

- Researching courses they'd like to take at university, school or college and where they might like to study;
- Finding out more about subjects they might be interested in taking in further education – especially if they have not studied them before, but even if they have, they can read additional material not covered in the school syllabus;
- If they plan to go to university, starting to prepare their personal statement and considering what they might need to do to make them stand out from others;
- Investigating what industry might be of interest for an apprenticeship or job application;
- Researching a gap year or looking for volunteer opportunities within the UK or overseas;
- Trying work experience through volunteering, interning or through connections of family and friends. Some organisations are offering virtual work experience whilst lockdown restrictions are in place.

Useful Link:

- BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/careers>
- Lifeskills: <https://www.weareteachers.com/life-skills-for-teens/>
- Futurelearn: <https://www.futurelearn.com/subjects/study-skills-courses>

Ways to help your child stand out

It doesn't matter if your child is applying for a job, an apprenticeship, a university or college place, training or an internship – the bottom line is always the same: they're more likely to get the interview if their application stands out from others and they'll get the place if they are likeable and impress their interviewer. It's personality that differentiates one person from another. Positive, proactive, committed, resilient individuals make good students and great employees – they're quick to learn, quick to forgive and pleasant to be around. And that makes them attractive. Preparation is key; nothing beats preparation in improving confidence and having the skills to stand out from others. Here are some practical ways to help your children prepare for their future, while they are home.

Take an online course

If there's something that really interests them, why not take a course? Choosing to study outside of the school curriculum, and taking assessments/ exams to prove knowledge, is very impressive. It shows initiative, commitment, and an ability to follow through – all desirable qualities whether the next stage is further education or finding a job.

This doesn't have to require massive commitment: some courses and modules are very short – others are longer. What's on offer is vast, and lots of courses are free because of restrictions imposed due to coronavirus. This sort of activity will stand your child in good stead when asked by potential universities or employers how they used their extra time during lockdown.

- [Futurelearn](#)

With over 2,400 courses and 10 million learners, there really is something for everyone! They can learn by watching videos, listening to audio and reading articles. Methods of assessment include quizzes, tests and assignments, although they will need to 'upgrade' and meet the course requirements for a certificate.

- [Harvard EdX](#)

Established in 1636, Harvard is the oldest University in the United States. It offers a range of free online courses in a variety of subjects. Once finished, there is an option to receive a verified course certificate for a fee.

- [Massive Open Online Courses \(MOOC\)](#)

With over 2,900 courses on offer, MOOC offer an impressive range of free online courses available for anyone to enrol.

Useful links:

- Futurelearn: <https://www.futurelearn.com/>
- Harvard EdX: <https://online-learning.harvard.edu/>
- MOOC: https://www.edx.org/search?utm_source=mooc.org&utm_medium=landing-page&utm_campaign=mooc-banner-cta

2. Stay up-to-date

It's a good idea for your child to be able to demonstrate relevant general knowledge. They should keep an eye on the news to be aware of headline stories – this might include major sporting events. During interviews, this can very often be “elevator talk” – i.e. something that is mentioned when someone meets them at reception to take them to the interview room. It may not be part of the interview, but it can have an influence. Not knowing anything about world events suggests a lack of interest, which may not be true but does not reflect well.

If they're not sure about news articles or are struggling to get a balanced view, they could try reading opinion articles to see what other people are saying so they can develop their own thoughts on the matter.

3. Listen to Ted talks

An absolute blessing if your child has a short attention span. Most Ted Talks are around 15 minutes long, covering diverse subject ranges from science to business to global issues and feature some of the most eloquent, thought-leaders of our times. It's a great place for your child to develop their interests without a huge time commitment.

4. Enjoy some podcasts

Not every teenager loves to read, so Podcasts are a fabulous way to discover interesting themes and topics. The length of podcasts vary significantly from 15-20 minutes to feature length episodes; some are very long and split into series, others are broadcast regularly as complete episodes but an overarching theme linking them all together. Podcasts are a relatively new media and very popular with teenagers.

5. Reading / audiobooks

Reading is a brilliant opportunity for your child to find out more about their curriculum subjects, favourite areas of interest, idols, topics they enjoy that are not covered at school and pretty much anything else on the planet – including fiction. If your child isn't a great reader (either of hardcopy books or online) no matter – they can listen to audio books instead.

Whether they choose to read around their set texts, in a subject they are not studying but interest them, fictional books, biographies or personal development books, they must be able to explain what they've discovered and say how it has had an impact on them.

There is little point in mentioning they have read something in an application or interview if they have nothing to say about it. Your child is looking to demonstrate that they can read, digest and summarize information, establish an opinion and express themselves.

These are all transferable skills that are vital in the workplace and very useful in further study. It doesn't matter whether your child concludes that they liked the book or not – it's how they say it that matters.

Many universities like to see evidence of 'wider reading' in Personal Statements as it demonstrates passion and interest for a subject. If your child is applying to university next year, encourage them to explore books, articles and online courses on topics that relate to their chosen degree subject.

6. Explore virtual work opportunities

While the global challenges of COVID 19 on schools and businesses have meant a temporary stop to work experience and internship opportunities for young people, many companies are offering virtual placements as an alternative option. I have set various virtual work opportunities through ShowMyHomework during school closure.

A virtual work placement can help your child gain valuable work experience, develop key skills and help create networks in the industries they are interested in. These experience can help your child stand out from their peers when writing their personal statement or/and CV.

Useful Links:

- TED Talks: <https://www.ted.com/talks>
- Wired: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/best-podcasts>
- Audible: https://www.audible.co.uk/?source_code=M2M30DFT1Bk12608131902CC&ds_rl=1238482&ipRedirectOverride=true
- Virtual work experience:
 - <https://www.insidesherpa.com/>
 - <https://www.speakersforschools.org/experience-2/vwex/>
 - <https://www.thelawyerportal.com/free-guides/law-work-experience/virtual-work-experience-for-law-students/>

Final Thoughts:

The summer holidays should be fun and about having more time to do the things we enjoy. It's not clear how quickly or widely lockdown restrictions will be lifted. So don't make the summer holidays a drudge for you and your children by creating an agenda for them and then getting cross if they don't fulfil it – we are all facing enough frustrations at the moment!

That said, there are plenty of suggestions with this guide to help your children in taking positive steps to plan and prepare for their future. There are lots of ideas which they may not have thought about themselves and this is where you can play a vital role in guiding them.

Education routes, opportunities and career changes are much more varied than when we were their age. Unless they have a specific, specialist career in mind (such as practising medicine), there are many routes to a successful future and very few choices that will close doors.

What's more important is they finding out the best way for them to develop so they can flourish. That will allow them to feel happy and fulfilled in whatever choice they pursue, and that's going to make you feel good too.