



Graduates 2025

Before You Graduate

The end of your academic journey is approaching — but don't rush through it.

As you prepare for graduation day, take a moment to reflect and commemorate all that's been accomplished along the way.

CHERISH IT ALL

This is a unique phase of life that won't be repeated. Don't forget to appreciate the fun and excitement of a typical school day, because it will soon be replaced with new opportunities and challenges.

BEGIN NETWORKING

As a recent graduate, it's important to cultivate and maintain relationships with key influencers and leaders — both in the academic environment you're leaving and in the workplace you're headed toward.

Start with current mentors. These should be individuals you respect and who have offered support throughout your academic career. Maintaining contact with them could open doors for future opportunities, as you may find ways to assist one another down the line.

Next, take advantage of LinkedIn to introduce yourself to leaders in your field. Introduce yourself to new contacts, and arrange a coffee meeting. This isn't a job interview so much as an opportunity to establish rapport and increase



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your visibility within your new professional sphere.

KEEP LEARNING

Make a pledge to keep learning, whether you're advancing to college, graduate school or simply growing your personal knowledge and skill set. Earning professional certification can lead to new job opportunities. Mastering a different

language improves communication skills while helping broaden thinking in diverse ways.

PRIDE IN ACCOMPLISHMENT

Transitioning out of a structured academic environment means adapting to a different pace. You may or may not immediately get the job of your

dreams. But remember that you've already accomplished a lot. Getting your degree is a testament to your resilience and dedication, whether you graduated at the top of your class or faced challenges along the way.

EVERYTHING IN PERSPECTIVE

Everyone's journey is different. Try to avoid feelings of

jealousy if others find success more quickly in life's next phase. At the same time, approach your own early accomplishments with an open mind and avoid making judgments. You and your former classmates are on individual timelines. We all bring unique perspectives, skill sets and experiences to life's journey.

Packing Up

This big transition means boxing everything up for a move.

You may have been living in a dorm, with college roommates in off-campus housing or still at home with your parents. Graduation brings all that to an end, as new opportunities await. Time to pack! Here's how get everything to your next chapter in life.

BEFORE YOU START

Moving can be a complex and stressful task. Before you begin packing, consider the following: Will you be renting a moving van or truck, or will you be using your own vehicle? Are you planning to hire professional movers, or will friends be assisting you? Hiring a moving company entails additional costs, of course, but it also offers several advantages.

HIRING A MOVER

Professional movers are trained in safely packing and stacking your belongings for transport, minimizing the risk of breakage and damage. They can streamline the moving process, since you'll be making a single trip instead of the multiple journeys often required when relying on friends. Your items will be insured, and that provides peace of mind should anything go wrong in transit.

PLENTY OF BOXES

To ensure a smooth moving



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day, begin by gathering a variety of boxes to securely pack everything.

You can purchase cardboard and plastic sealable boxes at your local hardware store. Your moving company may also make them available. They'll come at a higher cost, but may provide superior

protection. Reused boxes usually have dents and tears and may not close properly, putting your belongings at risk.

OTHER KEY ITEMS

In addition to boxes, buy packing paper and bubble wrap to safeguard fragile items. You'll need plenty of

tape to secure everything. If you are handling the move yourself, consider renting a dolly.

This makes moving heavier items like furniture and appliances significantly easier. It also streamlines the process by allowing you to carry multiple boxes at once.

MAKE A LIST

For more organized unpacking, list items by room. Use different marker colors for labeling boxes, such as red for the bedroom and blue for the kitchen. They can be placed at designated locations without having to open each box — or even closely examine the labels.

Considering a Gap Year?

After reaching this key milestone, some consider taking a short break.

Getting your degree is a significant achievement that typically follows more than a few big challenges. That's why some graduates take a so-called "gap year" to put things in perspective.

WHAT IS A 'GAP YEAR'?

You may find yourself arriving at this pivotal moment feeling drained after years of studying, exams, term papers and research projects. At the same time, you may want to travel or take part in a community service project, and that's more easily accomplished with an extended period away from academic or work commitments. This is commonly referred to as a "gap year," taking a pause before the next step in a traditional education or career path.

Gap years can happen between high school and college, or between college and your professional life. Either way, taking some time off has proven beneficial for some. There may be uncertainties ahead, so a short sabbatical could provide a valuable opportunity for reflection and renewal.

MAKE A PLAN

There are no right or wrong approaches for taking a gap year, but it's helpful to



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establish a clear understanding of your motivations. Build a comprehensive plan. For example, if you are postponing college enrollment because of uncertainty about your degree path, taking some time away could be smart. Use this time to refine your personal goals and the way forward could become clearer.

Gap years can expand your horizons after completing a college education. Discover new locations, new foods and new languages. There won't be as much time for exploring once you've taken the next step in life. Interacting with diverse cultures might end up influencing your future career trajectory, as well.

MAKE A BUDGET

Taking a gap year may involve some serious financial belt-tightening, since you'll be foregoing full-time employment or funds tied to scholarships and grants. Part of this journey may include temporary or part-time positions to support yourself financially. Remember, too, a "gap" doesn't have to

mean an entire year off. Taking off a single semester may be enough to provide a reset.

Certain jobs may qualify for college credit, potentially unlocking opportunities for financial aid. For information and additional resources, gapyearassociation.org has the latest on available scholarships and grants.



The Best Gifts for Grads

Thoughtful presents can help smooth the way during a period of change.

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Cash is always a highly appreciated gift for graduates, whether from high school or college. But it's not very thoughtful — and there's no guaranteeing it will be spent on the practical things that a graduate needs most as they make this transition.

CLOTHES

This doesn't sound all that exciting, but buying clothing for college graduates is a smart choice. They're transitioning into more professional environments, so they'll probably need an upgraded wardrobe. Graduates at any level can always use a pair of high-quality slacks or a dress, nice shirts and socks. If you are uncertain about their sizes or style preferences,

consider giving a gift card to their favorite retail store.

PURSE OR WALLET

A high-quality purse, wallet, bag or briefcase can be an invaluable asset. Consider investing in leather or exploring other durable materials designed to withstand daily commutes, meetings or classes, weekend getaways and evenings out. Consider a well-crafted carry-on suitcase if your graduate needs a replacement for their aging duffel bag.

HELPFUL ITEMS

Small appliances like a coffee maker, toaster, slow cooker, air fryer or microwave are excellent gifts for

high school and college grads.

Whether used in a dorm or at their first place, these helpful items are big money-savers because they reduce the need to dine out or buy overpriced to-go drinks. They also promote better health, while taking up minimal space.

JEWELRY OR A WATCH

With college classes or a new job, keeping up with the time becomes increasingly important. There are critical schedules to be kept, so a new watch might come in very handy. Earrings or a necklace are nice options. Look for designs that are elegant and suitable for a professional setting.

ELECTRONICS

Inclined to splurge? Purchase a new laptop or a voice-activated assistant, such as an Alexa. They can be highly useful, of course, but may also be out of budget for young graduates. Smaller items such as portable chargers are always needed.

GIFT CARDS

If all else fails, gift cards can provide a personal touch. Tie the gift to their favorite coffee shop or restaurant. More general gifts may include something from a grocery or bookstore. If there's a regular commute involved, consider cards for fuel, ride-sharing or public transportation.

Capturing Timeless Memories

Don't forget to take plenty of photographs and videos of the big day.

All your dedication and perseverance will culminate with a graduation ceremony. Don't forget to document it all so you'll never forget a single moment of this milestone day.

WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT

With so much ahead of you thanks to a new degree, it might be tempting to look past graduation. There's so much to be excited — and, yes, maybe anxious — about in college or out in the workforce. But ceremonies like this don't come along very often. Capture it all through photographs and videos, since they serve to immortalize these memories. As you embark on the next phase of life, you'll want to have these cherished visual reminders of accomplishments from your academic years.

MAKE A PLAN

Photographs of you wearing your cap and gown are essential, of course, but you'll also want video and photographs with friends and family in more informal settings. Document everything before, during and after the ceremony. Take a stroll over to historical campus buildings to get an unusual shot. Include classmates, since they've made so many contributions to your journey. Ask for copies of images taken by your friends and the school. These



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are moments that will be cherished for a lifetime.

DESIGNATING SOMEONE

It may be difficult for family members to adequately capture your graduation while taking it all in. And, of course, you'll be otherwise engaged too. So it

may be best to designate a friend or family member or hire someone to shoot video and take pictures.

Reach out to others who may be able to help identify the best professional for your needs. Conduct thorough research by exploring online portfolios,

which will help you figure out a photographer's approach and personal style.

Create a budget and stick to it. Some photographers are far more costly than others. You and your family have already piled up lots of additional expenses with invitations,

attire, a graduation party and perhaps even a special trip. Once you've selected a photographer, clearly communicate all your expectations but be open to their expert opinion. They may have special insights that you haven't previously considered.

What's Next?

You're closing one chapter of your life, and opening another.

Graduation marks a big transition for early adulthood. It typically involves moving out and living independently for the first time. Whether going to college or taking that first big job, you'll be embracing new responsibilities. There's plenty of excitement but also perhaps significant anxiety. That's a completely normal reaction. Here's how to deal with it all:

HOW TO COPE

To effectively address your fears, it's important to adopt healthy coping mechanisms. Anxiety and stress can affect both physical and mental well-being, so it's critically important to constructively manage these emotions. Consider starting a journal to articulate your thoughts. Have open and honest discussions with a mentor or trusted friend. Take part in physical activities such as running, tennis or martial arts to help alleviate stress. Don't hesitate to talk to a professional counselor or other support resource, particularly if anxiety becomes intrusive or overwhelming.

MOVING FORWARD

It's tempting to think that what you choose to study or your initial job after college will dictate the trajectory of your entire life. But statistics



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indicate that most workers will change jobs multiple times throughout their lives, exploring different career paths and even shifting to entirely different fields. These transitions may or may not be tied to your chosen major. If you're uncertain about a major, enroll in courses across various departments or consider pursuing a

minor in a subject that piques your interest. Remain open to the prospect of further training, related certifications, graduate education or even a new career in the years ahead. That can relieve some of the pressure to make a decision, since you'll be admitting that this era doesn't necessarily define your entire future.

FINDING NEW MEANING

Navigating through a big transition can often feel daunting — particularly when you're no longer surrounded by friends, former classmates and family. To ease through this process, try to forge a new sense of community. That might mean joining clubs, attending trivia nights,

participating in intramural sports or exploring new hobbies.

If you're a rising first-year college student, reach out to new roommates at the dorm. You'll be enriching your daily life while establishing a new support network for those moments you feel overwhelmed.

Before the Big Speech

You'll want to say a few words, even if you're not speaking at graduation.

Some will be given the honor of delivering an address at the ceremony. But thanking family and friends at your graduation party can be just as nerve-wracking. Here's how to make your talk a big success.

DON'T PROCRASTINATE

This will probably sound obvious but don't wait until the last minute to write your speech or rely only on bullet points as a guide. Take a moment well in advance to prepare, setting aside plenty of time to gather your thoughts.

CHOOSING A THEME

Many of the most impactful speeches revolve around a central theme. Your focus might be on offering guidance to your peers. Others might choose to reminisce about shared experiences. Take time to express gratitude to those who have influenced your journey. That doesn't simply mean naming those who are being thanked. Mention the specific contributions or support for which you're most grateful. Next, discuss how others' encouragement, time and involvement made a difference for you.

CAREFUL EDITING

Once you have composed

your speech, take time to revise it thoroughly to ensure every word represents your best effort. Reading your speech aloud to family, friends or a teacher can be beneficial. This allows you to identify any places where you might stumble, stray errors in grammar or memory and elements that may not be clear to your audience.

It's easy to assume that everyone will immediately grasp every concept that you present. If it sounds confusing in practice, it might be time to do more editing and refining.

FOCUS ON DELIVERY

Once you've gotten the content nailed down, focus on the delivery aspect of your speech. Practice reading it out loud to yourself and to others to improve your timing — whether that includes a smart anecdote or a funny joke. The way you deliver your speech always influences how it's received by the audience.

If you're giving an official graduation speech, you may be required to present the speech to the faculty or other representatives who are responsible for the ceremony in order to obtain their approval. Be prepared to make more changes — and to practice with the new edits.

