



How to Use Your Summers Well

Summer provides wonderful opportunities for you to learn and grow by engaging in activities you don't have time for during the school year. No single activity or type of activity is preferred by admissions officers so long as you can reflect on your experience and make it part of your maturation process.

Is it better to take a menial job for pay or an unpaid internship in a field you might be interested in going into? It depends on whether you need the money and whether the internship will provide valuable insights and experience. Working for pay even at a low level job will never hurt you when it comes to college admissions. In fact, it will always demonstrate a level of responsibility that reflects well upon you. If the job teaches you something about how to handle yourself when interacting with other people, so much better, especially if you can explain that on your applications.

Internships with businesses or organizations can be eye-opening experiences, especially if you're given real responsibility, but they can be difficult to obtain unless you know an employer personally. Summer Discovery, a reputable organization that has been in existence for many years, connects students with internships and provides housing and recreational activities in the cities where they are located. These can be expensive, and some people consider it offensive to pay for the privilege of doing an internship, but that doesn't mean that the internship itself, in a field like Sport Management for example, can't be a wonderful learning experience.

Similarly, travel opportunities that engage students with people in foreign cultures or community service can have a profound effect on your understanding of the world. Adventure travel that entails physical challenges can provide a different type of learning, an understanding of your mental and physical fortitude.

Community service in your own neighborhood is every bit as worthwhile as that performed far away, and for many people it makes much more sense because you don't have to pay a lot of money for the privilege of doing it. Generally speaking, activities that engage you with other people or enable you to learn or use special skills or talents are the most enjoyable and rewarding.

The job of camp counselor is one of the most readily available to teens and can be a great way for you to spend the summer. In fact, students often end up writing

college application essays about insights they gained from working with their campers. Camps for children with illnesses or disabilities hire many counselors because the camper-to-counselor ratio is so small, and these camps can provide additional learning opportunities by exposing you to people living with challenges you may have known little about beforehand. Some of them are only one week long like Camp Dream Street at the Tenafly J.C.C. or have multiple short sessions like Camp Sunshine in Ridgewood, so teens can work there in addition to doing something else over the summer.

Many colleges host pre-college summer programs where high school students can take classes from one to six weeks in length, usually in subjects they can't get in high school. These programs provide opportunities to learn about careers you are considering or pursue quirky interests as well as get a taste of what it will be like to live on your own when you go away to college. Some of these programs are more selective than others, and some are taught by the college's own faculty whereas others are taught by graduate students or run by people who have nothing at all to do with the college on whose campus they happen to be located. It's advisable to learn as much as you can about any such program you are considering because they vary considerably. None of them are likely to give you any real edge with college admissions, not even at the school where they're held although people often hope they will. However, all admissions officers will look favorably on students who opt to spend their free time learning since they are all looking to fill their campuses with students who are excited about pursuing knowledge as much as good grades.

The truth is, there is practically no limit to what enterprising young people can do. Seven years ago a group of high school students decided they wanted to do something about the problem of inadequate clean water that plagues so many places worldwide, so they founded an organization called Hands 4 Others (<http://hands4others.org>). This organization now runs an impressive global internship program that engages students throughout the school year as well as the summer.

The bottom line is that the more you dare to stretch yourself and try something outside your ordinary range of activities, the more you'll gain from the experience, and whatever you gain will make you a more desirable candidate for colleges.