

Why do something today when you can put it off until tomorrow?

DEFERRING IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING, "WHAT ARE YOU NAGGING ME FOR? I'LL DO THAT LATER!" WE ALL DO IT. MORE OFTEN THAN WE SHOULD. AND IT'S USUALLY A NEGATIVE THING TO DO - HIGH-FLYING PEOPLE HAVE INSPIRATIONAL NOTES PINNED ON THEIR WALLS WHICH SAY THINGS LIKE 'DO IT NOW!' ANYWAY, SORRY ABOUT THE RAMBLE. SMART START WANTS TO TALK ABOUT DEFERRING STUDIES WHICH DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A NEGATIVE.

Deferring your studies means accepting a place in a course (usually a university course) but postponing your enrolment.

Plenty of people finish Year 12 and defer their studies, usually for a year. It's sometimes referred to as a gap year, although a gap year tends to mean that someone is deferring because they want a break, rather than deferring because they need to do other things such as work before taking up your course.

WHY DEFER?

1. Money. You may need to work and build up some money to help finance your studies later on.
2. Change. Perhaps you are sick of studying and want to work for a year, get a bit of spending money in your pocket and experience a different environment.
3. Confusion. You might have

absolutely no idea what you want to do and need some time away to come up with a plan.

4. Travel. Perhaps you've just pulled off a daring robbery of your brother's piggy-bank and you need to put some serious Ks between you and him. Or, less likely, you just want to do a bit of travelling.

THE NUMBER ONE DEFERMENT RULE

MAKE IT OFFICIAL. Official deferment means you have made a formal arrangement with your university to start studying your course at an agreed date. Unofficial deferment (aka deciding to do it later) means you just decide to apply for a course some other time.

1. Before doing anything, accept the place in the course you want.
2. Contact the education institution to check on their

rules such as how long you can defer for, whether you can lengthen deferment and even if they allow it.

3. Apply for deferment.

4. Obtain and keep safe your official notification of deferment.

5. Keep in contact with the education institution to ensure you're aware of enrolment procedures.

CAN YOU DEFER NON-UNIVERSITY STUDIES?

Deferring is not really a term used much when you're talking about TAFE. If you want to do a TAFE course that requires an application, you'll probably have to apply again when you decide you're ready. The TAFE system is different in each state, so it might be worth checking with a local campus. As far as other education and training providers go, you may be able to defer, so ask. ●

WHY NOT DEFER?

It's not all positive, soft and cuddly. Deferment can be dodgy.

Loaded down. Caught in the work cycle, stick a few too many things on your credit card and find it difficult to return to study.

Lonely. Loose contact with your Year 12 mates and, when you do go back to study, find most of your classmates are younger than you are.

Lost. Travel but don't enjoy it as much because you find it hard to get work, you don't have much money and the people you meet are older than you.

Lose study skills. Forget your chemistry formulas and other tricks of the trade.

SMART START NEVER PREACHES, BUT...

Look, do what you want to do. It's your life. But take note anyway. Sometimes it doesn't matter what you do, as long as you do something. When you're doing something, your mind turns over because it is processing new info, and you're put in situations where you run into people and ideas.

Learning is not always in the context of an education institution, but you know when you're learning and when you're not. If you defer and go into the workforce, think about keeping your hand in the system by doing a part-time course online, or a short course off-line, or something somewhere. Have a plan and goals.

OFFICIAL DEFERMENT MEANS YOU HAVE MADE A FORMAL ARRANGEMENT WITH YOUR UNIVERSITY TO START STUDYING YOUR COURSE AT AN AGREED DATE

Lou Dexter loved deferring

LOU'S PARENTS RECKONED THAT IT WAS A GREAT IDEA LOU DEFERRED UNI STUDIES FOR A YEAR TO TEACH ENGLISH IN CHINA. THAT IS, UNTIL SHE SAID SHE WAS REALLY WAS GOING TO DEFER AND HEAD OFF TO CHINA. GET THE IDEA? SMART START EXPLAINS.

I wasn't that sure what I wanted to do after school," says Lou Dexter, 21. "I just knew there was no way I could have a desk job. I toyed around with the idea of medicine, but the thought of going straight into six years of medicine after six years in high school was not good. But a gap year hadn't even entered my consciousness."

When she was still at Glen Waverley Secondary College in Victoria, Lou saw some promotional material for a gap year organisation and she started to think about it.

"A lot of kids still don't realise it's an option which is probably due to the schools."

Her parents were supportive of the opportunities to travel. Teaching English in a non-English-speaking country was something that appealed to Lou especially.

"My parents were supportive at the start. I sat down and had a look at countries and thought China looked interesting. But when I got accepted in to the gap program in China, my parents said 'gosh, are you sure you want to go there?'," she laughs.

But her parents were won over. She applied for medicine at unis all around Australia, accepted a place at the University of Adelaide, then deferred her place.

So off she went to China. First there was training and sightseeing, then she was assigned to a school with about 70 others seeking an adventurous gap year.

Lou had never been overseas before. In fact, she'd never spent more than two weeks away from home. She admits there were to be a few tears from both herself and her parents. And although that first day in China was overwhelming, she also felt enormous excitement.

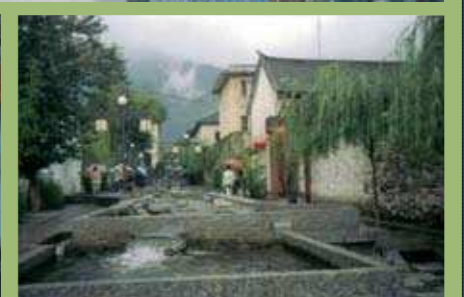
"There were 60 or 70 of us in Beijing and we did training and all the touristy things - went to see the Great Wall and Tiananmen Square. It was great - like an amazing school camp."

Then the organisers split people up into 'assignments'. Lou and another girl were assigned to a high school in Nanjing.

"We taught four days a week - we had 15, 45-minute classes. So we had one day off during the week and on the weekend we could travel.

"There is stacks of support in the schools, and we're shown around by the local teachers, and then straight into the teaching so there was no time to get nervous."

Lou and her mate took the opportunity



to eat in the school canteen and they were given a flat so they had privacy.

After five months teaching and another couple of months backpacking around China, it was time to come back to Australia.

When Lou had been planning her gap year, some of her parents' friends had told Lou's parents that Lou might not ever want to come back to university after getting a taste of the big, wide world. But this didn't prove to be the case at all.

"I came back with renewed enthusiasm for medicine. I had the maturity to begin a course like medicine and I came back with stacks more confidence."

Not only did the gap year fill her with enthusiasm for study, it also helped her fine-tune her approach.

"Before I went, I thought paediatrics. But I came back interested in trauma and disaster medicine. So that's what I'm thinking of now."

Whatever she decides to specialise in, Lou

reckons her experiences will make her a better doctor.

"I love interacting with people - especially with the language barrier; you appreciate how hard day to day things and that has given me a lot of empathy."

All and all, Lou is glowing about her experience and knows in her heart it was the best thing for her.

"I came back humbled from seeing another culture and being part of that culture. To have that experience at such a young stage is humbling and you really appreciate it.

"It was an experience that no doubt changed my life. There are so many countries you can go to and it's not just about teaching - you can work on the environment or care for disabled people, look after boarding school kids, and there's placements within Indigenous Australia. It's a great chance. China really signalled a fresh start for me."