

50 ways to spend your summer

By Kevin McMullin of CollegeWise

One of the many ways the college admissions process has spun out of control is kids planning their summers based on what they think will be most impressive to colleges, often at great expense. What colleges are really interested in is how *you* chose to spend your time, and a summer spent bagging groceries can have just as much meaning as one spent at Harvard Summer School. In fact, one of the best essays I've ever read was a student who worked at a hamburger stand who began his essay, "I make a mean hamburger. In fact, I'm a professional."

In 2009, I started publishing this list of 50 ways to spend your summer, all of which are free or almost free, and none of which require that you forgo hanging out with your friends, sleeping in occasionally, or goofing off with regularity. Pick one that looks interesting, or use it as motivation to think of your own way to carve out a great summer for yourself.

50 Ways to Spend Your Summer

1. Take an interesting class at your local community college.
2. Get a part-time job at the mall.
3. See how many books you can read this summer.
4. Work in your family's business. Consider doing so for free.
5. Think of ten people—teachers, coaches, family members, relatives—who deserve your thanks. Write them a hand-written letter of at least one page expressing your appreciation and detailing how they've impacted you. Tell them what you're going to do to make them proud and spend the summer doing it.
6. Take saxophone lessons.
7. Coach little league. Or basketball. Or soccer.
8. Work at a summer camp.
9. Volunteer at the local mobile health clinic, or the animal shelter, or the public library.
10. Tutor kids.
11. Start a business with your friends.

12. Set a goal that you are 99% certain you won't be able to achieve this summer. Then go all out and try to achieve it as though your life depended on it. You'll either get there or get much, much closer than you were at the beginning of the summer.
13. Learn how to write computer programs.
14. Read to the blind.
15. Teach something.
16. Learn to paint.
17. Pick something that really interests you and see how far you can go with it.
18. Take classes to become an emergency medical technician.
19. Learn sign language.
20. Pick a cause in your community that you care about. Find groups who care about it, too. Organize people.
21. Offer to intern for free someplace where the work seems interesting, like the city councilman's office, or an advertising agency, or the local newspaper.
22. Play guitar at coffee shops and see how much money you can make this summer.
23. Learn CPR.
24. Cook dinner for your family once a week. Each time, learn a new dish that you prepare. Write your recipes down and make your own family cookbook.
25. Volunteer to lead tours of local state parks.
26. Buy a college guidebook and learn as much as you can about 20 colleges you know nothing about today.
27. Raise money for someone or something that needs it.
28. Learn something that is pure fun, like bongos or hip hop dance or how to make your own purses (check out your local community colleges' "community education" programs).
29. Pick something you love and figure out how to use it to make contributions to others, like playing piano in a jazz band, teaching residents at a retirement home how to use a computer, or helping run the lights for a play at the community theater.
30. Work full time and give all the money to a charity of your choice at the end of the summer.
31. Pick a subject that fascinates you and challenge yourself to learn as much as possible about it.
32. Learn karate.
33. Teach karate.
34. Join a book club.
35. Organize a book club.

36. Go to your school principal and ask what you could do, for free, to improve the school. You could paint a classroom, clean lockers, or refurbish the lunch benches. Better yet, enlist five friends to do it with you. Don't just tell colleges you want to make an impact. Make one.
37. Set a goal to learn as many new things as possible this summer—facts, skills, concepts, etc. Write a blog detailing what you've learned so you can share it with cyberspace.
38. Build an iPhone app.
39. Master one subject or skill you currently don't know anything about.
40. Hold informal soccer conditioning workouts, or barbecues for the new student council members so you can get to know each other better, or meetings at Starbucks with your co-editors to brainstorm story ideas for the paper this fall. Show colleges you can organize people and lead them.
41. Have a neighborhood bake sale for the French Club in which all sales are conducted in French.
42. Get a group of kids from the drama club together and enroll in an improv class.
43. Pick a classic author and read all of his or her works. Find out what all the fuss is about Twain or Hemingway or Plath or Dickinson.
44. Take the hardest college class you can find and enroll in it "not-for-credit" so you can challenge yourself with impunity.
45. Visit as many colleges as you can in a 30 mile radius of your house. Take your friends with you. Write your own reviews of each school and share them with people.
46. Learn to cut and style hair. You'll be a savior during prom season.
47. Vow not to watch any TV this summer. Not one single second. Pick something cool and fun and productive to do instead.
48. Find a class offered at a local college that looks fascinating. Email the professor and ask if you can sit in on a session or two just to experience what the class is like.
49. Train to run a 10k, or a half-marathon, or a marathon, or to do a triathlon. And get your friends to join and train with you. Consider raising money with your efforts and donating to a worthy cause.
50. Pick the five most enticing things on this list and do them. At the end of the summer, email me at kevinm (at) collegewise.com and tell me about your experiences. I'd love to hear from you, and if you give me permission, I'll share your story here on our blog.