



Warmer

The pictures show activities that students might decide to do after high school. Work with a partner and use the language in the box to compare the pictures and say why these people might have chosen these activities.



going to university



taking a gap year



doing an apprenticeship



starting to work



doing an internship

to open doors undergraduate degree to graduate an employer career prospects to stand out
an eye-opening experience working environment to be financially independent a craft
monetary benefits soft / hard skills to be exposed to different cultures

Improve your reading

You are going to read a magazine article about life after high school. For questions 1–6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

Choices, choices

My mother, for all her faults, only ever wanted the best for me. “Study hard”, she used to say, “go to university”. She, like many others, held an almost unmovable belief that the piece of paper they award you at the end of an undergraduate degree would magically open all sorts of doors. Employers would queue up as far as the eye could see to offer me a host of well-paid, rewarding jobs. Without this piece of paper, my career prospects would plummet to a choice between being unemployed and, well, being unemployed.

I do not regret my time at university, but if I were to say that my degree magically opened any doors for me, I'd be lying. For my mother's generation having a degree was a massive advantage, but thirty years later it is a completely different story for people finishing a degree. The truth hits you around the time of your graduation ceremony. Just as you've finally *made it*, you look around proudly at your fellow graduates, dressed in gowns and funny hats. That's when you suddenly notice that the room is full of people just like you. Following this realisation, you sign up for a masters, in the hope that that's what's going to make you stand out from the crowd. One or two more years of stress, and in many countries, ten or twenty more years of debt, will land you the job you've always dreamt of. You don't quite know what that is yet, but surely a masters will lead you in the right direction, too. That wasn't something that I wanted to do.

9



At that point I started considering my options, which is something I admittedly should have done years earlier, and that I'd urge you to do now. A gap year might have seemed like a waste of time and money in my mother's eyes, but what fun would it have been, and how eye-opening an experience, before indebting myself for my degree. An internship would have given me the chance to get a feel for the office working environment, guiding me to choose the right career. Working would have given me the chance to be financially independent, perhaps save some money for other endeavours. If I'd thought about it before, I might have even decided to skip university altogether, as countless successful professionals have. In the end, it was an apprenticeship that caught my eye. Thousands of artisans everywhere are closing their shops due to a lack of apprentices, meaning the virtual disappearance of a multitude of crafts, from watchmakers to basket makers. I signed up for an apprenticeship in glassmaking, and I'm well on my way to taking over the workshop when the time comes.

Keeping in mind all of the above, you'd think I'd be recommending you don't bother with university at all. In fact, whilst flyers and brochures drone on about the monetary and career benefits of this or the other course, what they fail to tell you is where the true value of higher education lies: exposure. Exposure to new ideas, different mentalities, wildly differing cultures and people. It taught me that if there's one thing I know, it's that I know nothing. And, just for the record, I do also have friends who've done brilliantly thanks to their masters.

I might not use my extensive knowledge of French literature in my job, but in the end, that was the right path for me.

1 In the first paragraph, the author mentions his mother in order to...

- A Remember how loving his mother was
- B Say that mothers are annoying when it comes to their children's choices about their futures
- C Point out how degrees are generally believed to be the only route to attain professional satisfaction
- D Stress the importance of going to university and having a degree

2 On line 9, *made it* means...

- A given up
- B succeeded
- C got an advantage
- D understood that your efforts were wasted

3 In the second paragraph, the author's attitude towards a master's degree is...

- A favourable
- B sceptical
- C indifferent
- D resentful

4 In the third paragraph, the author mentions that...

- A He regrets not taking a gap year after university
- B He wishes he had evaluated his options before university
- C Is confident that working after university would have made him a successful professional
- D Believes that if he'd done an internship to begin with he would have pursued a career in an office

5 In the fourth paragraph, the author implies that...

- A He wouldn't recommend a university degree
- B He would recommend a masters
- C He is glad he went to university after all
- D He wishes he'd done a masters



6 The overall purpose of the text is to...

- A Promote a university course
- B Inform the reader of the drawbacks of university studies
- C Reassure the reader that they will make the right choice
- D Encourage the reader to reflect on their choices

2 Check your answers.

1 Is the writer's mother the main topic of the paragraph?

Yes = eliminate C and D. No = eliminate A and B

2 Is graduation a positive outcome?

Yes = eliminate A and D. No = eliminate B and C

3 Did the author do a masters?

Yes = eliminate B. No = eliminate D.

4 In the paragraph, does the author express regrets about what he did after university?

Yes = eliminate B and D. No = eliminate A and C.

5 Does the author talk about himself in relation to a masters?

Yes = eliminate B and D. No = eliminate A and C.

6 Is the whole text only about university?

Yes = eliminate C and D. No = eliminate A and B.

Speaking

Work with a partner to ask and answer these questions.

- Are/were students in your high school expected to go to university? Why/why not?
- To what extent do you think families should pressure children into choosing one option over the other after high school?
- Do you believe there is enough information available to high school students to allow them to make an informed choice about their futures?
- In a society where most people have university degrees, how can a person stand out professionally?
- Should experience be valued more highly than qualifications during recruitment processes?