

PROCRASTINATION: THE NUMBER ONE RIP OFF

One of the major time wasters is procrastination. Procrastination is putting off doing something you said you were going to do or something you need to do. It is important to remember that procrastination is a habit, and, like nail biting, toe tapping, and swearing, it can be difficult to stop.

There are many causes of procrastination. These can include the following:

SELF-DECEPTION: This is the tendency to rationalize your unwillingness to start unpleasant tasks. "I can always do it later. I've got plenty of time to do that research paper." "I work best under pressure." "I like to do things all at once and get it over with. Getting started early doesn't help." These statements are often heard when you are deceiving yourself.

PERFECTIONISM: Procrastinators often put unrealistic demands on themselves to be perfect. Perfectionism can be displayed in many ways. For example, think how often you have started an exercise program or diet only to give up after the first day when you were not in athletic condition or did not lose 10 pounds. Sometimes this is coupled with another perfectionist expectation, that excellence should come with little or no effort. For instance, when it becomes obvious that not all college classes will be joyful experiences, many students get discouraged and stop handing in assignments.

A FEAR OF FAILURE: This can lead to an "all or nothing" attitude in which you sabotage your work and secretly think, "The teacher may give my paper a bad grade, but this isn't really my usual work. After all, I only had 20 minutes to do it." By waiting until the last minute, you might give yourself an excuse in case you don't make that "A."

A FEAR OF SUCCESS: Yes, this may be difficult to imagine, but a fear of doing too well may motivate you to postpone studying for an exam or writing a business report. If you really did well, your boss, professor, friends, or parents might expect you to continue doing well, allowing little room for mistakes.

INAPPROPRIATE COMMITMENTS: In this situation, you put all your energy and time into fraternity life or athletics and let your academic work slide. This is an example of a failure to establish priorities.

REBELLION: If you feel you are being controlled or dominated by following schedules, deadlines, or rules set by someone else, you may be procrastinating in order to say, "I refuse to give in to you and let you tell me what to do!"

REVENGE: If you perceive your boss or professor as inconsiderate because she has given you too much work to do in too little time, you may want to get back by not turning in the work on time.

A FEELING OF BEING OVERWHELMED: Jobs that seem too big influence procrastination. Rather than take a major research paper step-by-step, the procrastinator "awfulizes" about how terrible it is that students are required to do so much work. Instead of using small bits of time to get started, the procrastinator becomes paralyzed by the thought of how much time the research paper will take.

BEHAVIORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO PROCRASTINATION:

1. **Spending too much time "getting ready" to study:** The student gets a pillow for his chair, sharpens pencils, puts soft music on the stereo, closes the blinds, makes his bed (so he will not be distracted), cleans off the desk—then he notices that an hour has passed and "Isn't it time to take a break from studying?"
2. **Lack of organization:** Procrastinators often have no idea when or where to start studying and what procedures to follow.
3. **Spending time doing things that do not produce the greatest benefits:** For example, a student may spend hours doing an art project for extra credit and spend almost no time studying for a comprehensive final worth half the course grade.
4. **The unwillingness to say "no":** If you are unwilling to turn down invitations to socialize, you are at the mercy of anyone who interrupts your studying.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT PROCRASTINATION?

1. **Make a schedule.** (Ask a tutor for the "Time Management" and "SLAC Daily Schedule" handouts.)
2. **Set clear and attainable goals.**
3. **Establish priorities.** Decide which goals are most important and group them according to how urgent they are. For example, label those goals that you must get done right away under heading "A." Label those less critical, but nonetheless important, goals under "B" and, finally, those goals that are worth attaining but are not urgent under heading "C."
4. **Use the five-minute plan.** Commit yourself to working on your studies for only five minutes. At the end of five minutes ask yourself if you would be willing to commit to another five minutes. Getting started is like rolling a large boulder. It can be difficult to begin, but once started, it is usually easy to keep going.
5. **Ask yourself, "Is there one more thing that I can do?"** If you added just one small task to each study session, you would be amazed at your increase in productivity.
6. **Use a regular study area.** Do not fall into the trap of studying wherever you happen to be at the time. Remember that procrastination is a habit, and one of the best ways to undo a habit is to create another, more productive habit. Your study area should be a work place that gets you in the mood for study. Do not watch TV, read comic books, or socialize at your study area. This only undermines the good habit you are trying to create. If you use your dorm room as a place to study, put a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door.
7. **Notice how others misuse your study time and learn to say "no."** If you live in a college dormitory, you will be frequently interrupted by others who want you to socialize or in some other way share the time that you had set aside to study. Be firm about your priorities and practice saying "no." Remember that your friends and relatives are not the ones who are getting your grades. Make agreements with roommates, parents, siblings, children, or spouses about time for study and time for play.
8. **Monitor your time.** Are you being productive right now? Or have you been daydreaming for the last 10 minutes? Be conscious of your use and abuse of time.

9. **Perfection is not always necessary.** Ask, "Is this a piano?" Carpenters who build rough frames for buildings have a saying they use when they bend a nail or hack a chunk out of a two-by-four. They say, "Well, this is not a piano." Ask yourself if what you are doing needs to be perfect; if not, accept lower standards when appropriate, especially when time is short.
10. **Use positive self-talk.** Notice how often you talk yourself out of beginning a project by saying such things as, "I can always do it later," or "I'm the world's worst procrastinator." Change those negative self-statements to positive statements such as "If I get it done now, I'll have time to watch TV or go out later without feeling guilty—and I'll feel better about myself."
11. **Reinforce your good habits.** Treat yourself to an ice cream cone, watch your favorite TV program, or call your boyfriend AFTER getting those 20 math problems done. Have something pleasant to look forward to when you have finished your work.
12. **Break down big jobs into smaller ones—and use small bits of time to do the smaller tasks.** For example, if you have half an hour before class, that may be an excellent time to search the online catalog in the library for sources for your research paper. Don't assume that you must do everything at once or that 20 minutes is not enough time to use productively
13. **Enlist support from others.** It is more difficult to avoid studying when you have to meet another student in the library to prepare for an upcoming test. If done properly, studying with someone else can make studying more enjoyable—and productive.
14. **Draw up a list of excuses you use for putting off your assignment or responsibility.** Evaluate them.
15. **Determine how much time you already commit to regular activities and responsibilities.** The time remaining should be the maximum time available for writing a paper or studying.
16. **Develop the habit of finishing what you start.** Don't jump from one thing to another, leaving a string of unfinished tasks behind you.
17. **Log your work on a chart only AFTER the work has been accomplished**
18. **Ignore how much work is left to do and focus on what has been accomplished.**
19. **Don't downgrade yourself.** Listen to what you tell yourself (self-talk): "I'll never make that A" or "I'm stupid." Change that negative talk to more positive talk: "I can do this if I try;" or "If I need to, I can get a tutor or a friend to help me."

Conquer procrastination. Learn to do it today!

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