

Strategies for Dealing with Procrastination

Procrastination is the act of putting off until tomorrow what can be done today. Learning more about yourself is a key factor in understanding how to overcome procrastination. What is it that keeps *your* procrastination going?

Write down all the things that interrupt your wish to get a job done. We often procrastinate when we must accomplish a task that can be repetitive, boring, difficult, long, or stressful. Following are some ideas and strategies that may help you in dealing with procrastination.

Challenge your Unhelpful Thinking Patterns

Procrastination is often perpetuated the way we think about ourselves or what we have to do.

Challenging your myths and unhelpful thought patterns can address these issues.

For example: Think of an assignment that you are currently putting off. On one sheet of paper write down all the reasons for your delay, on another argue as convincingly as possible against the delay. For example:

Thought: *'I must have six hours of uninterrupted study in order to work on my assignment'.*

Challenge: *'I can work in half hour blocks. I can take a break and not lose my focus. I don't have to do it all at once. I can work 'all morning' instead of 'all day'.*

Create realistic / helpful statements to change your perspective *"Doing something is better than nothing"* or *"Things get done one step at a time"*;



Check out the worksheet on Unhelpful Thinking Patterns.

Goal Setting

Goals are divided into short-term; medium-term and long-term. Focus on what ones are realistic for you at this time. Remember your short-term goal is part of your long-term plan.

Use the **SMART** goal-setting strategy to focus and plan your work/study: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-bound.



See separate worksheet on SMART Goal Setting.

Break tasks into manageable parts. Set yourself *small* goals - to read one chapter; to write 1 page; to write 200 words;

Set a goal every time you study i.e make a review page for an entire chapter before you take a break;

Try the Power of Five: Decide on five small practical tasks you can do in relation to the job on hand – write them down and tick off when completed;

Write down the benefits of meeting your goals today as a reminder to self.

Time Management

Develop a realistic view of time;

Procrastination comes from overestimating the time you *have* to accomplish a task or underestimating the time you *need* to complete a task;

Create a study time and space;

Organize your work environment;

Have a daily schedule and write down the tasks needing to get done today;

Prioritise your To Do List: Pick the top two priorities to focus on first;

Use the Pomodoro Technique to plan a focused study period. Work for 25 minutes, take a 10-minute break and then do another 25 minutes work. Four 'pomodoras' result in 1 hour of focused work;



Pomodoro Technique

Apply the 10-minute rule when feeling really stuck. 'I will do 10 mins work';

Start working 30 seconds after you sit down.

Motivation

Motivation is your ability to find the energy to achieve a chosen goal. **Intrinsic Motivation** is the desire to do something for the sake of doing it - comes from within. **Extrinsic Motivation** is about completing a task in order to receive a reward or avoid punishment and comes from the external. Both types of motivation affect your choices and actions. What motivates you?

Start with the easiest task i.e review your class notes;

Divide your work into small tasks. Divide a lab report into sections (summary, introduction, tables and graphs, discussion and conclusion);

Go from the general to the specific. Ask yourself: '*Which piece of this task can I do today?*'
'*If I can only get one thing done, what will it be?*'

Remember you don't have to work from the beginning to the end, pick the least demanding in thought or creativity and start there;

Bring yourself from the abstract (thinking) to the concrete (doing). Example: Lecturer gives you an assignment today, due in three weeks, do something concrete on it today;

When feeling stuck, rather than just stopping work, try a *different* approach - start on a *different* section of the work;

Do some practical tasks to re-focus i.e compile your references, write up the cover page, write the introduction or conclusion, organise your notes, clear your study space, review your plan realistically;

Study when you have the most energy. Find the times of day you are the most alert and use those times to study;

Write down what you have accomplished. Make a to-do list and check off the tasks you've completed;

Use your imagination. Make a dull topic interesting by being creative. Study games, memory cards, mind maps, checklists, colour-coded schedules can all help you to study.

Create a support network for yourself. Surround yourself with people that encourage you to stay focused and positive and help you stay on track;

Spread out your study periods. Use the entire semester to study by reviewing your notes every week.

Be Assertive

Set limits on distractions from friends. Reduce interruptions of phone, email, or having an open door. It is ok to say 'No' to some things for now.

Reward Yourself

After you have accomplished a task, reward yourself - give yourself a break or a treat. This brings a different focus to the work when put in place.



Practice some of our Relaxation & Mindfulness Techniques

Remember: Activation before Motivation. One action leads to another. Just start!

