

Why do so many people procrastinate and how to overcome it?

Procrastination is a problem for most college students. Whether the student is delaying studying, avoiding homework assignments, or putting off a research paper, procrastination can have a major impact on grades and even areas in life not relating to college such as finances, career, business, relationships, and even health.

Procrastination is not simply a matter of poor time management skills either, but can be traced to underlying and more complex motives. **For the most part, our reasons for delaying and avoiding are rooted in a lack of motivation, fear and anxiety about doing poorly, low self-confidence, being over-whelmed by the task at hand, of not having control of our outcomes, of looking stupid, or perhaps having our sense of self challenged.** Whatever the reason for putting things off, it is a fact that procrastinating creates more stress in our lives and never yields our best effort. So, what can be done to overcome our tendencies to procrastinate?

Awareness: The First Step

To overcome procrastination the student needs to understand **why delaying and avoiding have become an issue** and also understand the function or purpose procrastination serves. Consider some of the reasons listed above. Finding a solution is difficult if the root of the problem is not understood. Knowing the true reasons for procrastinating makes it easier to control.

Time Management Techniques: One Piece of the Puzzle

To overcome procrastination time management techniques and tools are indispensable, but they are not enough by themselves. And, not all methods of managing time are equally helpful in dealing with procrastination. Those that reduce anxiety and fear and emphasize the satisfaction and rewards of completing tasks work best. Those that are inflexible and emphasize the magnitude of tasks and increase anxiety can actually increase procrastination and are counterproductive. For example, making a huge list of “things to do” may INCREASE your stress and procrastination. Instead **set reasonable goals, break big tasks down into smaller chunks or segments, and set aside time for rewards as work is completed.** Repeatedly placing yourself in a situation where there are distractions can also be extremely counterproductive. If time management is not a strong trait, contact the ASC at 479.788.7675 and arrange a guided study appointment.

Motivation: Finding Productive Reasons for Engaging in Tasks

To overcome procrastination it is critical that you stay motivated for PRODUCTIVE REASONS. These are reasons for learning and achieving that lead to positive, productive, satisfying feelings and actions.

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These are in contrast to engaging in a task out of fear of failing or looking stupid. For example, if you are concerned about looking stupid you may not ask questions, try new methods, or take the risks necessary to learn new things and reach new heights.

A good way to put positive motives in motion is to set and focus on the goals at hand. Identify and write down personal reasons for enrolling in a course and monitor progress toward these personal, intrinsic goals as well as what the desired grade is for the course. Focus on **your** reasons and **your** goals. **The goals other people have set for you are not goals at all, but obligations.**

Staying Motivated: Be Active and Stay Engaged

A student's motivation is strongly influenced by what they think is important and what they believe can be accomplished. Another key to overcoming procrastination is to stay **actively engaged** in your classes. Students who are active learners engage in learning through reading, writing, listening, and reflecting (connecting what has just been learned to what is already known by asking questions, participating in discussions, and contemplating.) A student who is being a passive learner in class is probably not "getting into" the course materials and its topics and that weakens motivation. Preventing passiveness by aspiring to really understand the course material and being an active and engaged learner can be accomplished by:

- Seeking out what is interesting and relevant within the course material
- Setting your own purpose and goals for every reading and class session
- Asking yourself (and others) questions about what you are learning
- Creating index cards and quizzing yourself
- Re-write, re-organize, and review notes soon after class
- Change study tools. For example, when bogged down in textbook reading, watch a video. Next, quiz yourself over some index cards. Take a break, and then begin reading again.

Overcoming Procrastination Summary:

- ➔ Be aware of the reasons, habits, and thoughts that lead to procrastinating.
- ➔ Write down the main task, goal, assignment, etc. and give it a deadline. Think about all the steps it will take to accomplish this goal before the deadline arrives.
- ➔ Break the steps or tasks down into smaller segments scheduling a completion date for each and commit to completing this objective. This will build confidence and make the task seem manageable.
- ➔ If distractions are a problem, find a quiet place where the phone, internet, friends, etc. will not be an issue. Repeatedly placing yourself in situations where work is not accomplished is a form of procrastination.

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- ➔ If necessary, find someone to be accountable to. This can be a classmate, a tutor, or just someone who cares about your well-being. Good students learn to partner with those around them who are concerned about their success and happiness.
- ➔ Reward systems allow the student to have something to look forward to after successful completion of a task or goal—whether it be a latte, a nap, or an activity with a friend.
- ➔ Always move forward in a direction that inspires and motivates you as a student. Don't beat yourself up about not getting everything perfect. Focus on what needs to be accomplished versus what can be avoided. Most importantly, realize that achieving goals and changing habits takes time and effort, but in the end your actions will be rewarded.

“Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an uncompleted task.” William James

Adapted from:

The McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning, Princeton University,

<http://www.princeton.edu/mcgraw/library/for-students/avoiding-procrastination/>

CollegeView, Procrastination in College: Helpful Advice for Students,

<http://www.collegeview.com/articles/article/overcoming-procrastination>