

AVOIDING PROCRASTINATION



Procrastination

[proh-kras-tuh-**ney**-shun]

1. The art of postponing what needs to be done until the last possible second
2. The enemy of time management
3. Something every university student struggles with at some point in their degree

Procrastination means you are rushing to finish your work, and that what you're handing into your professor for marks... is often incomplete and inferior.

Common Myths

"I work better under pressure"

- Here, you are confusing desperation with motivation
- You focus less on doing the job well, and more on getting the job done

"Studying in advance is a waste of time because I will forget it all by test time"

- This is an excuse used to justify why you're not working
- Studying that is distributed (spread out) is more effective than cramming
- REM (dream) sleep is required for your brain to retain information
- Not only does cramming force you to miss this sleep, but cramming leaves you with no time to fix mistakes or seek help for material you don't understand

Strategies for Avoiding and Overcoming Procrastination

Use Time Management Strategies – Consistently

- By constantly organizing your time, you get into the habit of making schedules and setting study times
- Make specific, concrete study plans. “I will write my introductory paragraph on Saturday at 1:00” is more likely to happen than “I will try to do it on the weekend”
- This is a skill and like all skills, it requires practice.
- Eventually, procrastination will be replaced with good time management practices!

Gaining and Maintaining Momentum

- Some procrastinators have difficulty starting work, while others struggle with finishing it
- A solution is to plan your study sessions
- If you struggle to start working, begin with tasks that are interesting and easier
- You are more likely to work if it is something you want to work on
- Set other incentives! Sit down with your favourite hot beverage at your favourite coffee shop. Make the start of your study session as enjoyable as possible
- If you struggle with losing momentum, then work on the interesting and easier tasks in the middle or at the end of your study sessions
- Again, this gives you something to look forward to, and you will feel better getting the hard stuff out of the way

Be Organized

- Have what you need when you need it
- Is your computer charged? Do you have pens? Pencils? Paper? Your notes? Your textbook? Assignment sheets?
- If you are prone to procrastinating, this slight delay to working can be a perfect excuse not to work at all

Choose Your Location Wisely

- Again, WHERE you choose to work often determines WHETHER you work
- Home is wonderful. It's where we relax, cook our meals, watch TV with our roommates
- It is not always the most productive place to work because it is filled with distractions
- To improve concentration, you need to decrease the number of distractions
- What are you doing with your phone? With your computer? Are the people around you studying or socializing? Do you like background noise? Or do you need silence?
- We all study differently, but it is important to know what works and what doesn't when it comes to where we do our work

Don't Stop!

- If you are close to being done a task, but your study session is nearing its end, do your best to FINISH
- By stopping, you lose momentum and must regenerate it all over again
- Plus, finishing a task gives you a sense of accomplishment. YAY!
- And checking off completed tasks from your to do list is a good source of motivation to check off more

Break. It. Down

- This can't be stressed enough
- Just with organizing your schedule week-by-week, tackling your schoolwork in smaller chunks will help manage your stress and feeling overwhelmed
- Doing "small parts" of a larger task also helps with motivation
- Writing an introductory paragraph is less daunting than writing a 15-page research essay. Write the introduction. Then the next paragraph, and the one after that. Chunk-by-chunk... the paper will get written
- The less daunting a task is, the more likely you are to do it
- By breaking coursework into small, manageable sections, you make it look easier and more appealing

Find the Meaning

- Yes, you will take at least one class during your degree that is bah-orr-ing
- The content isn't interesting and the professor is as engaging as a rock
- But, you still need to study. You still have assignments, and tests, and other fun things worth marks
- Try your best to find something interesting in the course, to make the content significant to you
- Let's say you're studying rocks (disclaimer; I am not a geologist)
- Rocks. They're hard. They come in different shapes and colours. Wow. (Disclaimer; sarcasm)
- Orrrrrr... maybe they're thousands of years old? Did that hot stuff coming out of a volcano make them? Do they have fossils? Are they a fossil? I DON'T KNOW, BUT THESE ARE ALL INTERESTING QUESTIONS THAT MAKE ME MORE ENGAGED!
- You will be more invested in content you find interesting. When you're invested, it's easier to study. When it's easier to study, you get better marks. Win, win, win

Anxiety and guilt often accompany procrastination. You don't work on a task because you feel overwhelmed and stressed out, but then feel more overwhelmed and stressed out because the number of tasks keeps increasing.

It is a vicious cycle, but by getting into a routine, eliminating distractions, working on interesting or easier tasks at specific points in your study session, breaking those tasks into smaller chunks, and being organized in a location that will increase your concentration, can you defeat procrastination!

YOU CAN DO THIS!

Do not feel discouraged if this doesn't come easily. As with time management, beating procrastination is a skill you learn, and skills take time. Be dedicated, try, and don't give up.