

PROCRASTINATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

COMMON CAUSES OF PROCRASTINATION:

- **Being overextended:** determine whether it is humanly possible to meet all the obligations you currently have. Omit or reschedule some of these obligations so you have more flexibility in your schedule.
- **Low motivation:** You may not see a reason for a task, which may lead to low motivation to complete the task. You may not see the task being personally relevant. You may be working towards another person's goal rather than your own. Try to find some personal reward or relevance for completion of the task. Determine if you are really interested in the project and if not find a way to make it interesting or let it go.
- **Lack of training:** If you're unclear about what to do when the task is unfamiliar, or unprepared or incapable of completing the task, or if you find the expectations ambiguous it may be difficult to get motivated. You may want to ask for guidance, support, or a new perspective from someone who is more familiar with the process or skilled in the area.
- **Faulty assumptions:** You might assume that if you ignore the task long enough it will disappear. You might also underestimate how much time and effort the job will take or over-estimate the difficulty of getting the task done. Create a plan of action. Sit down and write out each step of the job, how long each step will take, and then tackle the job one step at a time.
- **Perfectionism:** You may set your standards so high they are unobtainable. If you fear doing a less than perfect job it may be interfering with your productivity. Remember perfection is unobtainable. Often it will feel worse to not do a job at all instead of doing it in a less than perfect manner. Try to assess how important the task is, and what level of performance really matters in relation to the task. Ask yourself "what level of performance on this task would I expect from a friend?" Your choice: unrealistic expectations or perfectionism. Adjust your expectations and set realistic goals.
- **Fear of Evaluation:** If you over-concern yourself with another individual's response to your performance you may be giving someone else way too much power over your life. Evaluate how much total impact upon your life this one reaction will have. Keep in mind; no one performs highly all the time, or in every area. Focus on completing the task with a goal of lessening your workload and anxiety, regardless of the evaluation.

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- **Avoidance of negative experience:** If you just **HATE DOING THIS TASK** and it rates up there with dental visits or cleaning out the refrigerator you may be dodging your responsibilities. You need to find a way to make it more pleasurable or enjoyable. If you can't (or won't), try doing the dreaded task first, while you still have energy. Often it can be helpful to have a friend nearby for encouragement (and to keep you on task!).
- **Fear and anxiety.** You may be overwhelmed with the task and afraid of getting a failing grade. Instead of completing papers, projects, and exams, you spend time worrying about them. Negative beliefs and self-talk such as "I can't do anything right" may influence you not to do the work. Giving yourself permission to make mistakes and to ask for help when you need it become important skills for success. If fear and anxiety is really getting you down, contact the Counseling Center, 591-5968.
- **Poor time management.** Procrastination may result from not managing time wisely. Being unclear about your priorities, goals, and objectives can result in putting off academic assignments to hang out with friends or other activities. Working on time management gives you the power and control to take care of your obligations and to have time for fun.
- **Lack of Interest in Subject.** You may find the subject boring or difficult or not something you would ever choose to take, but oftentimes you will come across those things you *have* to do rather than what you *want* to do. Develop the necessary skills now. Open your mind to new ideas. Read actively, converse mentally with the author, question his/her viewpoint, anticipate his/her conclusions, and attempt to disprove his /her ideas.
- **Lack of Goals for Each Study Session.** You may have no idea how much time and energy you are going to spend on any one subject, let alone your entire study session. Plan ahead exactly what you expect to accomplish in a study session, how long you are willing to devote to each subject and how you will know when you are done studying. When you finish plan an enjoyable activity as a reward for a job well done.
- **Poor Reading and Study Skills.** You may have found high school to be a breeze but now you're finding the expectations in college to be daunting, especially when it comes to reading and to instilling good study habits. Go to the Academic Support Center for referral in developing these skills. Learn an effective approach to textbook study. Learn to use an effective method of study. Surveying and raising questions about the material arouses interest in what is to be read. Be alert to ways in which your course relates to your life and your future career.

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- ***Trouble Getting Started.*** Just the idea of starting, keeps you from starting. Have a definite place to study and be properly equipped with pencils, paper, dictionary, etc. Have a definite starting time that you enforce. The sooner you begin, the sooner you will be free to do other things. A brief review is helpful in getting started.
- ***Daydreaming*** (an escape from work). Your body may be here but your mind is a million miles away, especially when you start to look at everything you have to complete. Have only one course's material on your desk at one time. Keep a scratch pad on your desk. Jot down your irrelevant thoughts and come back to them later.
- ***Worry About Personal Problems.*** Personal problems such as financial difficulties or problems with your boyfriend/girlfriend. Go to the appropriate student service agency for help - University Counseling Services, Financial Aid, Health Center, etc. If you have trouble deciding on a major, go to the Educational and Career Counseling Center, Starr 313. We will help you evaluate your personality and interests.
- ***Resistance to Deadlines.*** Just the idea of being told you have to finish something on a particular date, at a particular time throws you into a panic, or into a stubborn refusal the rules don't apply to you. Keep a calendar of assignment deadlines and appointments. Make a schedule with definite times for studying and completing assignments.
- ***You feel Isolated.*** You still haven't met anyone in your classes. You go from class to class without engaging with other students, your faculty or Meet with a classmate and get started. Go to the Academic Support Center and work with a tutor. Visit the professor. Talk about it to a significant other.
- ***Fear of Failure.*** Acknowledge your strengths and skills. Recall your previous successes. Work on your areas of weaknesses. Take risks. Give yourself permission to make mistakes.
- ***Fear of Success.*** Get an accurate perspective of what your success will mean to you. Focus on your own needs and expectations rather than those of others.
- ***The Consistent Put-Down.*** If you consistently put yourself down or, in other words, have a negative tape going, sit down sometime and write out the script as thoroughly as possible. Keep it in a drawer. The next time the tape starts up in your mind, pull out the script and tell yourself, "I have already written this out in great detail. I no longer need to go through it all again. It's here on paper, so I can skip it and move on to the next step."

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Time Management Strategies

- **Study where you can be the most effective.** Create a work area for yourself free from distractions, and commit to staying there for a one to two hour period. Minimize distractions while working. Organize your workspace. Turn off the T.V. Restrict computer use to the task at hand (no Facebook!). Don't answer the phone or respond to the text message. Go to the library if you're unable to concentrate in your room.
- **Look at overall assignment.** Identify what is necessary to accomplish task in a given amount of time; Get a sense of the entire project and what is required to complete it.
- **Break it down.** Set goals for what is to be accomplished. Break goals into smaller sub-goals (e.g., concentrate on one section of a paper at a time) Break larger tasks, such as papers or projects, into smaller goal steps. For example, most papers have at least five stages: picking a topic, researching the topic, reading and taking notes on the articles, organizing the information, and writing the paper.
- **Schedule it.** Break larger tasks into smaller goals, such as "library research for paper 2" and select target dates for completion of the smaller goals. Plan out a weekly schedule hour by hour. Remember to schedule time out every day for sleep, meals, social time, and some exercise and/or relaxation time. It is important to create a realistic schedule for yourself.
 - Be sure to list all projects, exams, and papers with their due dates.
 - Prioritize your tasks. Start with the task with the closest deadline or the one most urgent to complete.
 - If possible, have someone who knows you well look over your tentative schedule and give you feedback.
 - Try your new schedule. Remember, you're trying something new. It's okay to fine tune it or adjust it after you give it a try for a week.
- **Do the Work.** Accept that there are no magical cures. There is no quick and easy way to learn the material other than to actively do the work and study and use the material. All complaining and whining does is waste time. Accept it is a part of education and put yourself into it.
- **Set boundaries.** Recognize your obligations and resulting stress are as important as other people's needs, and set limits around being interrupted or rescheduling your work time.

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- **Know your energy.** Identify what time of day you have the highest energy and what time of day is your low energy period. Plan to schedule tasks that take your greater effort (concentration, enthusiasm) during high energy periods and plan rest breaks and more mundane tasks (such as laundry) during low energy periods.
- **Schedule in breaks** so you don't burn out or work inefficiently because you are too tired to do your best. Study no longer than one hour before taking a short break. Also be sure to schedule regular down time for recreation, exercise, and socializing with friends.
- **Reward yourself** for completing a task (catching a movie, buying something you want). Use small rewards for intermediate goals and a larger reward for finishing a project or paper.
- **Be realistic and don't expect perfection.** Write down the basic information needed for the task. Plan to revise and fine tune it later.
- **Use positive self talk.** Keep reminding yourself that you CAN do it! You've done it before successfully and you can again. Think of strategies that worked before when you were successful and use them now.
- **Take care of yourself.** Eat healthy foods and get enough sleep. Most adults function best on 7-8 hours of sleep nightly. Getting less than 6.5 hours nightly impairs your memory and ability to concentrate.
- **Keep your eye on the prize.** If an assignment doesn't seem relevant to you, remember your life goals. They can provide motivation and help us to prioritize.
- **Don't wait until you are "in the mood".** There is no perfect time, so stop waiting for it.
- **Accept the Challenge.** Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.

PROCRASTINATION: It's Never Too Late to defeat fear and anxiety.

- **Make an Un-Schedule.** Fill in a week's schedule with only essentials-- classes, work, and exercise. Then write down any minutes you do study.
- **Use a symbol for studying.** Choose an item, like a hat, that you put on when and only when, you are studying or an item that you place on your desk as you study.
- **Bits and Pieces:** Break large tasks into small ones. Prioritize work and set deadlines. Use behavioral suggestions, e.g., lay the book you have to read out in plain view.

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- **Relax your body before starting to study.** Relax your body and give yourself an affirmation and/or an image that will motivate you. Imagine your brain is filled with the subject you are going to study and there is no room for anything else. See the entrances to your mind are blocked by that subject so your mind will be less likely to wander.
- **Transition smoothly.** Find a transition activity that will move you in a positive direction towards studying. For example, if you have a paper to write, break the task down by starting to copy a favorite passage or poem from a book. Once you have the momentum for writing, you will find it easier to change subjects and begin your paper.
- **Contract with yourself.** Develop a contract that suits your needs. For example, if you observe that it takes you 30 minutes of procrastinating before you begin to study, contract with yourself to reduce that time to 20 minutes by defining a motivating reward or punishment.
- **Positive Patterns.** After analyzing your procrastination pattern, develop a positive pattern that will carry you across the rough spots. For example, instead of watching T.V., prepare yourself mentally...Think of...when... not if...; the price of delay; positive thoughts. The effects of an intervention like this will grow stronger each time you do it.
- **Learn to tolerate discomfort.** Watch for mental self-seductions into behavioral diversions, (e.g., "I'll do it tomorrow," "What's the harm of a half-hour of TV now? I've still got time," or "I deserve some time for myself," or "I can't do it.")
 - Dispute mental diversions, (e.g., "I really don't have that much time left, and other things are sure to come up later," or "If I get this done, I'll be better able to enjoy my time," or "Once I get started, it won't be that bad.")
 - Identify your special behavioral diversions: identify them; note when and where you use them; plan how to diminish and control their use
- **The Ten Minute Plan:** Work on a dreaded task for ten minutes, and then you decide whether or not to continue.
- **Bogged in the Middle:** Change location or position; take a break; switch subjects or tasks.
- **Give Yourself Credit For a Step.** If you solved 5 problems but not 10, if you read 30 pages instead of 50, recognize that you are making progress, doing something.
- **Not a Mona Lisa Every Time.** Grades are not a measure of self-worth. Your assignment is not equated with worthiness as a person.