
Avoiding Procrastination

Outline:

1. Introduction
 2. Definition
 3. Characteristics of procrastinators
 4. When you procrastinate (patterns)
 5. Reasons of procrastination
 6. Causes of procrastination
 7. Strategies to combat procrastination
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Introduction

We all procrastinate at some time or another, and researchers suggest that the problem can be particularly pronounced among students. An estimated 25 to 75 percent of college students procrastinate on academic work.

1. Definition

Procrastination is a learned (acquired) behaviour that involves putting off or postponing something until a later time. As procrastination is an acquired (learned) behaviour, it can be unlearned, reduced or eliminated.

2. Characteristics of procrastinators

- a. They accept and even boast about their procrastination
- b. They pride themselves on being able to do things quickly, at the last minute, and under pressure
- c. They often wait for a “push”, a threat of a specific consequence, crisis, outside force to start doing things.
- d. They focus on completing the task on time and not its quality.
- e. They try to use their procrastination as a legitimate excuse for not performing at high levels or not completing projects
- f. Procrastinators find it hard to start working on something.
- g. Procrastinators always complain about how hard things are and how busy they are.
- h. Procrastinators don't have systems. They don't plan, try out different approaches or find out what works best for them

3. When do you Procrastinate? (Patterns)

To discover your procrastination patterns, answer these questions.

- a. Are there any specific tasks involved when you procrastinate?
- b. Do you procrastinate at the beginning of a task, or during the middle of it?

- c. Do you start multiple tasks, jumping from one to another, and make less important tasks appear more important and urgent?

4. Procrastination Patterns That Keep Us Stuck

- **Procrastination Pattern 1: Focusing on What's Not Done**

To make the first inner shift, end each day with a list of what you accomplished, big or small. Resist adding on what you didn't do. Feel grateful and acknowledge yourself for those items.

- **Procrastination Pattern 2: Setting Unrealistic Expectations**

Feel free to do a brain dump of everything you can think of that you want to accomplish. This gets it out of your mind and onto paper. Then choose the 1 - 3 items that you will do that day and do them.

- **Procrastination Pattern 3: Thinking Something's Wrong**

When you observe yourself procrastinating or putting off items on your list, consider that nothing is wrong. This is a natural process. Begin to dialogue with yourself, asking questions like: What do I most need right now? Why is that item on my list?

- **Procrastination Pattern 4: Calling It "Procrastination"**

The language is powerful. What we call something gives it meaning, and gives it life. When you have a long list of ideas and action items, then you only do some of them, but that does not mean you are procrastinating. It means you are prioritizing. Shift your language from "I'm procrastinating" to "I'm prioritizing"

- **Procrastination Pattern 5: Resisting Resistance**

Learn to discern between resistance and "not the right time". It can be very valuable to trust your instinct when something just doesn't need to be done. We all say we need more time in our lives. Resistance can be a wonderful data point telling you when to let something go.

5. Why do you procrastinate? (Reasons)

- a. Lack of interest, motivation or purpose
- b. Low self-confidence
- c. Overestimating how much time left to perform tasks
- d. Underestimating how long certain activities will take to complete
- e. Too difficult or complex task
- f. Lack of skills or know-how
- g. Overextended or over committed
- h. Unconducive environment
- i. Forgetting
- j. Blaming sickness or poor health
- k. Not feeling in the mood to do the task
- l. Not caring if a task gets done or not (negligence/carelessness)
- m. False beliefs (work better under pressure)
- n. Fear of failure
- o. Perfectionism
- p. Self-control (do many other side tasks)
- q. Below expectations (from boss, for example, that everything is in high priority, too, where to start)

- r. Task related anxieties: certain situations may cause anxiety, which leads to procrastination (visiting a dentist)

6. Strategies to combat procrastination

- a. **Recognize the onset of procrastination:** explore when and why you procrastinate about a specific task. Pay attention to when thoughts of procrastination, start to creep into your mind.
- b. **Identify a purpose and a meaning:** avoid negative attitudes toward a task, as they lower motivation. Find a valid purpose for the task.
- c. **Create an interest:** through finding other people working with you on the task, looking for information on alternative sources. This increases interest.
- d. **Take charge of the situation:** gather up all necessary material, and select an appropriate environment.
- e. **Prioritize and stick the order:** prepare a list of tasks that must be done according to the order of importance, and schedule time.
- f. **Relax your personal standards:** avoid perfectionism and be realistic with your expectations. You don't have to be the best all the time.
- g. **Be flexible and willing to change:** Be ready to change the way you used to do things. Try new strategies and create new behaviour patterns.
- h. **Face your fear and failure:** focus on your positive traits, accomplishments, and skills. Talk to yourself positively, and build your self-confidence
- j. **Visualize success:** create a mental picture of yourself feeling positive about your work, and completing the work on time.
- k. **Make a contract with yourself:** stop using excuses for not completing tasks, and create a plan of action with clear goals.
- l. **Reward yourself:** once you have completed a task (or even a small portion of a larger task), it is important to reward yourself for your efforts something that you find fun and enjoyable.
- m. **Eliminate distractions:** turn off all distractions – such as music, television, and social networking sites – and use that time to focus all of your attention on the task at hand.
- n. **Break down projects:** when you are faced with a big project, take individual items on your list and break them down into a series of steps into more manageable segments.
- o. **Be kind to yourself:** if you have the tendency to label yourself a procrastinator, make your first effort one to drop the name calling. Refocus on doing 5% more toward your goal.
- p. **Take the smallest step possible:** when you don't feel motivated, take the smallest step possible toward your goal. Then, you're more likely to continue taking more steps toward that goal.

Conclusion

Procrastination is a bad habit that students should avoid to maintain interest in their studies and ensure success. Before engaging in combating procrastination, one should first determine the causes that led to it so that it is effectively eliminated or reduced. It may take some time to overcome such an issue, but through constant engagement and systematic procedures, procrastinators can modify such bad behaviour and adopt more appropriate ones.