

Procrastination

“Procrastination is opportunity’s assassin.”

Victor Kiam

Time does not discriminate. We get 168 hours of it per week. It’s our time to use or lose, no one else’s.

Procrastination is the ‘thief of time’ as well as being opportunity’s assassin. Very few of us don’t procrastinate at some time. At home we put off washing the dishes, and more importantly, getting our homework or an assignment done.

We know, we know, we know they must be done, the dishes and the assignment, but we just can’t quite seem to ‘get’ to them.

Procrastination can become a habit and spiral out of control. The ultimate result of procrastination is panic as a deadline looms.



“I’m not procrastinating. I’m proactively delaying the implementation of the energy-intensive phase of the project until the enthusiasm factor is at its maximum effectiveness.”

Procrastination has external and internal consequences. The external is scoring a zero because a person didn’t hand in their assignment, or a lesser mark because they didn’t have time to properly research it, edit it, reread it, or check it before submitting it.

The internal consequences are guilt and anxiety. Guilt sucks the enjoyment out of other things, when a person knows they should have started or be doing the assignment.

The anxiety of an impending deadline often makes completing the task even harder. By the way, procrastination and perfectionism are good buddies (see section on Perfectionism.)

NOSSAL WELLBEING NOTES

Rampant procrastination can engender feelings of self-disgust and inadequacy and undermine self-esteem. It has the potential to seriously affect all areas of our life and relationships.



"Tomorrow is the busiest day of the week."
Spanish proverb

"The best way to get something done is to begin."
Unknown

Why do we procrastinate?

We procrastinate for a multitude of reasons and each of us might have one reason or many. They include:

- poor time management
- inability to prioritise
- feeling overwhelmed by the task itself
- feeling anxious about the task
- inability to concentrate
- not fully understanding the task or what's required
- fear of failing or not living up to our own high standards
- perfectionism (impossible standards are set)
- feelings of inadequacy and doom: "It's going to be a disaster", "I'll fail anyway"
- disliking the topic; being bored by the task
- feeling the task is too difficult
- the overwhelming workload we already have
- lack of problem-solving techniques
- giving up too easily
- being disorganised
- having a messy or cluttered work-station.

What can we do about it?

Don't punish yourself because you've procrastinated. It's only human.

Do, however, **be determined to do something** about it. The bad news is that there is no magical way to beat procrastination. **We need to change the way we think.**

NOSSAL WELLBEING NOTES

Reframe thinking

Self-talk that involves *can't*, *always* or *never*—"I can't do this", "I always ruin things", and "I'm never going to get this done"—will make facing the task impossible.

Changing *can't* to *hate* is honest—"I hate this, but I can do it", and at least reminds us of our longer-term goals, the reason we really need to do this, the aim we're working toward.

Increase understanding

Many people struggle to get started because they don't understand the question. If not sure of the topic or what's expected, clarify it with the teacher. This takes minutes, reduces some of the fear, demystifies the question, and can save hours.

1. false security



2. laziness



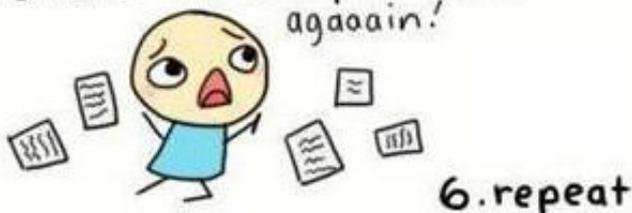
3. excuses



4. denial



5. crisis



6. repeat

Prioritise

Make a (study) plan of the tasks that need to be done in the next day/week/month. Include study tasks, relaxation, social life and household chores. Now check that it's realistic, do-able. Be flexible: postpone less important activities, and schedule the important tasks for the most productive time to work.

Mind mapping

Write the question or the theme in a bubble in the middle of a blank page. Brainstorm every idea or thought you can about what's in the bubble. Don't try to make any sense of it until you have exhausted every avenue you might explore.

Now look at it and you'll see which thoughts and ideas go together. Draw arrows to link related points, highlight the most important things, and so on. A structure for your assignment will almost certainly suggest itself via this process. Now begin.

NOSSAL WELLBEING NOTES

Don't edit while you write

If the assignment or task involves lots of writing, do the writing first. Many people edit (keep altering things) as they write. You get much more done by keeping these functions separate.

When you write, write. Always edit later. Remind yourself: no one need ever see your first draft, so it doesn't have to be perfect! Aim to finish the writing a few days before it is due; that way you have time to edit and refine.

Chunking

Break the task up into manageable, bite-sized pieces. Trying to complete the task in one fell swoop is likely to be overwhelming, and increases anxiety and panic.

Look for tasks achievable in smaller chunks of time—30 minute periods are good: read a chapter, research a particular issue, and have a break in between. Do another chunk the next day.

Physical environment

Create a space you want to work in, comfortable, with the things you need handy. If you work better with music, play music; if in silence, create that silence. Minimise interruptions: let people around you know that you're doing some serious study. Remind them with a sign on your door.

Make a list

List the tasks needed to complete the assignment and cross those completed off the list. It's encouraging to see your list getting smaller.

Work with a noisy timer

The sound of a timer in the background will help you stop procrastinating. It adds an aural dimension to time passing and **reminds you that you're supposed to be working.**



Reward yourself

Set small goals and reward yourself when you achieve each. Possible rewards: an ice cream, a short phone call to a friend, or ten minutes on Facebook. Small tasks deserve small rewards or your plan could go out the window and you're back where you started ... not getting anything productive done.

Give yourself a large reward for finishing the whole job

You could buy a book, nice coffee, video game, movie tickets.

Better still is the knowledge that doing and completing the task is its own reward and that the real reward is learning. Nothing is learned by doing nothing.