

Overcoming Procrastination

Why do you procrastinate?



Procrastination is a complex psychological Behavior that affects everyone to some degree or another.

With some it can be a minor problem; with others it is a source of considerable stress and anxiety.

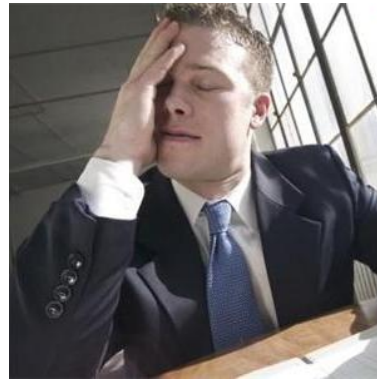


Some characteristics of procrastinators include...

- being optimistic about completing their tasks on a tight deadline.
- knowing exactly what needs to be done, even if they don't know how to do it.
- believing “They work best under pressure.”

“I work best under pressure.”

One of the biggest excuses people use for procrastinating on a task is the mistaken belief that they can work at their best “*under pressure*”.



Why Working Under Pressure is Not Optimal

- At this point, considerable effort is directed towards completing the task, and work progresses.
- This sudden spurt of energy is the source of the erroneous belief "I only work well under pressure."

What's really happening...

The real situation...

- At this point you are making progress only because **you have no choice.**
- Your back is against the wall and there are **no alternatives.**
- This causes **anxiety** which can lead to many **health issues.**
- You have to get the project done now or **FAIL!**
- Progress is being made, ***but you have lost your freedom.***

So why do some people think they can only work best under pressure?



The answer is psychological. Procrastinators receive positive reinforcement (a good grade) for delay.

- Barely completed in time, the paper may actually earn a fairly good grade.
- But the net result is reinforcement: the procrastinator is rewarded positively for poor behavior. "Look what a decent grade I got after all!"
- As a result, the counterproductive behavior is repeated over and over again.

The problem is, positive reinforcement does not have to happen all the time in order to keep up the unwanted behavior.

So even though a procrastinator might get a good grade sometimes, usually the opposite is true.

But the behavior continues.

This is called Classical Conditioning... just like training a puppy.



Four Simple Reasons for Procrastination

1. *Difficult* - the task seems hard to do; we naturally tend to avoid difficult things in favor of those which seem easy to us.
2. *Time-consuming* - the task will take large blocks of time, and large blocks of time are unavailable.
3. *Lack of knowledge or skills* - no one wants to make mistakes, so we wait until we learn how before starting.
4. *Fears* - everyone will know we don't know how to do it or that we will screw up.

Four Complex Reasons for Procrastination

1. Perfectionism
2. Anger & Hostility
3. Low Frustration Tolerance
4. Self-Downing (negative self-talk)



1. Perfectionism

- Unrealistic high expectations or standards.
- High degree of dissatisfaction and frustration...Nothing is ever good enough.
- Overwhelmed by the sheer amount of energy it will take to criticize and nit-pick something.
- Uses the words should, must, ought to, have to.

How to resolve:

- Try self-reassurance that this effort or version will be good enough.
- Make an effort to praise what you have done.
- Remember it's impossible to achieve perfection.
- You have undoubtedly found all the fatal errors by now.

2. Anger & Hostility

- If we are unhappy with someone, we'll often withhold our best efforts.
 - For example, if you are upset with a professor, you might delay in starting a demanding project as a way of "getting even."
- But you are the one who loses; you are the one who will get the low grade.

How to resolve:

- Determine that you are the one who is feeling upset and see how your actions will actually harm you in the long run.
- Don't let how you feel about a particular class stand in the way of your personal future.

3. Low Frustration Tolerance

- Circumstances overwhelm you easily.
- You find situations radically intolerable and terribly unfair.
- Frustration is characterized by whining and complaining.

How to Resolve:

- Be realistic. The more you want something and can't have it, the greater your level of frustration.
- Get help from someone who can show you how to solve the problem.
- Learn how to temporarily postpone your desires. Most of the time, you will eventually get what you want.

4. Self-Downing

- This happens when you continually minimize your own skills and abilities and express doubt about your ability to succeed.
- You might habitually put yourself down and tend to disbelieve yourself even when you are successful.
- You may also find it hard to accept praise and compliments for work performed.

The trouble with self-downing is, given a long enough time, you will actually come to believe that you are incapable of achievement.

How to resolve:

- Practice accepting compliments about your work performance by simply saying "Thank you."
- Figure out why you feel uncomfortable with success. Did someone in your life make you feel this way? Were you taught to minimize your success? Why is success so scary? Will it make you stand out in the crowd? Do you feel as though others will not accept you if you are successful?
- Remember to compliment and praise yourself for work accomplished.

Some Ways to Combat Procrastination

- Realize you are delaying something unnecessarily.
- Discover the real reasons for your delay and list those reasons.
- Dispute those real reasons and overcome them. Be vigilant.
- Announce the task you need to complete.
- Begin the task.



Student Success Centers

For more information on being a successful college student contact the Student Success Center.

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Student Success Advisors are available to help you.