

Procrastination

What is Procrastination?

Procrastination is the avoidance of doing a task that needs to be done—postponing until tomorrow what can be done today. Procrastination affects our work and commonly involves feelings such as guilt, inadequacy, stress and depression. This can fuel a cycle where we lose confidence in our ability to get back on track.

Why Do People Procrastinate?

- Overload of tasks at a specific time causing you to feel overwhelmed
- Anxiety about the task—time is spent worrying rather than doing
- Difficulty concentrating
- Not knowing what is required
- Concern about failing or not meeting standards
- Fear of success and its possible consequences
- Too many distractions
- Perfectionism—often associated with unrealistic standards
- Negative thoughts (e.g. “I’m stupid,” or “Nothing ever goes right for me.”)
- All-or-nothing thinking—one setback is seen as a total catastrophe
- Being bored by the task
- Avoidance of things that are uncomfortable or difficult

How to Overcome Procrastination

Overcoming procrastination involves developing a clearer understanding of its personal and emotional meaning and then implementing a clearly-structured and realistic timetable. If we keep doing the same things, we do tend to get the same results. The approach is about beginning to do things differently to overcome procrastination.

Dealing with Emotions

If we are experiencing painful, confusing or overwhelming emotions, it becomes very difficult to work. Our creativity, motivation, capacity to think and ability to focus are often impacted. A good place to start is to spend time reflecting on how you are feeling and what you are thinking about. Often, we become so focused on a task or issue that it distracts us from what we are really thinking or feeling. It can be useful to visit with a friend or loved one to learn about their perspective on the situation.

Mindfulness can also be used to develop a new way of managing our emotional experiences. This can help reduce the likelihood of procrastination. Exercise, yoga or getting involved in a creative outlet like music or art can also help.

Becoming aware of your thoughts and feelings can highlight underlying issues you might want to get help with from a professional. Get help sooner rather than later as it can make a dramatic difference in your ability to work.

Boundaries, Timing and Tracking

- Create and sustain boundaries that protect your time and space while also giving yourself permission to focus on work. Let friends and family members know that you will only be available at certain times. Turn off distractions (phones, TV, etc.).
- Create a clear and realistic timetable to cover work and break time. Break tasks down into small, manageable blocks of time.
- Keep a log of the work you have done. Each time you complete a task, cross it off. This builds confidence.

Finally, seek help and guidance from a professor, advisor or counselor if these strategies don't work for you.