

## **PROCRASTINATION**

Essentially, procrastination means putting off until tomorrow something that you could do today. This may come in the form of an assignment, studying for exams, making an appointment, or even arranging to meet up with someone.

Students frequently report that they would be less stressed and more productive if they could just stop this bad habit.

### **What causes procrastination?**

Difficulties in being productive may stem from various sources and the causes of procrastination may be different for different people. Here are some of the most common reasons that make people procrastinate.

- 1.** Having an unrealistic view of how a productive person really functions. Procrastinators often think that successful people always feel confident, have no self-doubt, can easily accomplish their tasks and never endure frustration or failure. People then have a tendency to give up when things get tough. Adopting a "coping model" of success is an alternative to this. This means beginning to view achievement as something which can be stressful, accept that life will be difficult at times and that obstacles and failures are part of the process to getting things done.
- 2.** Fear of failure is another cause of procrastination. As success is often extremely important to people, they are afraid to risk failing, so instead do nothing at all. If you think that failing at your work will mean that you are a failure in general, this attitude should be confronted and challenged in the light of your accomplishments to date.
- 3.** Being a perfectionist is an underlying cause of procrastination. Perfectionists believe that they should always do things perfectly and put immense pressure on themselves, and subsequently feel so stressed that they procrastinate. Being concerned about the quality of your work differs from compulsive perfectionism. Being enthusiastic and determined about getting work done achieves a sense of accomplishment due to efforts. On the other hand, perfectionists are often spurred on by a fear of failure and are never entirely satisfied with their accomplishments.
- 4.** People who procrastinate get in the habit of telling themselves "I really should get started". These "should" statements, are usually ineffective and unproductive as they make you feel guilty, making you completely avoid the task. Every time you tell yourself "I should do...", try to replace "should" with "could" or with a different phrase such as "It would be desirable if I could do....".
- 5.** One of the most common reasons for procrastination is genuine lack of desire to do whatever task that you're putting off. There will be certain goals and tasks you will not really feel committed to

which may result in putting it off. Admitting this to yourself will help you to re-examine why you are putting this off.

**6.** People procrastinate because they don't feel like doing them at the time or because they are not in the mood to do them. A common belief is that motivation is required to produce action, whereas in reality it is usually action which causes motivation, which leads to more action. As motivation can be crucial for academic success, you can train yourself for work efficiently instead of waiting until the 'right mood' strikes you. Actions which can improve your motivation include establishing a study routine, and rewarding yourself for accomplishing assignments and studying. One simple way to improve your motivation is through goal setting.

### Try the technique SMART.

**S- Specific. Set specific goals.** Decide a specific time and day that you are planning to do some study.

**M - Measurable.** Continuously measure progress towards your goal. For example, ticking off items from a "To do list".

**A- Action Related.** Identify the necessary actions required to achieve your goal. If you have to start an assignment, the first step might be to take out appropriate books from the library. The second step would be to begin reading on the subject, the third to decide on a particular topic and then narrow your focus.

**R - Realistic.** Ensure that your study goals are realistic and can be accomplished. **T - Time based.** A good idea would be to work back from a deadline when planning your study.

### The ABC of Procrastination

We can look at procrastination by examining separately each of the components:

Affect (emotions and sensations), Behaviour (actions) and Cognitions (thoughts and beliefs), by using the ABC method.

- Affect as emotion can be experienced as positive (e.g. joy), negative (e.g. sad) or somewhere in between. Affect as sensation (e.g. feeling tired, relaxed) can also be experienced as either positive or negative. These emotions or sensations can be over-reactions to events or situations such as heart palpitations when asked to speak in class.
- Behaviour relates to observed actions . As most behaviour is learned, one can modify them through practice.
- Cognitions are the thoughts, ideas and beliefs which depict our view of ourselves, others and the world. They can be positive as in thinking how great it will be when a goal is accomplished, or negative as in thinking about how we could fail.

Although Affect, Behaviour and Cognitions can be examined separately they are all connected as parts of a person as each component is constantly interacting and influencing another.

## Beat your Procrastination

1. Identify it Identify one task you are putting off unnecessarily and that you want to start doing.

2. Think about it

- Using the ABC above method ask yourself what emotions/affect

(A) are enabling procrastination. Does the task make you feel anxious/tense? Are you frustrated that you have to do at all?

- Ask yourself what behaviours

(b) contribute to your procrastination. You may be replacing some other behaviour for the one behaviour you need to do. This behaviour may be a behaviour that is easier to do (e.g. watching T.V. instead of going to the library)

- Then ask yourself what thoughts/cognitions (c) are linked to your procrastination.

Do you think that you work well under pressure and so now you will wait until the last minute? Or you could think that you are going to fail so don't want to try at all.

3. Look at your own ABC interaction Identify which component is triggers your procrastination and in what order the other components follow.

For example, you may think you will fail an exam and feel anxious about starting studying and then delay looking at your notes. In this case the firing order is CAB and C (your cognition or thought) begins the interaction. By identifying your trigger for procrastination you can start to change it.

- If A (emotions/affect) was the problem, using relaxation and other stress management tools can allow you to deal with the feeling and proceed with the task.

- If C is the problem, replace your negative thoughts that are causing the procrastination with more positive self-talk.

- If the difficulty is at B, (behaviour) use rewards to promote the behaviour that you are avoiding, making you want to complete it. For example, allow yourself to watch a television programme only when you've finished one topic. Extra Tips for Procrastination

- Make it Meaningful What is important about the task you have been putting off? Make a list about the benefits of finishing it, including how you will feel when the task is done.

- Break it down Break big, daunting tasks into small ones, for example, if you have readings to catch up on, divide them into two pages sections. Make a list of pages and cross them off as you complete them and reward yourself as you go along.

- Make an intention statement On a piece of paper, write for example "I intend to cover two topics of my exam by 7p.m". Place this card somewhere you can see it.

- Tell everyone Tell your housemates, class members, family and whoever will listen what you intend to do. This holds you accountable for the task.

- Reward yourself in the right ways But only do this if you complete the task, there is no use in giving up and watching T.V. after a few minutes of studying.
- Just do it Don't give yourself time to think about the task, just dive right in. Do it now. You'll often find if you just begin a task, you become more motivated to continue.
- Change your environment If you always study at home, try the library. If it's sunny outside, sit in a sunny corner.