

# ACCESS

## Study Skills Tip of the Week

### Just say “NO” to Procrastination

Procrastination is the avoidance of a specific task or work which needs to be accomplished. This explanation doesn't capture the emotions triggered by the word. For most of us the word reminds us of past experiences where we have felt guilty, lazy, inadequate, anxious, or stupid... or some combination of these. It also implies a value judgment: if you procrastinate, you are bad and lack worth as a person.

### Causes of Procrastination

In order to understand and solve your procrastination problems, you must carefully analyze those situations where your work is not being completed. First determine whether the cause is poor time management; if so, you will need to learn and develop time management skills. If, however, you know how to manage your time but don't make use of those skills, you may have a more serious problem. Many individuals cite the following reasons for avoiding work:

Lack of relevance- If something is not relevant or meaningful to you personally, it may be difficult to get motivated even to begin.

Acceptance of another's goals- If a project has been imposed or assigned to you, you may be reluctant to spend the necessary time to complete it.

Perfectionism- Having too high standards will discourage you from completing a task. Remember, perfection is unattainable.

Evaluation Anxiety- Since others' responses to your work are not under your direct control, overvaluing responses can create the kind of anxiety that will interfere with work getting accomplished.

Ambiguity- If you are uncertain of what is expected of you, it may be difficult to get started.

Inability to Handle the Task- If through lack of training, skill, or ability you feel that you lack the personal resources to do the job, you may try to avoid it completely.

## **Procrastination Takes Many Forms**

Once you have acknowledged your procrastination, and after you have analyzed the underlying cause, you need to clearly specify how you procrastinate. Consider the following examples.

1. Do you act as though if you ignore a task it will go away? Your midterm Chemistry exam is not going to go away no matter how much you ignore it.
2. Do you underestimate the work involved in the task, or overestimate your abilities and resources in relationship to the task? Do you tell yourself that you will be able to complete physics problems in one hour and it normally would take you six?
3. Do you deceive yourself into believing that a mediocre performance or lesser standards are acceptable?
4. Do you deceive yourself by substituting one activity for another? Suppose you clean the apartment instead of writing your term paper. Valuing a clean apartment is fine but if that value only becomes important when there is a paper due, you are procrastinating.
5. Do you believe that repeated delays are harmless? An example is putting off writing your paper so you can watch five minutes of your favorite television program. If you don't return to writing the paper after five minutes, you may stay tuned to the TV for the entire evening with no work being done.
6. Do you dramatize a commitment to a task rather than actually doing it? An example is taking your books on vacation but never opening them or perhaps even declining invitations in order to "stay home and study," but not studying at all. This way you stay in a constant state of unproductive readiness to work without ever working.
7. Do you persevere on only one portion of the task? An example is writing and rewriting the introductory paragraph of the paper but not dealing with the body and the conclusion. The introductory paragraph is important, but not at the expense of the entire project.
8. Do you become paralyzed in deciding between alternative choices? An example involves spending so much time deciding between two term paper topics that you don't have sufficient time to write the paper.

### **Effective Planning**

The larger, more involved, the project, the more difficult it is to plan effectively to carry it out. The following steps may be helpful:

- Divide the task into small steps. The entire job may seem impossible, but smaller segments will seem more manageable.

- Give yourself a reasonable amount of time to complete each small step. “Reasonable” is the key word; you must allow sufficient time for each step. Do not fool yourself by believing you can do more than is humanly possible.
- Realize that we all need variety and relaxation sometime. Give yourself rewards for completing steps in a project. This will help you feel less resentful of the task and the work that still needs to be done.
- Monitor your progress on the small steps. Watch for the pitfalls discussed earlier. Assess problems when they arise and do something about them quickly.
- Be reasonable in your expectations of yourself. Perfectionism or extremely strict expectations may cause you to rebel or may block your progress..

Based on information from : Counseling Center, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

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