Procrastination: Top 15 Tips

Procrastination is letting the low-priority tasks get in the way of high-priority ones. It's socializing with colleagues when you know that important work project is due soon, watching TV instead of doing your household chores, or talking about superficial things with your partner rather than discussing your relationship concerns.

CAUSES
Like other habits, there are two general causes. The first is the “crooked thinking” we employ to justify our behavior. A closer look at our crooked thinking reveals three major issues in delaying tactics - perfectionism, inadequacy, and discomfort. The second source is our behavioral patterns. Getting started on an unpleasant or difficult task may seem impossible. Procrastination is likened to the physics concept of inertia - a mass at rest tends to stay at rest.

Top 15 Tips for Stopping/Preventing Procrastination

1. **Rational Self-Talk.** Those old excuses really don’t hold up to rational inspection. The “two column technique” will help. Write down all your excuses on one side of a piece of paper. Start challenging the faulty reasoning behind each of the excuses. Write down your realistic thoughts on the opposite side of each excuse. Here are two examples of excuses and realistic thoughts.
   - **EXCUSE:** I'm not in the mood right now. **REALISTIC THOUGHT:** Mood doesn't do my work, actions do. If I wait for the right mood, I may never get it done.
   - **EXCUSE:** I’m just lazy. **REALISTIC THOUGHT:** Labeling myself as lazy only brings me down. My work is really separate from who I am as a person. Getting started is the key to finishing.

2. **Positive Self-Statements.** Incorporate a list of self-motivating statements into your repertoire of thoughts. Consider ...
   - “There’s no time like the present.”
   - “The sooner I get done, the sooner I can play.”
   - “There’s no such thing as perfectionism. It’s an illusion that keeps me from doing what I have to do right now.”
   - “It’s cheaper and less painful if I do it now rather than wait until it gets worse.”

3. **Don’t Catastrophize.** Jumping to the conclusion that you will fail or that you are no good at something will only create a wall of fear that will stop you cold. Recognize that your negative predictions are not facts. Focus on the present and what positive steps you can take toward reaching your goals.

4. **Design Clear Goals.** Think about what you want and what needs to be done. Be specific. If it’s getting that work project completed by the deadline, figure out a time
table with realistic goals at each step. Keep your sights within reason. Having goals too big can scare you away from starting.

5. **Set Priorities.** Write down all the things that need to be done in order of their importance. The greater the importance or urgency, the higher their priority. Put “messing around” (distractions) in its proper place - last! Start at the top of the list and work your way down.

6. **Partialize the Tasks.** Big projects feel overwhelming. Break them down into the smallest and most manageable subparts. You’ll get more done if you can do it piece by piece. For example, make an outline for a written report before you start composing, or do a small portion of the chores rather than all at once. Partializing works especially well with the unpleasant jobs. Most of us can handle duties we dislike as long as they’re for a short time and in small increments.

7. **Get Organized.** Have all your materials ready before you begin a task. Use a daily schedule and have it with you all the time. List the tasks of the day or week realistically. Check off the tasks when you have completed them.

8. **Take a Stand.** Commit yourself to doing the task. Write yourself a “contract” and sign it. Better still, tell a friend, partner, or supervisor about your plans.

9. **Use Prompts.** Write reminders to yourself and put them in conspicuous places like on the TV, refrigerator, bathroom mirror, front door, and car dashboard. The more we remember, the greater the likelihood we’ll follow through with our plans.

10. **Reward Yourself.** Self-reinforcement has a powerful effect on developing a “do it now” attitude. Celebrate, pat yourself on the back, smile, and let yourself enjoy the completion of even the smallest of tasks. Don’t minimize your accomplishments. Remember, you’re already that much closer to finishing those things that need to be done. Go ahead, get started ... NOW! This information was written by Kent T. Yamauchi, Ph.D.

11. **“The Pomodoro Technique.”** Set a timer time a specific amount of time (20, 25, 30 mins), and work on an activity (reading, worksheet, etc.) until the timers goes off. This allows you to a) estimate how long you need to complete tasks; and b) work for small chunks of time and then reward yourself with small breaks (such as checking your phone, social media, email).

12. **Have a Support System.** Having a family member, friend, or even someone on campus to help keep you accountable can help you to stick to your anti-procrastination goals. Ask a family member to call/text you to see if you’ve gotten an assignment done. Asks a friend who also wants to improve their time management/limit procrastination
to study with you. Ask professors/TAs if you can set up due dates for rough drafts in addition to the final version due at the end of the semester.

13. **Don't Plan to Procrastinate!** Saying things to yourself such as “I can't do (insert activity) that night; I'm going to be up all night writing a paper” shows that you are actually able to plan out both your academic and social responsibilities. But, we know that staying up late the night before an assignment is due typically ends in poor quality assignments (and therefore lower grades) as well as makes us exhausted and unmotivated to do any work the next day. Plan instead to do your assignments when you need to, rather than when you have to. Plan to be productive and have balance in your life!

14. **Set Earlier Deadlines for Yourself.** Set your own deadlines a couple of days before the assignment is due. And don’t just try to get the assignment done by then – actually get it done! This allows you time to review the final project, seek feedback from instructors/TAs, the Writing & Media Center, as well as deal with last minute stressors (e.g. roommate drama) that would otherwise prevent you to meet a deadline and turn in a quality project.

15. **Be Patient with Yourself.** Changing your current procrastination habits is learning a new habit in and of itself. *It will take time* to build the willpower to put away your phone while studying, or to ask your friends to postpone meeting for an hour so that you can finish your assignment. The endeavor will be difficult and you will inevitably not be able to quit “cold-turkey.” And that’s okay. You don’t have to lose faith in your ability to overcome procrastination just because you postponed reading a chapter to run an errand in town.