

# Procrastination: Top 10 Tips

Academic Success Center  
Iowa State University

---

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. The second source is our behavioral patterns.

A closer look at our crooked thinking reveals three major issues in delaying tactics - perfectionism, inadequacy, and discomfort.

Our behavioral patterns are the second cause. 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 10 Tips

- 1. Rational Self-Talk.** Those old excuses really don't hold up to rational inspection. The "twocolumn 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.

# Procrastination: Top 10 Tips

Academic Success Center  
Iowa State University

---

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 "messaging 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.