

Procrastination

Ever found yourself doing less important things as opposed to that assignment that is due in a week? Well, that is procrastination. History has seen many procrastinators, and procrastination affects even the most successful people. But these people were ultimately able to make sure they completed their tasks — hopefully within the set deadline, although sometimes sadly much later.

Missing a deadline when it comes to a university assignment, tutorial or exam is never a good idea, neither is it good for your overall wellbeing. Legitimately missing a deadline could mean that you need a letter from a professional deeming you unfit to have submitted an assignment or write a test. But I can't say that a doctor would ever agree to write down 'procrastination' as a valid reason.

A tendency to procrastinate should not always be seen as the enemy as some people thrive under pressure. A lucky few are unable to deal with the pressure of leaving an assignment for the last minute. The trick is knowing yourself and how you work under pressure and ultimately figuring out how you can produce the quality of work that is required of you. According to the experts, there are two types of procrastinators, the structured procrastinator and the unstructured procrastinator (Mikus, 2015).

The structured procrastinator is the person that sits for hours or days sorting out their class notes as preparation for studying, and then realises two or three days before a test that they have not actually started studying! The good thing about this procrastinator is that they are then able to start studying with well-sorted notes. However, this will work for you only if your study skills are excellent or you are just very good at that subject. (If not, visit the Counselling Centre for study-skills-groups dates and times!)

The unstructured procrastinator is the person that seems to just put off *everything* — and who ultimately does little or none of the work required by their lecturers. We might simply call these people lazy, but honestly I don't want to offend anyone!

Whether you are a structured or unstructured procrastinator, learning time management is the right step towards moving away from being a chronic procrastinator (Perry, 2016). Clear (2016) describes some helpful steps in dealing with a (perhaps universal) tendency to procrastinate. Following these steps will allow for *some* instant gratification while also helping you make progress on that assignment that is only needed a month from now.

Step 1: Set your goals

First, you need to just state your goals and then envisage your ideas on reaching them. Everyone loves to dream about things, but that may not be realistic — so here we are discouraging dreamers! Goals *must* be realistic and reachable; you must be able to state *how* you imagine you are going to get to the future you.

Step 2: Start the task

Just starting a task is typically the most difficult part. Really difficult. But, invariably, as soon as you start it, it will not seem so painful. For example, for days I have been putting off typing this article, but today I decided 'let me type just a few ideas and see how far I get with it'; two hours later, almost a full page emerged. The most painful part — the dread of starting — was behind me; and soon enough, I felt I was almost done.

Step 3: Build a ritual

A friend related how it didn't feel like much fun for him to wake up at 6 am to go out for a jog. Yet since he had started doing that, he thought that he might as well continue because if he skipped even one day he would likely skip it again the next. Hence, he set his goal for the future, started the process, and by keeping to the set time each morning he had built his ritual — to jog, which he loves. Once you get through the processes of *just starting* the rest can feel like a breeze. Likewise, you can build a successful student ritual by having a fixed time dedicated solely to preparing assignments, preparing study notes, researching, studying and just getting on with it — and with personally satisfying and good results!

We all want instant happiness, and therefore long-term deadlines may not seem as important as short-term ones or our immediate needs (Clear, 2016). Even so, learning to *plan and implement* will help a great deal in all aspects of your life. Everything starts small. Just do it!

References

Clear, J. (2016) *The Akrasia Effect: Why We Don't Follow Through on What We Set Out to Do (And What to Do About It)*. Retrieved from JamesClear.com.

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Perry, J. (2016) *Structured Procrastination: Do Less, Deceive Yourself, and Succeed Long-Term*. Retrieved from www.structuredprocrastination.com.