

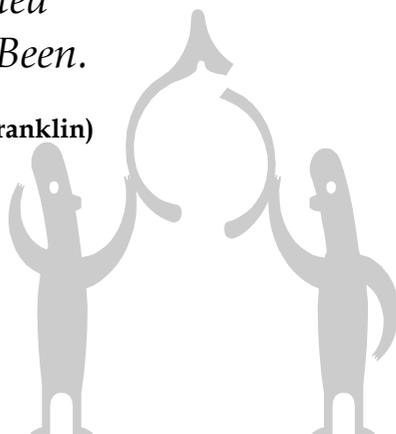
# Procrastination: How to stop putting things off



*Mr. Meant-to has a comrade  
And his name is Didn't-do.  
Have you ever chanced to meet them?  
Did they ever call on you?*

*These two fellows live together  
In the house of Never-Win  
And I am told that it is haunted  
By the ghost of Might-Have-Been.*

(Benjamin Franklin)



## **What is Procrastination?**

Procrastination, or putting things off, is a common habit in all walks of life. University students however are particularly vulnerable, possibly because of the amount of work expected of them, the lack of formal structure in university and the range of tempting distractions on campus. At its worst procrastination can seriously threaten academic achievement or course completion and can become a serious problem affecting many areas of a person's life. The aim of this leaflet is to explain some of the signs, causes and ways of dealing with procrastination.

## Do any of these sound familiar to you?

- *Difficulty making a start on a piece of work or revision-* are you putting the starting time back or waiting for the right moment?
- *Craving diversion-* tidying, TV or phoning a friend suddenly become irresistible. Distractions – such as Facebook or social opportunities – feel much more tempting than the task you are trying to complete.
- *Ineffective working-* spending time in library with little to show for it- staring at a blank piece of paper rather than writing
- *Last minute rushing-* doing work at breakneck speed the night before a deadline or exam.
- *Missed deadlines-* are you requesting extensions or making excuses, perhaps losing marks because work is handed in late? Finding it hard to get to classes?
- *Nagging Guilt-* social and relaxation time is spoilt as you feel you should be working.



## Where does procrastination come from?

### Over-Aversion to Discomfort

Some tasks in life are truly unpleasant and it is natural to want to avoid the discomfort of completing them. However, other tasks, such as completing a degree are difficult and challenging for good reasons. (That is why the completion of a degree is usually seen as an important accomplishment.) It is natural to find the challenge of academic work uncomfortable and if you can face up to this discomfort you can expect to get to

grips with it quite quickly. If you continually put off uncomfortable things you never break through the “pain barrier” to the comfort and sense of achievement beyond.

### **Lack of Self-Confidence**



If you are quick to blame yourself when you find things difficult, you might be using self-defeating talk that makes problems seem insurmountable and puts you off trying altogether.

### **Fear of Success**

Sometimes, getting started and completing a task can mean moving on and changing. Success can be linked to increased responsibility and for some people this means increased anxiety and worry.

### **Getting Overwhelmed**

Putting things off can cause a build up of things to do and a sense of being swamped by responsibilities. With academic work, you might find yourself overwhelmed by piles of notes or books, making it difficult to know where or how to start.

### **Under-Developed Study Skills**

Study skills help you to work efficiently and effectively. If you haven't addressed how you work or looked at how to improve your skills, you might be wasting precious time and energy. If you are working hard for little or no return you are more likely to become demoralised and tired.

### **Unrealistic Expectations**

Some people set unrealistically high goals thus increasing the pressure on themselves to perform. Ra-

ther than settling for producing work that is a true reflection of their abilities, they end up producing rushed or incomplete work. Procrastination allows them to keep alive the belief that they could get a first, if only they'd got started sooner!

### **Resentment and passive-aggressive behaviour**

One possible underlying factor to procrastination is the experience of having authoritarian parents. Procrastination provides a non-direct way of resisting the demands of parents while providing the person with a sense of autonomy. Therefore, if you have reason to feel resentful about your situation at University, you might then use procrastination to express these kinds of feelings. As one writer put it, procrastination is a "sophisticated form of sulking."



### **Lifestyle**

Procrastination can become a habit and can affect every aspect of a person's life. Your lifestyle can reinforce procrastination especially if you have erratic sleeping patterns or use drink and drugs to distract you.

### **Depression**

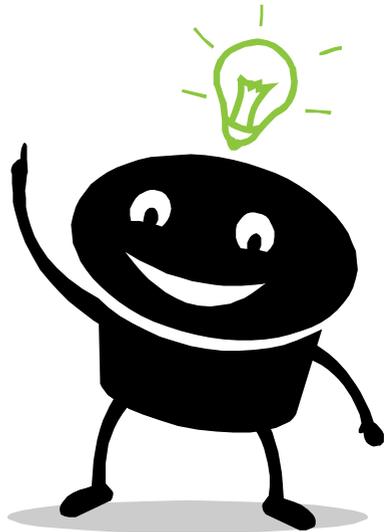
An inability to concentrate or a lack of motivation can also be symptoms of depression. If you are aware of other symptoms such as changes in appetite, sleeping patterns or a persistent low mood you might want to seek further help.

## Some strategies that may help:

- *The ten-minute plan:* work on something for just ten minutes. At the end of ten minutes, switch to something else if you want. Chances are, you'll get involved enough to keep going.
- *Do only a small part of the task each time.* ('I'll just check out the books tonight. Later on, I'll glance through them').
- *Set yourself achievable tasks and reward yourself when they are achieved* (watch TV, go out for a drink with a friend, phone home - though only after you've achieved your goal not before).
- *Keep reminding yourself of your goals.* Can you see why this particular (dreaded?) assignment is necessary.
- *Use a good friend as a positive role model.* If you have trouble concentrating, study in the presence of someone who doesn't.
- *Modify your environment* - if you can't study at home, find a place where you can study, or change your study situation at home.
- *Plan for tomorrow and establish priorities* - some students find that simply writing down reasonable starting and stopping times helps them get going.



- *Expect some difficulties.* Don't expect to be perfect. Accept setbacks and start again.
- *Identify your distractions* (Facebook, emails etc). Give yourself a fixed time of thirty minutes to get these out of your system before you start studying.
- *Do something physical* – physical activity will help you to feel more energetic, help you to unwind and relax and to think more clearly.
- *View topics of learning as part of a bigger picture.* Look for, and make links between one subject and another.
- *Put on some really loud music* and get on with what you've been putting off.
- *Spend a few moments today on your own, in a peaceful place and breathe slowly.* Think about what matters to you. What do you need to do about it?
- *Picture yourself doing the thing you have to do, doing it effortlessly and afterwards being full of relief and relaxation.*
- *Make the tasks look small and easy in your mind.* Remind yourself 'I've written good assignments/reports; this is just another one'. Be specific – think 'I need to write the first chapter' rather than 'I need to write the essay'.



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**Monday-Friday 10:00am-4:30pm**

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