

Study Skills Tips: Overcoming Procrastination

The Procrastinator's Code States: "Don't start today what you can put off until tomorrow." The trouble is, of course, that tomorrow comes and the task remains - plus you waste the time and energy making excuses. Webster's Universal College Dictionary defines "procrastinate" as "put off until another day or time; defer; delay." This implies that any time you defer action you are procrastinating. There are times when delaying is a good decision, but recurrent procrastination means trouble. Negative consequences of procrastination include such things as turning in incomplete work, getting lower grades, failing a class, or losing a job. In this section of Study Skills Tips you will learn about the procrastinator's cycle, and how even procrastinators can set and achieve goals.

The Procrastinator's Cycle

1. I'll start early this time.
2. I must start soon.
3. What if I don't start?
4. There's still time.
5. Something's wrong with me .
6. A final choice : to do or not to do.
7. The promise : I'll never do this again! .

Setting and Achieving Goals for the Procrastinator

Procrastinators are terrible goal setters. They set vague goals ("I'll do some math problems soon") and/or unrealistic goals ("I can research and write my entire term paper on Sunday"). But even p

To set effective goals, follow these guidelines:

- Break large goals into smaller manageable components ("I will start my research paper by finding sources in the library")
- Make your goal specific ("I will go to the library tonight at 7 o'clock").
- Make it measurable ("I will find five sources tonight").

Set a reward for successful completion ("If I find five sources for my paper I can watch Letterman"). The key here is not to reward yourself unless you have accomplished the task.

Set an Environment of success

Procrastination often means placing yourself in situations where it is difficult to begin or remain on task. Pay attention to your actions and surroundings when you're avoiding a task. Who or what is distracting you?

Recognizing distractions is one step to changing your situation. You must also learn to recognize the people and situations that help keep you on task, then seek them out. Once you learn to recognize both positive and negative influences, you can begin to make better choices regarding your time.

Timing is Everything

Procrastinators tend to underestimate the amount of time involved in any one task or project. They end up doing all-nighters or skipping everything else (work, other classes - sound familiar?) to finish. Managing your time effectively can help you combat procrastination. See the Time Management page or attend the seminar for more information.

Procrastination Busters

1. List the benefits of completing the task. List the consequences of not completing it. Make a conscious choice between the two.
2. After you set goals, tell people who will check your progress.
3. When you notice yourself procrastinating, plunge into the task. Don't lurk in the shallows; jump into the deep end.
4. Deliberately choose to procrastinate. If you can choose to do it, you may find you can choose *not* to procrastinate.
5. If you find yourself putting off the same thing over and over again, reexamine its priority. Maybe you don't need to do it.