

Working Through Procrastination

Graduate Writing Center

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Reasons for procrastination differ from person to person and procrastination can occur for a number of reasons. This handout identifies potential causes of procrastination and discusses strategies to overcome and minimize it.

Common Causes of Procrastination:

- Fear of failure or fear of disappointing ourselves or those we love/respect.
- Fear of success. Success may mean a change that is stressful or undesired.
- Perfectionism. You can't perfect the assignment to the level that you desire by the deadline.
- Fear of not finishing work by a specific deadline.
- Not having a clear understanding of the work required.
- Being overwhelmed by the work required for the project.
- Lack of motivation. The task may be uninteresting or unpleasant, so you resist beginning it.
- Performing the task may not provide immediate gratification, so it can be tempting to perform more rewarding tasks first.
- Hope that the assignment will go away if it is ignored.
- Stress related to other tasks or obligations unrelated to the task at hand.
- A mental health issue such as ADHD, depression, or anxiety. Professionals at the [UCR Counseling Center](#) can help you determine if these or other mental health issues are the cause of your procrastination.

Strategies for Overcoming Procrastination:

- **Figure out your fears** – Determining the reason for your procrastination can help you overcome it. Self-reflection or talking with a family member or close friend about your procrastination can help you determine the reason(s) for your procrastination.
- **Control your setting** – Create or go to an environment that is conducive to the task that you need to complete. This may be your home, an office, or another place. You may need to clean an area to make it better for your work habits, but don't let cleaning become a source for more procrastination. Finally, take time of day into consideration. For example, if you are not a morning person, set aside time at night to work on your writing.
- **Break up large writing assignments** – If a writing assignment is too large to finish at once, break it into smaller tasks that can be checked off as they are completed. This will allow you to see progress even if you only complete a small portion of the assignment at a time.
- **Make a writing plan** – Plan out all the steps needed to complete the project by the due date. Design a schedule for yourself that takes into account other priorities. Planning ahead will help minimize conflicts among several obligations.
- **Set aside a time and date to work on your writing** – Mark on a calendar when you will write. Set up beginning and ending times. You can schedule mental breaks in the time (five minutes per hour is recommended) to surf the Internet, eat a snack, or simply do nothing.
- **Reject perfectionism** – Accept that your writing will not be perfect. You can only complete the work to the best of your ability in the time allowed.

- **Reward yourself for writing** – Reward yourself for completing your writing on time by doing something that you enjoy. For example, if you have always wanted to go to a certain museum, invite a friend to go with you, set up a time/date, and tell him/her about your reward. This will motivate you to finish your writing because you have told someone else that the activity is a reward and that it will happen on a specific day.
- **Learn to say no** – If someone approaches you with a task that will interfere with the time you have set aside to write, say no. Allowing yourself to do another task will aid in procrastination. Make exceptions only for emergencies or for time-sensitive requests from a boss or superior.
- **Make necessary lifestyle changes** – Setting aside blocks of time on specific days to work on an assignment requires a willingness to commit to a more organized lifestyle. In order to accomplish this, it may be necessary to clean your house, hire a babysitter, buy a calendar, or make other changes specific to your situation.

Additional Resources:

- ***Virginia Tech: Cook Counseling Center***: This website has resources to identify sources of procrastination and to develop better time-management skills.
- ***Procrastination: Why You Do It, What to Do About It***. By Jane M. Burka and Lenora M. Yuen. 2004. Written by psychologists, this book delves into the causes of procrastination.
- ***Time Warrior***. By Steve Chandler. 2011. This book offers a new approach to time management by tracking lifestyle instead of time.
- ***The Organized Life: Secrets of an Expert Organizer***. By Stephanie Denton. 2006. The author provides tips for being organized in every aspect of life, no matter how busy you may be.