Procrastination: The art of postponing

The Academic Support Centre
Student Health
16th October 2017
Today:

• What is procrastination?

• Why me? Mapping the problem.

• What can I do about it? Concrete strategies for planning, scheduling and staying on task.

• What if that isn’t enough? How to handle discomfort, etc.

• How does it work? The stages of change.

• Where do I go from here? Start small and start now: plan of action.
Procrastination

Latin: procrastinare = to postpone till the next day

It means deciding for no good reason to postpone or abandon a task that you had set yourself and to dedicate yourself to something less important instead, even though this has negative consequences for you.

NORMAL…

… but it can become a disabling psychological condition!
The numbers...

- Almost everyone procrastinates at some point

- 75% of students report procrastinating at some point during their studies.

- 20% - 40% of students report chronic problems with procrastination.

- Procrastination is especially common in the context of assignment work/essay-writing.

- General increase.
Procrastination

A learned pattern of reaction to unpleasant feelings (such as restlessness, boredom, anxiety, depression) through avoidance or flight
Clark’s anxiety graph

Discomfort

Evasive behaviour/Procrastination

Time

Imagined course
How do you excuse your procrastination?

There may well be some truth to your excuses

– but the conclusion that it is therefore OK to procrastinate needs to change.
How do you excuse your procrastination?

- “I am too tired, I’ll do it tomorrow”
- “I don’t have all the material I need to get started”
- “I don’t have enough time to complete the task, so I’m waiting until I have more time”
- “It is too late to start now”
- “I won’t get much done, so I’ll just drop it now”
- “It’s better if I do it when I feel in the mood or get inspired”
- “I would miss something fun that is happening right now, I can do it later”
- “It is too nice a day to spend it on this today”
- “I will do the task when I’ve got this other thing done first”
- “I must tidy my desk, the laundry, the kitchen drawers first”
- “I must exercise first”
- “I am too stressed to do it right now”
- “I have plenty of time to do it later”
- “I work better under pressure, so I’ll do it at the last minute instead”
- “It won’t turn out that well anyway so why should I do it now”
- “Even if I work on this today it won’t make any difference”
- Other...?
Why do people procrastinate?

Personality traits

Can manifest in

Self-regulatory deficit

Determines vulnerability to

Situational factors
Underlying reasons

- Personality traits (impulsiveness, conscientiousness, etc.)
- Concentration problems
- Low self esteem/ self confidence
- Perfectionism and unreasonable demands
- Anxiety and depression
- Alcohol and drugs
Consequences

• Stress:
  Normal physical reaction
  Only dangerous over a longer period of time
  Balance between studies and free time
  Not what you do but what you think about

• Guilt and shame:
  Thinking you don’t deserve free time.
  End up doing nothing – worse!

• Anxiety and depression

• Low self esteem

• Study failure
The Vicious Cycle of Avoidance

- Fear of failure
- Avoidance/Procrastination
- Confirmation of inability
- Feeling of failure
- Losing faith in one's self
Strategies for change...
1. Know yourself & establish routines
1. Where do I concentrate best?
2. Do I work best (with greater focus) in the morning or evening?
3. Am I easily distracted?
4. Am I able to choose a learning or study strategy according to the task? And recognize when it needs to change?
5. How do I motivate myself to complete tasks?
6. What are my short-term & long-term goals?
8. How long does it take me to read one page?
9. How long does it take me to write one page?
Routines & Scheduling

1: Semester overview
• Week 35 classes start
• Week 36 first study group meeting
• Week 39 reflection paper
• Week 40 paper topic
• Week 41 presentation
• Week 43 final paper

2: Weekly schedule
• Pages to read
• Lab work to be done
• Review time
• Research time
• Study group meetings
• Assignment work/writing

Formulate these as daily goals
Create a to-do list for this week.
Include:
• Reading for class and assignments
• Writing (note-taking and/or assignment work)
• Exercise and recreation events you have planned
• Any other commitments

**NOTE:** Your to-do list for the week should be realistic, and limited to tasks/ goals that must be completed this week. **Don’t** create a “dumping ground” for every neglected task you can possibly think of!!
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Consulting your answers to the “know yourself” questions (particularly questions 1, 2, 3, 8 and 9), and your to-do list, fill in a weekly schedule:

1. Fill in lectures, classes and workshops first.

2. Next, schedule time to work on pressing tasks, like assignments. Consider when and where you are able to work with the most focus.

3. Next schedule reading/ revision time.

4. Schedule exercise

5. Schedule social events/ other commitments

6. ...And finally, block off a small slot for writing next week’s schedule!

**Don’t forget to schedule breaks for longer study sessions!**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study smart</th>
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<th>Study more</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Short bursts of focus on one thing</td>
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<td>• Spread out over whole day; mindless multi-tasking</td>
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<td>• Planned breaks</td>
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<td>• Dependent on willpower</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dependent on disciplined scheduling and routine</td>
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<td>• Willpower is not unlimited</td>
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Single-tasking is the new multi-tasking
2. Set Clear Goals and Sub-Goals
The Study Session: Setting Goals

Goal: Where am I headed?
Sub-goal: A step on the way there.

A good sub-goal is:
• Concrete
• Realistic
• Relevant
• Something you can tick off
Pomodoro Technique

1. Choose a concrete, realistic task (sub-goal)
2. Eliminate as many external distractions as possible
3. Work with intense focus for 25 minutes
4. Quickly note distractions on scratch paper
5. After 25 minutes, note what you have done
6. You’ve earned a 5-minute break 😊
7. Work for another 25 minutes
8. After 4 pomodori, take a longer break
After the Study Session: Reflecting on your Progress

• What did I get done? Did I achieve my sub-goal(s)?

• If yes, well done! Reward yourself for your progress, and write down a starting point/ sub-goal for next time.

• If not, reflect on what happened and develop new strategies:
  
  ■ Distractions?
  ■ Problems with the sub-goal?
  ■ Other factors?

• Do I need to seek outside help?
3. Be accountable to others
Create a study group of 4-6 people.
Study Group Routine

How it works
• Define expectations up front (contract?)
• Avoid complain-a-thons or social hour
• Teach each other!

What to do
• Review lecture notes
• Discuss unclear concepts
• Discuss readings
• Give feedback on essays
• Practice presentations
WRITE NIGHT

Wish writing weren’t such a lonely process?
Bring your computer and something you’re writing
(or should be writing) to the ASC to find a community of
other writers working on similar projects.

We’ll provide a spot to work, fika breaks, and writing
consultants in case you’d like feedback along the way.

Autumn 2017:

2 October
23 October
6 November
20 November
4 December

17:00-20:00

in Genetikhuset

Email english.support@stu.lu.se to reserve a spot.
Seating is limited.
If that isn’t enough...
Managing thoughts and feelings

• Learn to observe which thoughts and feelings activate the impulse to postpone or avoid something, and practise changing the thought pattern connected to that behaviour.

• When you are studying and you lose your focus - write down the thoughts and feelings and what you felt an impulse to do.
SOAR

• **Stop**, breathe

• **Observe.** What am I thinking? What am I feeling? What are my feelings telling me to do?

• **Accept** your thoughts and feelings.

• **Respond** (do what the feeling says) or **Let go** (do what you know makes most sense in the long term).
The stages of change

- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance
- Relapse
Remember...

• Small steps – change doesn’t happen over night
• Be aware of perfectionistic thoughts
• Under plan instead of over plan— self efficacy
• Reflect on your progress
• Relapse is part of the process
• You are not alone - turn to others for support (shame)
Procrastination group

• Open group of 16 students
• Disregard reasons
• Focus on the studies
• Weekly meetings
• Help to structure and plan your studies
• Set reasonable goals
• Follow up results and consequences if you haven’t done what you planned
• Support from each other
Reward yourself!
Start Small & Start Now!
Workshop Activity: Your Next Study Session

Consulting your schedule and question answers, plan a study session that will take place in the next 24-48 hours.

Write down:
1. The bigger task or goal (an essay, upcoming exam, etc.)
2. The concrete, realistic sub-goal for that session.
3. Where and when the study session will take place.
4. How long will your session last?

Share your plan with the person sitting next to you and get feedback—is your sub-goal concrete and realistic?
Academic Support Centre

Student Health

www.lunduniversity.lu.se/academic-support

http://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/current-students/health-care/student-health-counselling