

Procrastination/Time Management

Do you find yourself avoiding specific tasks or not getting around to things that need to get accomplished? Managing your time successfully implies accomplishing what is most important for you. When you don't accomplish what you truly want, you may feel confused, discouraged, compromised, guilty, and frustrated. If this is an issue for you, try focusing on the following ideas.

Common causes of procrastination:

- **Being overextended:** Is it humanly possible to meet all the obligations you currently have? If not, can you omit or reschedule some of those obligations?
- **Low motivation:** Is the task relevant to your personality? If it is another person's goal rather than your own, try to find some personal reward or relevance for your completing the task. Are you really interested in the project? If not, can you find a way to make it interesting or let go of it?
- **Lack of training:** Are you unprepared or incapable of completing the task? On a new task do you find you afraid of the unknown? Are the expectations ambiguous? You may want to ask for guidance, support, or a new perspective from someone who is more familiar with the process or skilled in the area.
- **Faculty assumptions:** Are you assuming that if you ignore the task long enough it will disappear? Do you tend to underestimate how much time and effort the job will take? Do you have a tendency to over-estimate the difficulty of getting the task done? Try sitting down and writing out each step of the job, how long each step will take, and then tackling the job one step at a time.
- **Perfectionism:** Are fears of doing less than a perfect job interfering with your productivity? Remember that perfection is unobtainable. Often it will feel worse to not do a job at all instead of doing it in a less than perfect manner. Try to assess how important the task is, and what level of performance really matters in relation to the task. Ask yourself "what level of performance on this task would I expect from a friend/co-worker?"
- **Fear of Evaluation:** Are you over concerned with another individual's response to your performance? Try to evaluate how much total impact upon your life this one reaction will have. No one performs highly all the time, or in every area. Try to focus on completing the task in with a goal of lessening your workload and anxiety regardless of the evaluation.
- **Avoidance of negative experience:** Do you just HATE DOING THIS TASK? Does it rate up there with dental visits or cleaning out the refrigerator? Is there any way to make it more pleasurable or enjoyable? If not, try doing the dreaded task first, while you still have energy. Often it can be helpful to have a friend or co-worker nearby for encouragement (and to keep you on task!).

Time management techniques:

1. First list all projects, exams, and papers with their due dates. Then prioritize them.
2. Break larger tasks into smaller goals, such as "library research for paper 2" and select target dates for completion of the smaller goals.
3. Identify what time of day you have the highest energy and what time of day is you low energy period. Plan to schedule tasks that take your greater effort (concentration, enthusiasm) during high energy periods and plan rest breaks and more mundane tasks (such as laundry) during low energy periods.
4. Plan out a weekly schedule hour by hour or a to do list. Remember to schedule time out every day for sleep, meals, social time, and some exercise and/or relaxation time. It is important to create a realistic schedule for yourself.
5. Optimize your work environment by keeping things you need in your work area and making sure the physical environment is conducive to concentration, not just comfort.
6. Protect your work time by minimizing interruptions/distractions and make a commitment to work for a few hours at a time. Also schedule breaks or rewards for yourself so you don't burnout.
7. Let others know about your schedule or goals for completing assignments because it can help ensure a task's completion by creating a strong support system.
8. Avoid over-organizing, expect some unexpected things to happen so plan in extra time and/or be ready to adjust your plan.