

Preventing Procrastination

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About this workshop:

- Aims of the workshop:
 - Understand how and why you procrastinate
 - Learn strategies to help you overcome procrastination (goal setting, managing thoughts)
- What this workshop can't help you with:
 - Won't cure procrastination. You need to do the work yourself!



What is procrastination?



What Is Procrastination?

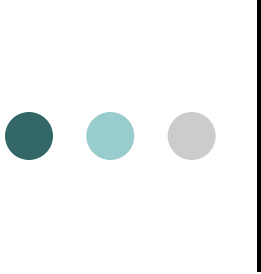
- Postponing a task that you need to complete in order to achieve a goal.

Procrastination is not related to intelligence:

- 95% of university students procrastinate from time to time
- For 50% of uni students it is ongoing and problematic
- For 25% of students procrastination causes stress and harms performance
- Up to 20% of adults procrastinate at work and on everyday tasks

Source:

- Ellis, A., & Knaus, W.J. (1997). Overcoming procrastination. NY: Institute for rational living



What do students nominate as the main obstacle to being an excellent student?

TOP 3 RESPONSES:

1. Procrastination
2. Inability to concentrate
3. Time Management/ Organisation

Difficulties with concentration and time management are also part of what is recognised as procrastination.



Implications for university students.

Costs for individual

- Late assignments
- Underachievement of potential
- Inability to make decisions
- Increased anxiety and stress as deadline approaches
- Health and relationship stress

Cost for others

- Shifts the burden of responsibility onto others resulting in increased resentment
- Destroys team work
- Undermines personal relationships



Identifying Procrastination?

- What do you do when you are procrastinating?
- How do you recognise it?



What are some reasons as to why we procrastinate?

PERSONALITY

Self-discipline (conscientiousness), consisting of:

- (a) Having a desire to work towards goal;
- (b) Tolerating negative emotions arising from the less-than-pleasant task; and
- (c) Being able to resist more pleasant tasks in the meantime

EXPECTATIONS

- Your ability to complete task adequately
- How long it takes to complete task
- How complex the steps in completing task are





MOOD

- Boredom
- Anxiety
- Too relaxed
- Depressed
- Anxious
- Frustrated

SKILL LEVEL

- Time management
- Goal setting
- Study skills

Triggers for procrastination (Cummins & Chong, 2006)

Anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Questions ability to complete task, “What if it’s wrong?” (future focused)○ Procrastinate to avoid dealing with discomfort of not doing well enough
Boredom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Procrastinates due to the task eliciting feelings of boredom○ More exciting activities are pursued instead○ “This is so boring. I’ll work better if I go for a swim at the beach to clear my head”.
Too Cool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Overly relaxed when it comes to task completion.○ “There’s plenty of time to get around to it.”
Negativity/ Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Asks self “Why bother?” in light of past mistakes, others being better/more capable○ Unlike anxiety, focus is on failures of past rather than potential failures of the future○ “What’s the point? I won’t do well anyway. I may as well not bother.”
Perfectionism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ More extreme version of anxiety○ Has unrealistic expectations; everything has to be “just right” (unrealistic expectations), difficulties in completing a task just so it is “good enough”○ Significant time pressure as perfectionists push themselves to do every task perfectly○ “It would be absolutely unbearable if I didn’t get an HD. I should put more effort in.”

**PUTTING IT ALL
TOGETHER:**
About my
procrastination

FEELING

DOING

(include your procrastination behaviours)

**WHICH PROCRASTINATOR
TYPES DO I IDENTIFY
WITH?**

PROCRASTINATION

THINKING-FEELING-DOING

(Cummins & Chong, 2006)

THINKING

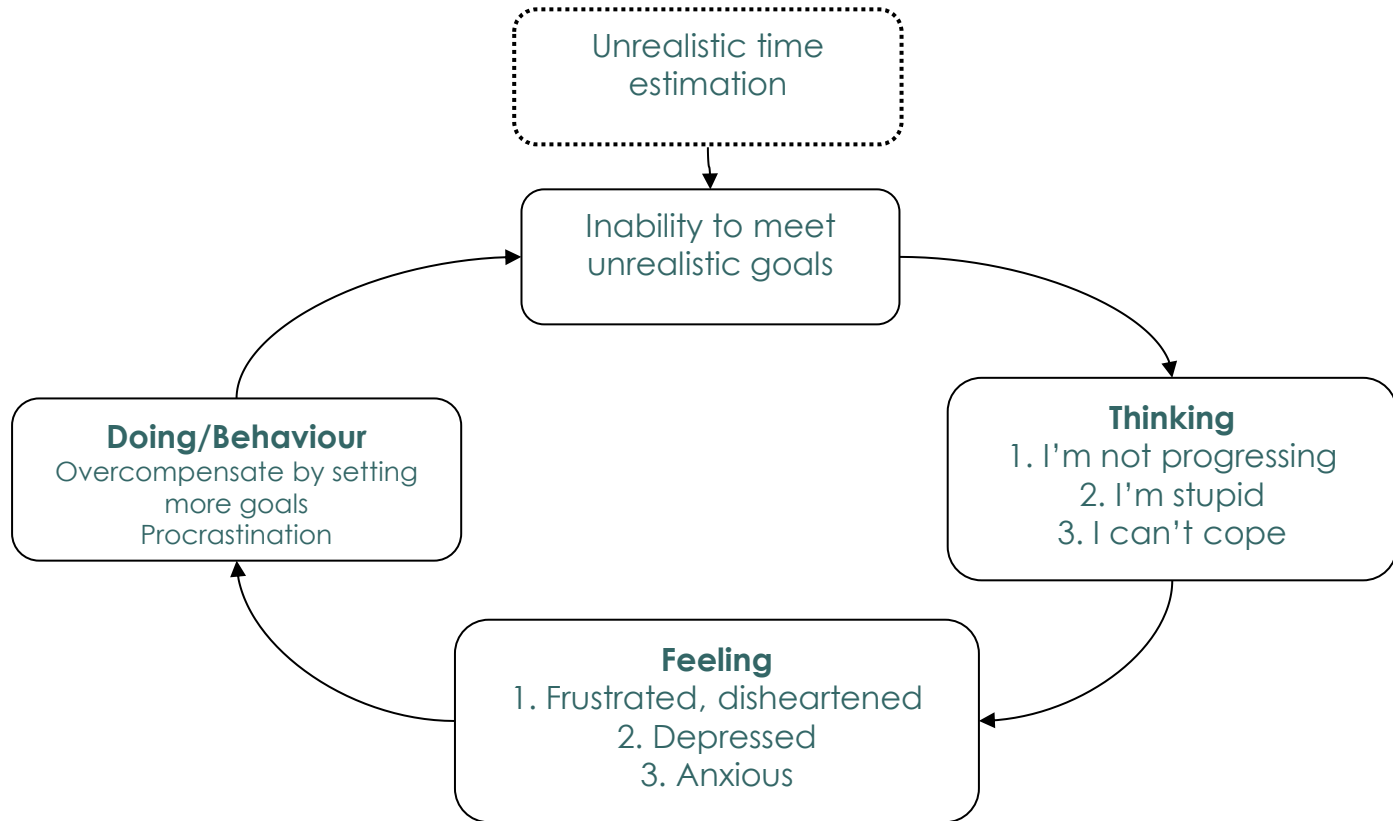
(list common thoughts that lead to procrastination and the associated procrastination styles)



Strategies for change

- Developing realistic expectations
- Developing a realistic plan of attack
- Goal setting
- Modifying thoughts that contribute to procrastination

Developing realistic expectations: Identifying how long tasks actually take



- Learn how long tasks actually take – it all adds up!
- Work out where your time is spent.
- Estimating time... multiply the estimated time by 1.5 to 2 times. Research shows us that underestimating how long it takes to complete a task is a very common phenomenon.

Developing realistic expectations: Identifying how much time you actually have

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6-7 am	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep-in	Sleep-in
7-8 am							
8-9 am	Gym		Gym				
9-10 am	Lectures			Lectures	Lectures & tutorial		
10-11 am							
11-12 am		Lecture	Lecture				
12 pm-1 pm		Lunch			Lunch		
1-2 pm	Lunch	Lecture	Lunch	Lunch	Tutorial	Lunch	Lunch
2-3 pm	Lab/ tutorial		Lab/tutorial	Lab	Lecture		
3-4 pm		Lecture					
4-5 pm		Tutorial					
5-6 pm				Work			
6-7 pm		Sport					
7-8 pm	Dinner		Dinner		Dinner	Dinner	Dinner
8-9 pm		Dinner					
9-10 pm				Dinner			
10-11 pm							
11 pm-12 am				Sleep		Sleep	
12 pm-1 am	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep		Sleep		Sleep

Developing realistic expectations: Identifying how much time you actually have

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	
6-7 am	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep-in	Sleep-in	
7-8 am	Travel	Shower/eat †	Travel	Shower/eat	Shower/eat			
8-9 am	Gym	Travel	Gym	Travel	Travel			
9-10 am	Lectures	Internet	Shower/eat	Lectures	Lectures & tutorial			Relaxing & laundry/ housework
10-11 am		Socialise				Socialising		
11-12 am		Lecture	Lecture					
12 pm-1 pm		Lunch			Lunch			
1-2 pm	Lunch	Lecture	Lunch	Lunch	Tutorial	Lunch		
2-3 pm	Lab/ tutorial	Socialise	Lab/tutorial	Lab	Lecture	Grocery shopping		
3-4 pm		Lecture						
4-5 pm	Travel	Tutorial						
5-6 pm	Shower	Travel	Travel	Work		Cook dinner		
6-7 pm	Relax	Sport	Cook					
7-8 pm	Dinner		Dinner			Dinner	Dinner	Dinner
8-9 pm	Dishes/relax	Dinner	Dishes/relax		Dinner	Sleep	Dishes/relax	
9-10 pm		Travel						
10-11 pm		Shower		Relax				
11 pm-12 am	Socialising	Relax	Socialising	Sleep	Sleep			
12 pm-1 am	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep			Sleep		

Real Timetable = 24 hours free hours



What is planning without goal-setting?

- To help keep you on track with your timetable and to assist with planning, use Goal Setting principles:
- **SMART** goals:
 - **Specific** – who, what, where, when, how
 - **Measurable** – so you know when you will have accomplished it
 - **Achievable** – Is it within your reach?
 - **Realistic** – Is it achievable given competing demands? Is it achievable given your current level of functioning?
 - **Time-based** – Have you set deadlines for achieving the goal? Shorter-term goals tend to be more motivating than longer-term goals, so break down LT goals into several ST ones.



Why goal setting is good for procrastination:

If you procrastinate because of:	Goal setting helps because:
Feeling overwhelmed (Anxiety)	Seeing smaller, more manageable goals rather than a larger one means that you are less likely to be overwhelmed.
Feeling down (Negativity/Depression)	Bite-sized chunks means that the potential for achievement seems more likely, thus increasing motivation to approach the task.
Feeling bored (Boredom)	Smaller tasks means that you only need to tolerate the boredom of the task for a shorter period of time
Feeling overly relaxed (Too cool)	This gives you a 'reality check' as to the amount of work that is really involved
Thinking that you must do everything perfectly (Perfectionism)	Having time-based goals with deadlines for completion make it difficult for perfectionists to spend excessive amounts of time on non-important/non-urgent tasks



Thoughts and how they contribute to procrastination

- Thoughts:
 - Overly optimistic
 - Avoidant
 - Fear of failure
 - Stress-increasing
- Thinking styles
 - Emotional reasoning (Mistaking feeling for fact)
 - All or nothing/Black and white thinking (no in-betweens)
 - Catastrophising (worst-case scenario)
 - Jumping to conclusions (incl. mind reading)
 - Shoulds and musts
 - Overgeneralisation
 - Mental filter



Thoughts, thinking styles, and the different procrastination types

Procrastinator type (Cummins & Chong, 2006)	Thoughts and thinking styles that may be present
Anxiety	Fear of failure thoughts (“I can’t do this, it’s just too difficult.”) Jumping to conclusions - “What if my tutor thinks my work is terrible? She’ll think that I’m an idiot.”
Boredom	Avoidant/distracting thoughts (“I’ll be more motivated once I’ve had a break.”) Catastrophising – “I’m going to die of boredom if I have to do this task.”
Too Cool/Overly relaxed	Over-optimistic thoughts (“I work better under pressure”, “There’s plenty of time”) Emotional reasoning – {feeling relaxed means that there’s no need to take action on anything}
Negativity/ Depression	Stress increasing thoughts “This is just intolerable, I can’t make it happen in the time frame.” Mental filter – “I won’t be able to do it, like all the other times. Sure my tutor has given some positive feedback, but that’s her job. She gives everyone positive feedback.”
Perfectionism	Fear of failure thoughts (“If I don’t get an HD it will be a sign that I’m losing touch academically”) Over-optimistic thoughts (“I still have plenty of time before the deadline for the next assignment, I’ll get around to it once this one is perfected.”) Shoulds & musts – “I must get an HD” All or nothing – “If I don’t get an HD I may as well have failed” Jumping to conclusions – “If I don’t get an HD people will think I’m weak and stupid.”



Managing thoughts and thinking styles in procrastination

- Looking at things from a different perspective:
 - For Negativity/Depression, Anxiety, and Perfectionism:
 - What is the worst thing that can realistically occur?
 - If the worst-case-scenario did occur, how intolerable would it be? Five years down the track, how significant would this event be?
 - Is my mental filter contributing to my procrastination (e.g. ignoring positive feedback from past as in the case of Negativity and Anxiety, ignoring instances where there has been one or two 'mistakes' and marks have still be of a high standard)
 - For being Too cool/Overly relaxed
 - How much work is really involved?
 - Is my thought that completing the task is not pressing realistic?
 - What other competing demands do I have?
 - For Boredom
 - Is the boring nature of this task really as intolerable as I think it is?
 - What would be the benefits of short-term 'pain' at this point in time?
 - For Perfectionists
 - What is my "bang-for-buck" here? Am I putting extra in for little additional output, when I could direct this time and effort more strategically?"
 - What would be so intolerable if it was not perfect? What difference would it realistically make to my final mark?
 - What is the cost of my perfectionism?



Confusion

PROBLEM:

Confusion or not understanding the task, may make you feel immobilised

SUGGESTION:

Clarify the topic by asking the lecturer, tutor, other students and reading the references

Look at the question, parameters, marking criteria, references, brainstorm



Poor Study Skills

PROBLEM:

Poor study skills, such as inability to manage time, take notes, read for assignments, source information and prepare for exams may result in procrastination.

SOLUTION:

Identify the skills you need to develop.

Seek assistance from The Learning Centre, Counselling Centre or websites.



POOR MOTIVATION

PROBLEM:

Poor motivation may be the result of –

- not knowing why you're studying at Uni,
- choosing the wrong course for you,
- lack of interest in the subject or topic
- the course not being what you expected.

In such cases, study can seem irrelevant , a waste of time, boring and therefore you may try to avoid it.

SUGGESTION:

- Reassess your personal and career goals
- Examine the reasons for choosing this course and subjects.

You may:

- find it useful to talk to your academic advisor, counsellor or seek career guidance.
- consider changing to an alternative course or changing subjects.



FEELING OVERWHELMED

PROBLEM:

The task seems huge and insurmountable.

Think about starting-don't know where to begin.

Too hard-delay longer.

Then too huge and the time available to do the task has shortened and it seems even bigger.

SUGGESTION:

Break the task down into smaller steps.

For instance, Write a literature review ...

Can be broken down into several steps:

- Select a topic
- Go to the library and collect **4 articles** (do this step twice)
- Read **2 articles** and summarize as you go (do this **step 4 times**)
- Write an outline of the major themes (reference)
- Write a draft paragraph or two on each theme.
- Write a draft introduction.
- Write a draft summary.
- Revise and edit the drafts (this can be broken down).
- Write the bibliography as you go.



DISORGANISATION

Problem:

- Study materials are disorganised
- Due dates and tasks are forgotten
- Poor distinction between what is urgent and a priority, versus non-urgent and less important.
- Old and new tasks are jumbled need to drop the current tasks for urgent ones.

- Suggestion:

- Organisation of materials into folders, systems, labels-colours!
- Use of diary – to record deadlines and ongoing work
- Prioritise work and plan a schedule



OVER-COMMITMENT

PROBLEM:

There seems to be too much to do and too little time. The problem may be that you are actually over committed, that is you have too much on your schedule.

SUGGESTION:

You may need to reassess your priorities and reduce your commitments. For instance, you may be working too many hours to allow time for study or you may have taken on too many subjects this session. The decision of what to reduce will be dependent upon your own circumstances and priorities.



Personal Problems

PROBLEM:

Sometimes students are distracted and have difficulty concentrating on study because they are preoccupied with personal problems.

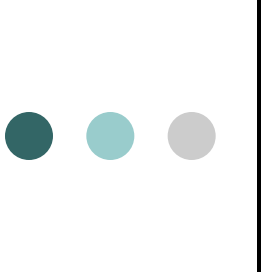
These may include:

- financial difficulties,
- relationship problems,
- health issues,
- personal crises or
- grief.

When there are personal concerns, study and related activities may assume less significance.

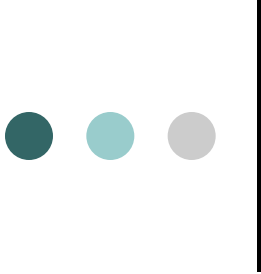
SUGGESTION:

It is better to deal with the problem early before it becomes insurmountable.



11 ideas that help reduce procrastination

- Worst first-other bits easier.
- '5 minute rule'-you can tolerate difficult feelings or distress for this long-at the end of the 5 minutes reassess and plan when you will spend the next 5 mins
- Use the momentum-often the hardest thing is to start.
- Set specific amounts of time to work on tasks-30 mins and stick to it even if you feel you can do more.
- Prime time-know your rhythm-what is your peak time to work-lark or owl?
- Prime place-distracted by the net or the phone? Change where you work so there are minimal distractions. Library



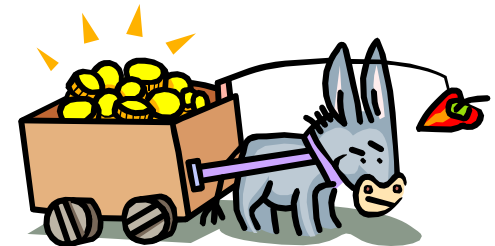
11 ideas that help reduce procrastination

- Reminders-use visual and audio prompts-phones/calendar/diary, sticky notes, coloured signs –different colours for subjects.
- Learn mindfulness-simple, slow breathing exercises and relaxation techniques to help with focus. Visualise submitting the piece of work. Learn these skills when you are not stressed and about to do an exam and practise.
- Timetable exercise/food /sleep and social activities into your schedule
- Plan rewards, even for small achievements this will help reduce the sense you are missing out on things

Seek help early in semester.

When you've done all that you can to prepare and now you're faced with the task...

- Looking for the perfect answer? That magical solution?
 - There isn't one! If it's too good to be true then it probably is!
 - At some stage, tolerating the negative feelings (or overcoming overly relaxed ones) will be required:
 - Breaking larger tasks into more bite-sized chunks will decrease the intensity of the feelings that contribute to procrastination
 - Managing thoughts that contribute to procrastination will also decrease the intensity of the feelings that contribute to procrastination.
 - The feelings are still there! (although, likely to be less intense and far more tolerable).
 - Some more specific behavioural strategies:
 - Setting Rewards





And, finally...

- Put together your action plan for overcoming procrastination and using better time management.
- Consider:
 - What procrastination/poor time management traps you need to look out for (including thoughts, feelings, and behaviours)
 - How to identify when you are procrastinating
 - What THINKING strategies you can use
 - What DOING strategies you can use
 - How can you reward yourself to stay motivated and on-task?



What thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are triggers for my procrastination?

How do I know when I am procrastinating?

Some **THINKING** strategies that I can use are:

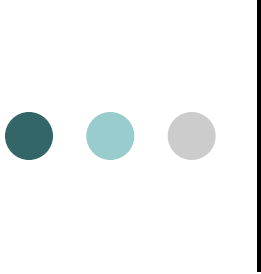
Some **DOING** strategies that I can use are:

What rewards (within reason) can I give myself?

MY ACTION PLAN

Procrastination & Time Management Workshop

CAPS, UNSW



○ Struggling???? Who can help?

- Faculty office /academic advisor
- Need a doctor-Unihealth Service -385 5425
- Need to see a psychologist- Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPs) -9385 5418
- Private psychologist with a Mental Health Care Plan from GP
- UNSW Psychology Clinic-low cost sessions-9385 3042.
- Have a disability -SEADU disability services
- Student Development International
- Need help with academic skills-Learning Centre
- Need help to appeal a decision ARC.



Further resources

- <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au> there is a section for procrastination