

Top tips for overcoming procrastination



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1. Break down large tasks

Sometimes procrastination occurs because you are overwhelmed by a task or do not know where to begin. Breaking down an activity or task into smaller tasks gives you manageable steps that you can focus on, one at a time, and also helps you to see which step comes first so you can get started.

2. Write WHEN/THEN statements

Implementation intentions, or WHEN/THEN statements, provide a cue to complete a task. If you know you need to write an essay introduction after dinner, you can repeat to yourself, "WHEN I am finished dinner, THEN I will write my essay introduction." You can also use WHEN/THEN statements to control distractions or to bring awareness to a specific thought pattern.

3. Eliminate distractions

Eliminate controllable distractions before they can occur. Set your cellphone to silent or airplane mode, block social networking sites and clear everything off your desk except what you need to complete the task.

4. Focus on the future

If you do procrastinate, do not dwell on it. Worrying about procrastination will only make you feel bad and more likely to procrastinate again. Instead, look at what factors enabled you to procrastinate and build a plan so that you do not fall into the same trap again.

5. Fine tune your study skills

Be honest about what you can accomplish. Can you really write an entire paper in one afternoon? Setting and achieving realistic goals will give you a sense of accomplishment that will set you up for future success.

6. Make it meaningful

Often students procrastinate on schoolwork that they feel is boring or irrelevant. Find ways to make it interesting and meaningful to you. That might mean asking if you can present your essay as a video or choosing a topic that overlaps with one of your interests.

7. Eat your frog

If you had to eat a frog, would it be better to think about it all day or just get it over with? When you are dreading a task that you must complete, do it as soon as possible. If you have a task that will take under five minutes, do not put it off until later. Do it now. Completing small tasks as they come up will reduce the likelihood of you procrastinating on larger tasks.

8. Build your willpower

Procrastination occurs easily when willpower is low. You can build your willpower by practicing an activity like eating with your non-dominant hand for two weeks. You can also boost your willpower by getting enough sleep, choosing an apple instead of coffee and spending time with people and activities that make you feel good about yourself.

9. Pace yourself

If you do not feel like working on something you need to get done, set a timer and commit to working on it for a half hour. If you still do not feel like working when the timer goes off, give yourself permission to stop and do something else for an hour. Return to the task every hour, as needed, until you get it done. It takes roughly 23 minutes to get into the zone, so you might find that once the alarm goes off, you want to keep working.

10. Ask for help when you need it

Visit Student Academic Learning Services for more information about how you can overcome your procrastination.