

# Stop Procrastinating! (Now!)

## Introduction

The Mural begins with a quote from Josh Linkner, the author of “The Mañana Trap.” The quote reads, “When someone said they’d get to a project ‘mañana’ [tomorrow], it didn’t really mean tomorrow. It just meant ‘not today.’” End of quote.

In the upper left corner of the Mural, there is a written fact. The fact reads, “Did you know...? Twenty percent of people identify themselves as chronic procrastinators.” End of quote.

## Strategies to Stop Procrastinating

### 1. Challenge your underlying attitude

Procrastination often comes from an underlying attitude, mindset or belief. Here are some common attitudes that foster procrastination, and what to do about them:

#### **Attitude: “I do not want to fail!”**

What to do: Consider what rules and assumptions you hold about failing. For example, maybe a part of you feels that, if you fail a project, your family will be disappointed in you. Where do your rules and assumptions about failing come from? Are they truly reasonable, realistic, fair and helpful? What could be the negative consequences of holding your beliefs? What is a better way to think about failure?

#### **Attitude: “If I succeed, I will raise everyone’s expectations and never be allowed to fail again!”**

What to do: Consider what rules and assumptions you hold about success. Where do they come from? Are they truly reasonable, realistic, fair and helpful? What could be the negative consequences of those rules and assumptions? What is a better way to think about success?

#### **Attitude: “I do not understand the task/I do not know how to complete it!”**

What to do: Consider whether you can at least identify the first step required to complete the task. You may want to use the UTSC [Assignment Calculator](#) for help. You should also think about where you could go for help with your assignment. For example, you can ask professors, TAs and classmates for help. You can also review [the subject-related resources](#) on the AA&CC website, or visit the [Centre for Teaching and Learning](#).

#### **Attitude: “I always procrastinate. It works out fine!”**

What to do: Think about how you came to believe that procrastination always works out for you. Are your beliefs truly reasonable, realistic, fair and helpful? What could be the negative consequences of holding your beliefs?

#### **Attitude: “I am not interested in the task/I just do not want to do it.”**

What to do: Think about whether that is really a good reason to avoid the task. What could happen if you do not complete the task? How could you develop motivation to complete the task? To develop motivation, you may want to review the [AA&CC’s “Motivation” tip sheet](#).

## 2. Question why later is a better time than now.

When we procrastinate, we often make excuses to justify it. For example, we might tell ourselves, "It's good to wait until the last minute because I work best under pressure," or, "There is no point working when I am so tired." Our excuses make us feel like there is a good reason to postpone the task, even though there is not one. Here are some ways to avoid the cycle of procrastination and excuse-making:

- Analyze your excuse for postponing the task. What is it? Is it really true that you cannot work on the task at all right now? Are you really going to be better off in the long-run by postponing the task? If you postpone the task, what might happen and how might you feel?
- Consider why you should not postpone the task. Can you think of a reason why you should not postpone it? Is there any aspect of the task at all that you could possibly work on now? If you start the task now, what might happen and how might you feel?
- Remember to be self-encouraging, not self-critical. If you make yourself feel bad for procrastinating, you will probably only want to procrastinate more. Is the voice in your head motivational and forgiving, or nasty and critical? Would you dare speak to your friends the way you are speaking to yourself? To learn more about self-encouragement, check out the YouTube video "[6 Ways to Exercise Self-Compassion.](#)"

## 3. Figure out what to do.

As mentioned before, one of the main reasons why students procrastinate is that they are unclear about what they are supposed to do, or how to do it. Therefore, make sure to use these strategies to get a clear picture of what you need to do.

- Make a To Do list for all your tasks. You can use apps like [Microsoft To Do](#), [Todoist](#), or [ClickUp](#). You can also use good ol'-fashioned pen and paper.
- Prioritise your tasks from most to least important/urgent
- Chunk your tasks into steps. Many universities provide online assignment calculators that will do that for you, such as UTSC, University of Waterloo, Queen's University and Wilfred Laurier University.

## 4. Make yourself do the task.

Even if you have a healthy mindset about your project and know what to do for it, it can still be challenging to put that theoretical knowledge into practice. Here are some quick tips for improving your ability to work on the task:

- Use reminders to prompt yourself to work. You can use digital reminder programs, such as calendar reminders or [Google Keep](#), or place handwritten sticky notes around your house.
- Complete the task as soon as you remember to do it.
- Take 5 – 10 minutes to focus yourself. To help yourself with that, use meditation apps like [MyLife](#), [Breathe](#) and [Calm](#).
- Promise yourself to complete only 80% of the task.
- Do the worst part of the task first.
- Visualize yourself completing the task. Learn more about visualization from the article "[Visualization Meditation: 9 Benefits and Techniques](#)," and the YouTube video "[Goal-Crushing Tip #6 – Procrastination & Visualization.](#)"
- Surround yourself with people who do not procrastinate.
- Set a specific time at which you will begin working on the task. You can do that using apps like [TimeTune](#) and [Remember The Milk](#).
- Aim to complete only a portion of the task, or to work for only a set amount of time. It may be helpful to use the Pomodoro Technique, which you can learn about by watching the YouTube video "[POMODORO TECHNIQUE – My](#)

[Favourite Tool to Improve Studying and Productivity.](#)” You can use programs like [Focus Keeper](#) Pro and [pomofocus.io](#) to help yourself practise the Pomodoro Technique.

- Promise yourself a reward in exchange for working on the task. To do that, you can use apps like [Habitica](#) and [Beeminder](#).
- Promise yourself to work on the task for only 5 minutes.
- Optimize your environment. You can use apps like [myNoise](#) and [Forest](#) to drown out background noise, and [FocusMe](#) to manage your phone and computer use.

## 5. Extra resources

Avoiding procrastination is a skill, and learning a new skill takes time. If you experimented with the strategies in this Mural and still struggle with procrastination, check out these other resources:

- The Government of Western Australia’s self-help workbook “[Put Off Procrastinating](#)”
- The [AA&CC website tipsheets](#)
- The [AA&CC study skills course on Quercus](#)
- Wall Street Journal’s YouTube video “[Procrastination: How to Overcome Putting Things Off](#)”
- [The AA&CC study skills peer coaching program](#)

## Reference list

Dembo, Myron H. Motivation and Learning Strategies for College Success: A Self-Management Approach. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

Saulsman, Lisa, and Paula Nathan. Put Off Procrastinating. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions, 2008.

Resource developed by Sophie Faessen (Study skill peer coach)

