

# Procrastination

As a group, students may be particularly vulnerable to procrastination. They do not have a supervisor overseeing their productivity and there is no pay cheque as a reward for the effort put forth. The rewards for students are further in the future. You have to apply yourself and study for four years before receiving the reward of a degree. With rewards that are not immediate, you may have an increased tendency to procrastinate.

## The Cost of Procrastinating

- Submitting work that reflects cramming
- Not submitting work and facing the consequences
- Increased stress levels/decreased self-esteem
- Increased likelihood of poor academic performance resulting in reduced education and career options

## Reasons for Procrastination

1. **Fear of Failure.** You may have received some negative feedback in the past or be feeling overwhelmed by a particular course or program. You may feel it is safer to avoid real evaluation of your performance by procrastinating and either avoiding the assignment altogether, or having the excuse of a “rushed” job. This is known as “self-handicapping.” You may use procrastination as a way to control disappointment. Some students set low goals to protect themselves from really trying and being disappointed if they should fail, but by procrastinating there is an increased likelihood of failure.
2. **Fear of Success.** In this example, a really good performance sets up expectations from others about your overall potential. This can be threatening to those who are close to you. Procrastination can be used as a way of ensuring poor academic performance rather than risk losing an important relationship. Fear of success can also contribute to procrastination if a student does not want top marks. After all, once you establish a high standard for yourself, you will have continued pressure to maintain that standard. For some students that seems like a lot of hard work.
3. **Disorganization/Not Enough Information.** Sometimes students procrastinate on a project or assignment when they don’t know where or how to begin. A task may need to be broken down into its component parts and goals set for the completion of each part before tackling it. As the saying goes, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Take that first step today!
4. **Lack of Interest.** Students can lose interest in school for many reasons. The course content may not capture your attention, or personal issues may be interfering with your concentration. You may lose momentum and lack the energy to stay involved, perhaps because of poor sleeping or eating habits. Consult the *Goal Setting* tipsheet to help you to assess your short and long term goals if lack of interest is a problem for you.
5. **An Established Pattern.** It is not uncommon for students to leave projects until the last minute and then pull “all-nighters” to get them completed. This pattern becomes part of your repertoire of study approaches and may, for a while, be successful. However, there is a tendency for such a pattern to become a problem. If academic success is to be attained, it may be time to break the procrastination habit.

## Solving the Problem

In attempting to understand the problem of procrastination, you can see the complexity of the issue. The underlying reasons for procrastinating may vary from course to course and a student may exhibit different symptoms at different times. The important thing is that ***you really want to beat the procrastination habit!***

**There are several steps that can be taken to begin solving the problem of procrastination.**

1. **Identify the Roadblocks.** Identify the roadblocks posed by your time wasters, examine your rationale for procrastinating, and explore accompanying feelings. You will benefit from going through the exercise on page 66/67 of *Power Over Time* as a step toward making a positive change in your behaviour.
2. **Pay Attention to Self-Talk.** Subconscious messages like “I have lots of time” or “I’ll do it later” lead many students into the “**Mañana Trap.**” Mañana means “tomorrow” in Spanish. Ask yourself why “later” is a better time to work on a specific task, versus right now. Unless you have a rational reason for delaying, get started immediately.
3. **Try the 5-Minute Plan.** Many students agree the hardest aspect of completing a project is getting started. Next time you find yourself procrastinating, commit to working on the task for five minutes. Most of the resistance associated with that activity will decrease after working on it for five minutes, and at the end of that time you may find yourself motivated to keep working.

**The Importance of Rewards**

Your old procrastination patterns can resurface from time to time. You may become discouraged and have a sense that change is impossible. You can help to foster change by incorporating rewards into your action plan. Take some time to explore both small and large rewards as part of your action plan to become a better time manager, and plan to implement these self-motivators.

**Self-Assessment Exercise**

		Yes	No
1.	I take notes in class, whenever the professor is lecturing.		
2.	When I am taking notes, I am able to keep up with my professor, or I ask him/her to repeat the material.		
3.	I am able to identify the main points in a lecture and to record them in my notes.		
4.	Before I write my notes, I think about what the instructor has said and then put the material in my own words.		
5.	I review my notes within 24 hours of taking them.		
6.	My notes are well organized and easy for me to review.		
7.	When sitting in class I practice active listening and I am respectful (eg., I do not talk to my friends or sleep).		
8.	During class I sit in the part of the room that is the best for me to be attentive, see overheads, etc.		
9.	I read the assigned material and review my notes before each class so that I have a context to understand the lecture.		
10.	I stay actively involved in my lectures by asking questions, relating the material to my own life, trying to understand the material in my own words, etc.		

Your strengths, as a note taker and active listener, are indicated by those items to which your response was **yes**. If your answer to an item was **no** you may want to develop more effective strategies in that area of note taking and listening.

**Resources Available at the Academic Advising & Career Centre**

It takes practice to avoid procrastination in University. You will find more detailed information on procrastination issues time management strategies and goal setting in some of the study skills books in the Academic Advising & Career Centre (AA&CC). Some titles to begin with include: *Power Over Time*, *Learning for Success*, & *Procrastination* by McMaster University.