

How to Overcome Procrastination

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People procrastinate for different reasons. The reasons typically link back to our emotions, thoughts, and/or behaviors. To overcome procrastination it is important to evaluate each of the following areas:

Emotions

The **first step** in overcoming procrastination is to identify your emotions. When you find yourself procrastinating, ask yourself, *“what emotion am I experiencing right now?”*

Here is a list of common emotions underlying procrastination:

- Dread
- Boredom
- Overwhelmed
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Fear

Thoughts

The **second step** is to identify the thoughts that may be producing your identified emotion. Can you relate to having any of the thoughts below?

- “It is too hard.”
- “I’m going to fail.”
- “I don’t know how to do this.”
- “I hate doing this.”
- “I perform better under pressure.”
- “I have always been a procrastinator.”
- “Being a procrastinator is part of my personality.”
- “It will take too long.”
- “It is pointless.”

What many people do not realize is that these thoughts can trigger and keep procrastination going.

The **third step** is to change your thoughts to healthier thoughts that will lead to more successful behavior:

- “Although this seems difficult, I believe I can rise to the challenge.”
- “It’s unlikely that I will fail. I choose to have a more optimistic and confident view. I can succeed if I apply myself well.”
- “It is true that I do not know how to do this yet; however, I can figure it out if I apply myself and seek help, if needed.”
- “While I perform better under pressure, I realize that waiting until the last minute or even missing deadlines creates undue stress. Sometimes it even causes me to miss out on fun opportunities. I will complete tasks with buffer time to take better care of my emotional and physical health.”
- “Dwelling on how much I hate doing this will only make it more difficult for me to do it. I will focus on even the smallest positive aspect of this task that I can.”
- “Just because I have always been a procrastinator does not mean I have to continue procrastinating behaviors. I can change.”
- “Rather than viewing procrastination as part of my personality, I am going to shift my view to seeing procrastination as a habit I have developed. I can develop new, healthy, and better habits.”
- “It may take a long time; however, putting it off will not change this so I might as well get started now so I do not lengthen the amount of time this is on my plate.”
- “Even though I think this is pointless, I will be open-minded to other purposes I have not considered yet. (ex. How can doing this task build my character?).”

By improving your self-talk, your feelings and behavior will also improve as our thoughts, which are within our control, have a significant impact on how we feel and behave.

Behavior

The **fourth step** is to identify your behaviors that hinder you from breaking the habit of procrastinating. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I take responsibility rather than make excuses for procrastinating?
- Do I prioritize properly?
- Do I plan realistically?
- Do I manage my time well?
- Do I eliminate or minimize distractions as much as possible?
- Do I persevere even when it’s difficult?

- Do I have short and long-term goals?
- Do I make [SMART goals](#)?
- Do I work in a space conducive to productivity?
- Do I seek clarity when needed?
- Do I use appropriate resources to fill in my knowledge gaps?
- Do I have anyone to keep me accountable?
- Do I get enough sleep in order to have enough energy to complete tasks?
- Do I grant myself healthy rewards after meeting my goals?

If you said “yes” to all of these questions, then you likely do not have issues with procrastination. If you said “no” to some, many, or all of these questions, think about what you need to do in order to turn your answer “no” into “yes.”

The **fifth step** is to change your behavior. Here are some practical behavioral changes you can make to overcome procrastination:

- Structure your day by creating a schedule. Keeping an unstructured schedule can more easily lead to procrastination.
- Follow a regular sleep/wake schedule being sure to get enough sleep. Being tired makes it difficult for even the most motivated and disciplined people to get started and work efficiently.
- Eat a healthy diet. If you eat a lot of sugar, you will likely experience a “sugar crash” and feel very fatigued. Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet provides you with energy and “brain power.”
- Remember that to do something well, it usually takes longer than we anticipate. Therefore, it is important to overestimate how long you think it will take you to complete a task to avoid feeling frustrated and stressed, submitting subpar work, and possibly missing the deadline.
- Determine a location in your home most conducive to working (bedroom, dining room table, living room, outside on your porch or deck, etc.).
- Use a monthly calendar so you can easily see what is coming up.
- Write or type up a list of tasks each morning (or the night before) that you need to accomplish by a set time of the day.
- Ask someone you trust to keep you accountable.
- Develop your short and long-term goals, if you have not already done so.
- Keep your goals in mind to serve as motivation. For example, maybe you think a particular assignment is “pointless.” When you think of the big picture of your life, you may realize that this “pointless” assignment is preparing you for your future.
 - It is helping you develop critical thinking and writing skills.
 - Maybe the difficult act of completing the task is building the character trait of perseverance in you.
 - Or you need to complete it to earn a high grade to keep your GPA up to get into a school you want to attend to pursue your dream career.

- Seek clarity when needed. Ask your teacher for clarification when you do not understand the directions to an assignment.
- Turn off your notifications on your computer so that you do not get pulled away from your task.
- Put your phone in another room to reduce the temptation to pick it up and then lose your focus.
- Develop your own reward system to motivate you to stay the course. After you meet your goal, what is something enjoyable you can do? Here are some ideas:
 - Video chat with friends.
 - Spend time with family.
 - Talk on the phone.
 - Watch YouTube videos.
 - Work on an art project.
 - Play a game.
 - Read a book for leisure.
 - Take your dog on a walk.

I understand that overcoming the habit of procrastination is challenging. If you follow the five main steps above, it will be easier though!

Keep in mind that you do not need to make all of the suggested changes above in one day. Choose and implement the ideas that you believe will make the most significant impact in your life and begin enjoying the benefits of making these positive changes.

If you would like to talk about your specific challenges with procrastination, please feel free to contact me, Mrs. Beutel, at beuteln@chsvb.org. I would be glad to help you.