

Overcoming Procrastination

Procrastination is putting low-priority tasks ahead of high-priority tasks. We all do this at times. We know there is something (like studying) we should do now, but we put it off because we're not in the mood, we anticipate that the task will not be enjoyable, or the task is so large that we don't know where to start. The longer we delay, the closer the deadline gets and the more stress we feel.

Procrastination may be more of a problem for some students in college than it was in high school. In high school, assignments tend to be short term - often due the next day. Assignments in college tend to be long term, and there is no one to prod us into doing what we should - perfect conditions for procrastination!

Here are some tips for overcoming procrastination:

USE GOOD TIME MANAGEMENT

Sometimes procrastination is due to poor time management. When we say we don't have enough time to do something, we may really be saying that we are not spending our time the way we want or need to spend it.

First, assess how you spend your time. Make out an ideal schedule for one week, hour by hour, to enable you to get everything done that you need to do. Then during the course of that week, record hour by hour what you **actually** did. If your ideal schedule and your actual schedule don't match, try to analyze why. Was your ideal schedule realistic?

- did you schedule one hour for a two-hour job?
- did you schedule too little time for maintenance chores such as doing laundry, running errands, shopping?
- if you commute, did you build travel time into your schedule?
- was your ideal schedule so demanding that you just gave up?
- did you schedule yourself to get up too early or study too late at night?
- how and when did you tend to waste the most time?

Revise your schedule and try again! Emergencies and other unavoidable things come up, but don't get discouraged. Recognize that these things happen, and get back on schedule the next day.

LEARN HOW TO DEAL WITH INTERRUPTIONS

An interruption is a perfect opportunity to put off the task at hand. Learn how to

minimize your interruptions:

- study in the library as much as possible
- if you study with friends, make sure they are there to study instead of socialize
- if you live in a residence hall, put a "Do Not Disturb" sign on your door when you need to study and politely let others know you are serious
- let an answering machine get your calls and return them later
- be aware of time wasters - especially TV - and find ways to control them
- if thoughts of other tasks you need to do pop into your mind while you are trying to study, jot them down and forget them until later - stay on task!

BREAK LARGE TASKS INTO SMALLER ONES

The hardest part of a big job (like doing a research paper) is getting started. The project seems so large we don't know where to begin. Take a large task and break it down into all the small steps necessary to complete it. Then go to work on it, one small task at a time. Once the first small part is done, you're not procrastinating any longer - you've begun. Completing that first step will give you a feeling of accomplishment and motivate you to go on to the next step.

SET GOALS

Set goals for yourself that will help you get your work done. Remember to make these relatively short-term, reachable and measurable. When you have reached a goal, reward yourself for a job well done!

ENLIST THE HELP OF OTHERS

If you have trouble staying motivated by yourself, make a "contract" with a friend. Encourage each other to stay on task and reach the goals you've set.