

STOP

PROCRASTINATION
AND MOVE YOUR
BUSINESS
FORWARD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



What Is Procrastination?

Procrastination is the act of delaying or putting off tasks until the last minute or even past their deadline. Basically, you fail to self-regulate by delaying inevitable tasks even though the consequences of doing so are potentially negative to yourself, your job, or your business.

Procrastination is associated with mediocre or bad grades and lower salary. It can also affect your stress levels, as well as physical and mental health. Procrastination can have a huge negative impact on your life.

Reasons for Procrastination

Many people assume that procrastination is simply a sign of weakness or lack of willpower. In reality, it's far more complicated than that. There are many reasons people fall into the procrastination trap.

Oftentimes, when you are faced with a difficult decision or task, you can rely on your self-control to push yourself and power through to get things done.

Motivation, based on the hope of receiving a reward of some kind for your efforts, can help to support this self-control and increase the odds that your task will be completed in a timely manner.

On the flip side, there are also many demotivating factors you can experience which will have the reverse effect on your motivation.

When self-control and motivation outweigh the demotivating factors, the work gets done in a timely manner.

When all of the negative factors outweigh your self-control and motivation, procrastination is the end result.

Health Reasons for Procrastination

Before delving into the various types of procrastination, let's talk about some mental health challenges that could lead to problems with procrastination.

Depression - Procrastination is a common side effect of depression. When you feel hopeless, helpless, and lack any measurable amount of energy, it can make it very difficult to start (or finish) even the simplest task.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) - Because OCD is often connected with maladaptive, unhealthy perfectionism, people with OCD may fear making mistakes, have constant doubts about whether they are completing a task correctly, or worry about what others are expecting.

ADHD - Procrastination is a huge struggle for those suffering from ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). When someone is constantly distracted by other stimuli and their own internal thoughts, it can be difficult to begin or finish a task, especially if the task is of no real interest.

Abstract Goals

When goals are vague, you are far more likely to procrastinate compared to when your goals are clearly defined.

Besides the lack of a clear definition, there are other factors that can make your goal feel abstract. **For example, if you set a goal that you are highly improbable to achieve, you will also perceive it as relatively abstract.**

Abstract Outcomes

Tasks associated with abstract outcomes are another contributor to procrastination. These are tasks with rewards or punishments that will only be received long after completing the task. Outcomes that are far in the future relative to the task being accomplished tend to be discounted by those working on the task.

Many people have a bias to choose activities that offer some type of reward in the short term at the expense of working on tasks that have better outcomes in the long term.

Future Self-Disconnection

Sometimes, procrastination is caused by a phenomenon known as temporal self-discontinuity or temporal disjunction. This is when you view your future self as being somewhat disconnected from your present self.

The disconnect that can occur between your present self and your future self can cause procrastination in a variety of ways.

Focusing on Future Options

Sometimes, you might avoid taking action on a task in the hopes of pursuing or being offered a more attractive task in the future. This type of mindset can lead to long-term procrastination that continues even when you don't follow through on your intended "better" plan.

Pessimism or Optimism

Sometimes, you might procrastinate on a task because you're overly optimistic about your ability to complete it in the future. You keep telling yourself you have plenty of time and therefore keep putting it off.

Pessimism can also lead people to procrastinate, such as when it causes them to believe that any attempt they make at completing the task will undoubtedly result in failure.

Indecisiveness

Sometimes, procrastination results when you are unable to make decisions in a timely manner. This can present itself in various ways, like not being able to decide which course of action to take, or not being able to make a smaller decision before moving ahead with the overall plan.

Feeling Overwhelmed

Sometimes, procrastination happens when you're feeling overwhelmed by the tasks that need to be done. This can happen for a variety of reasons.

- A single task may just feel too big in terms of scope.
- A large number of smaller tasks may add up.

Task Aversion

Sometimes, procrastination occurs simply because you don't want to do whatever it is that needs to be done. **Generally, this happens when you find the task unappealing, and the more unappealing it is, the more likely you are to procrastinate.**

Perfectionism

Perfectionism can lead to procrastination by making you so afraid of making a mistake that you end up not taking any action.

Of course, it's reasonable to want to put out high-quality work, but the perfectionist aims for unattainable standards.

Fear of Negative Feedback

Sometimes procrastination occurs because you're afraid of receiving negative feedback from others.

In most cases, the fear of negative feedback is irrationally exaggerated or unjustified altogether.

Fear of Failure

Fear of failing is another common cause of procrastination. Being fearful can cause you to avoid finishing a task or avoid getting started on the task in the first place.

The amount of fear you have is generally related to the importance of the task in question. Important tasks are associated with higher levels of fear and procrastination.

Handicapping

Sometimes, you may procrastinate as a way of putting barriers in your own way. That way, if you do fail, your failures could be attributed to procrastination rather than your abilities. This behavior is referred to as self-handicapping.

Self-Sabotage

Self-defeating behaviors can lead to procrastination as you actively try to sabotage your progress. There are various reasons to engage in self-sabotage, and if you procrastinate, for this reason, you are likely to engage in other types of negative behaviors.

Lack of Motivation

Often, procrastination occurs because you're simply not motivated enough to work on a given task.

This can especially be an issue when the motivation for performing the task is extrinsic (motivated by others' expectations) as opposed to intrinsic (performing the task for your own satisfaction).

Other Reasons for Procrastination

- **Low self-efficacy:** Not believing in your ability to perform actions needed to achieve your goals.
- **Perceived lack of control:** Procrastinating because you feel incapable of controlling the outcomes of the events of your life.
- **Lack of energy:** You may be more likely to procrastinate if you are suffering from low energy levels, either physical or mental.
- **Laziness:** Sometimes, you may find yourself simply unwilling to put the effort needed into completing a task.
- **Short-term mood boost:** This type of procrastination is also referred to as hedonistic delay and means you're procrastinating to make yourself feel better in the moment.
- **Low capacity for self-control:** If you find yourself unable to regular your behavior in order to follow through.
- **Lack of perseverance:** Inability to maintain goal-driven behavior despite obstacles.
- **Distractibility:** Being unable to focus your attention on one thing at a time or stay focused for a prolonged period.
- **Rebellion:** When you resent being given a task, you may tend to postpone completing the task.

Procrastination Cast of Characters

Researchers have classified procrastination into two main types:

- **Passive:** Delay tasks because they have trouble making decisions and taking action.
- **Active:** Delay tasks on purpose because working *under pressure* makes them feel more motivated.

Other researchers have developed types of procrastinators based on different behaviors relevant to each. This cast of procrastinators includes the following:

- **The Perfectionist:** Tasks are delayed due to a sense of fear that they won't be completed perfectly.
- **The Dreamer:** Because they aren't good at paying attention to details, tasks get put off.
- **The Worrier:** So afraid of the potential of leaving their comfort zone that tasks are neglected.
- **The Rebel:** Doesn't want anyone dictating their schedule or may resent the tasks that have been assigned to them.
- **The Crisis-Maker:** Enjoys working under pressure and therefore puts tasks to the last minute.
- **The Overdoer:** Takes on too much, becomes overwhelmed, and then struggles to find the time to complete all of the tasks they've signed up for.

There are many different reasons for procrastination as well as types of procrastinators. If you see yourself in some of these descriptions, read on to find out how you can help yourself avoid procrastination traps.

Rationalizing Your Behavior

There are various reasons why procrastination happens and often, you can come up with a number of excuses or rationalizations to justify your procrastination. Including:

- Not knowing how to do a part of the task
- Not knowing what needs to be done
- Not being *in the mood* to work on it
- Not caring whether the task is completed or not
- Being indifferent to timelines or deadlines
- Just flat not wanting to do it
- Having a habit of waiting until the last minute
- Thinking you work better under pressure
- Delaying the task to work on another task
- Wanting time to think about the task and plan
- Blaming your health
- Waiting for the right time
- Forgetting to do the task
- Lacking the motivation to get started

Negative Impacts of Procrastination

When procrastination becomes a chronic problem and begins to impact daily life, it can be a serious issue. Sometimes it's not just about having poor time-management skills, it's become a part of daily life.

Employment and Financial Issues

People who procrastinate tend to have various problems with their careers and finances. They may find it difficult to keep a job, earn a lower salary, or find themselves underemployed or completely unemployed.

Interpersonal Relationship Issues

Chronic procrastination can impact interpersonal relationships negatively as well. Procrastination can:

- Damage relationships with coworkers
- Cause issues with relationships with friends
- Lead to issues in romantic relationships

Reduced Wellbeing, Mental, and Physical Health

Procrastination can lead to a wide range of mental health issues like stress, and also physical health issues. Increased stress relates to increased rates of illness.

It also causes people to experience many negative emotions like frustration, shame, guilt, and sadness.

Procrastination Leads to More Procrastination

The cycle of procrastination can be hard to get out of and the more you procrastinate now, the more likely you are to continue to procrastinate in the future. It can create a somewhat vicious cycle.

Four Steps to Stop Procrastinating and Start Moving Forward

Now that you understand the variety of reasons for procrastination, you can better understand why you fall victim to procrastination and figure out how to stop.

1. Define the Nature of Your Procrastination

As you read through the reasons people procrastinate, which ones resonated with you? Do you tend to make abstract goals or because you feel overwhelmed? Once you know this information, you can move forward with a plan to combat procrastination.

2. Establish Your Goals

Remember, the more defined your goals are, the more likely you are to take action on them. They should be significant enough that progress is meaningful while also being attainable.

3. Create a Plan of Action

Your plan should be a combination of anti-procrastination techniques that are relevant to the nature of your procrastination. This will allow you to deal with the situations that lead to procrastination and not achieving your goals.

4. Implement Your Plan of Action

As you begin implementing your plan, be sure to monitor your progress and refine your plan. Try different anti-procrastination techniques and keep what works for you.

Strategies to Overcome Procrastination

It is possible to overcome procrastination. Use these strategies as part of your plan of action.

Recognize That You're Procrastinating

Briefly delaying a task for a sincere reason isn't necessarily procrastinating. There are a lot of reasons why a task may have to be put off, like needing to re-prioritize your workload. **When things start to get put off indefinitely or you keep switching your focus to avoid the task, that's definitely procrastinating.**

Figure Out the Reason You're Procrastinating

You need to first understand why you're procrastinating before you can begin the process of fixing it. Maybe you're avoiding a task because you find it boring. Maybe poor organization is the source of your procrastination.

Maybe poor organization is the source of your procrastination. Maybe you have doubts about your abilities and are worried you'll fail if you attempt the task.

It's also possible that you subconsciously fear success and so you self-sabotage in order to have an out for not completing a task.

Adopt Anti-Procrastination Strategies

Procrastination can be a deeply ingrained habit that may be hard to break. It won't get better overnight. Try these strategies for the best chance of succeeding.

- Forgive yourself for past procrastination
- Focus on doing - not avoiding
- Give yourself a treat
- Find an accountability buddy
- Tackle as you go
- Minimize distractions

- Eat the elephant
- Baby steps
- Recognize warning signs
- Make a to-do list
- Prioritize your list
- Become a scheduling and project planning guru
- Identify your peak times
- Set time-bound goals
- Use time management strategies