

Break the Procrastination Habit

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People who procrastinate usually have long-term goals they hope to achieve. The problem is they are always putting off the daily work necessary to fulfill those goals. But if procrastinating produces nothing but guilt, why are there so many procrastinators? Some people procrastinate because the tasks they face seem so demanding they do not know where to begin. Other people procrastinate because the goal that needs to be achieved is someone else's goal, not their own. These people find it difficult to mobilize their energy and initiative. Many people procrastinate because they hope to avoid facing failure. If time runs out and they don't produce, they avoid having their work judged. Battling procrastination is tough, but it can be done. You just have to train yourself to develop new work habits and a new attitude toward time.

1. **Start small.** Target one specific project that you want to accomplish within a specific period of time. Make the project small, e.g., develop a tentative thesis for your end-of-term research paper due in three months. Give yourself two weeks to come up with a possible idea that you think you can support with research.
2. **Let other people know what your project is and when you plan to finish it.** Tell several people what you intend to accomplish and why you are doing it. In particular, try to find the kind of people likely to ask you how your work is coming along.
3. **Divide and conquer.** Divide your project into a series of subtasks and give yourself deadlines for each and every one. Make sure that the first task on your list takes no more than fifteen minutes to accomplish, e.g., make a list of possible topics. Complete that task within twenty-four hours of drawing up your list. After completing that first brief task, cross it off your list and congratulate yourself.
4. **Maintain your momentum.** Go on to the next task immediately after completing the first one, e.g., "Mondays and Fridays, I'll find and look over at least three websites devoted to my topic." Each time you complete a task by its deadline, congratulate yourself or give yourself some unexpected reward, e.g., go to a movie you had been putting off seeing because of work. When you do not finish a task by its deadline, penalize yourself not by feeling guilty but by doing something you hate like cleaning your room or doing laundry.
5. **Analyze the causes for postponing your work.** If you find yourself slacking off and falling into your old predictable ways, you need to discover why this is happening. You may have taken on a task that is too difficult to accomplish during the time you allotted. If so, rework your schedule to make it more realistic and doable. If you can't figure out why you are postponing your work, try writing in your journal. Ask yourself questions like these: Fear of failure may lie at the heart of pro-

crastination, but what is so terrible about failing? When I fail, does it mean that I cannot do better the next time? Why am I wasting time and not achieving goals I really want?

6. **Do not become discouraged by relapses into old habits.** It is quite natural to fall back into your old habits when you are trying to create new ones. Don't be surprised or angry if you can't stop procrastinating overnight. However, when you find yourself reverting to old forms of behavior, recite a positive motivational statement such as, "I can kick the habit of wasting time; it's just going to take a little while."
7. **Recognize the consequences.** Anytime you feel yourself starting to procrastinate, list some of the consequences of this seemingly harmless habit: a constant sense of guilt, a mediocre career, unfulfilled potential, and a life of indecision. Is it really worth it?
8. **Eliminate time-wasting activities one by one.** Make a list of ways in which you waste time, such as talking with your friends before you begin studying or taking unnecessary breaks to check your cell phone. Tack the list on your wall, taking it down once per week to cross off a time-wasting activity you intend to eliminate. For instance, promise yourself and stick to your promise that you will not, for the entire week, check your cell phone while you study.