

Anti-Procrastination: Being a Time Warrior

#WellbeingWarriors

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As a student you may be tempted to relax at home during the lockdown, thinking that you have ample time to prepare for all your modules. Or, you might be so anxious as a result of all the changes and uncertainties that you have avoided doing any academic work. It is therefore essential to manage your workload and time effectively during this time.

Procrastination is postponing a behaviour or action. For example, looking at your phone, watching series or movies, while your open textbook is next to you.

It is important to be aware of the reward aspect of procrastination, and thus the difference between immediate and delayed gratification. Procrastination draws you to do things that feel good and are easy, providing a sense of immediate gratification. Whereas if you delay gratification, rationally considering that some things may not be easy and feel good immediately but need to be done, you will reap the rewards later. The task may be less pleasant, but more important.

Why do we procrastinate?

Many factors can contribute to procrastination, which can include:

- **Fear of failure**
This could be due to feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work, as well as the difficulty of the task, which creates a fear of not finishing the task successfully.
- **Lack of confidence**
You may be doubting your own abilities or placing undue pressure on your capabilities.
- **Difficulty controlling one's anxiety**
Anxiety can be caused by having unrealistic expectations of yourself or being perfectionistic. Avoiding the task at hand only creates a temporary relief from anxiety.

For a look inside the mind of a procrastinator, [watch this video](#).

Quote by Martin Luther King: "You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step."

Some strategies to beat procrastination:

- **Rewards**

If you set yourself a reward that you will engage in or give yourself at the end of the task, you will increase your motivation to complete the task. Keep in mind the big picture and your goals. Tell yourself that you will watch that series episode or that movie once the task is complete, rather than using these to procrastinate.

- **Break things down**

Break the task into smaller, more manageable bits. Like [eating an elephant](#), it has to be tackled one bite at a time. Looking at a large task that needs to be completed can be intimidating. So set smaller goals to achieve, step-by-step, with their own short-term deadlines, and reward yourself after each step is complete. Write down each step that needs to be completed and schedule hour by hour when you will complete them. Setting the tasks that are more enjoyable, such as writing the intro to an essay, may help you get started.

- **Delayed gratification**

Being able to [delay gratification](#) can also help build your internal locus of control. Having an internal locus of control means believing that you can control the consequences of events with your own personal efforts. If you are able to be intrinsically motivated, i.e. being able to motivate yourself to complete tasks without external pressure of deadlines or the prospect of failure, you will have a stronger internal locus of control.

- **Mindfulness**

[Mindfulness](#) is where you have an awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of your present moment experience. Mindfulness techniques help with various forms of distress such as anxiety, worry and fear. It may help to take a few moments before you begin a task, to practice a mindfulness technique. One of the ways you can do this is by simply bringing your attention to your breathing and focusing on the sensation of the air coming in on the inhale and the air going out on the exhale.

- **Relaxation**

Some [relaxation techniques](#) that may be useful in combating anxiety are Deep Breathing and Progressive Muscle Relaxation.

Deep Breathing: Inhale deeply for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, and exhale for 4 counts.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Tense and release different muscles in succession. For example start with your toes and work up towards your face.

Procrastination is something that we all struggle with and most people have a task (or two) that they are avoiding doing. You now know the causes and elements that promote procrastination in your life and with an understanding of how you can tackle them, you are well on your way to overcoming it.

For more tips on beating procrastination, [click here](#).