



Procrastination

Ever had this happen? It's Monday and you have a paper due in a week. You say to yourself, "This paper shouldn't be too hard; I'll get started on Wednesday." Wednesday comes and you find yourself too busy to do any work. That's okay, you can work on the paper on the weekend. But Saturday, some of your friends are going to the mall and the movies. So you wait until Sunday. Sunday comes and you do some chores before sitting down at 7 o'clock to start your paper. Then, you panic.

Have no fear; you're not the only one who procrastinates. The art of putting off for today what can be done tomorrow can often lead to anxiety and stress as we worry about what we aren't getting done. Despite the anxiety, though, we continue to avoid the very task that is worrying us. Here are some tips to help you avoid procrastination.

First, Ask Yourself: What Type of Procrastinator Am I?

Below are four types of procrastination. Choose the type that best describes you.

Type	Description
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If there is a party on a night when I should be studying, I'll go to the party.• I often socialize instead of studying.• School work is boring; I'd rather do something fun.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Doing schoolwork fills me with dread.• I am sometimes afraid that even if I try my best, I still won't do that well.• I often find myself feeling like school is too hard and teachers expect too much.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I must always be on time and do well.• Others must like and approve of me.• I believe that if I can't do it right, I shouldn't do it at all.• I use the word "should" a lot. I say, "I should get straight A's," "I should be able to do this better than most other students," "I should get this right the first time."
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes I don't do school work just to get back at my parents.• If a teacher annoys me, I avoid doing his/her assignments.• If I have to do an assignment that seems silly or pointless to me, I don't do it.

Some Solutions for Your Type of Procrastination:

If you chose *Type 1*, you are a *Relaxed* type of procrastinator. A *Relaxed* procrastinator ignores school-related tasks and concentrates on having fun instead. He or she may feel that schoolwork requires too much pain for too little gain, and that the work necessary to get through school is boring or stupid. The *Relaxed* procrastinator often makes excuses for poor performance, like “I study about an hour a day but it doesn’t seem to help much anyway so why bother?” or “I would have done better last semester but my best friend had a crisis that I had to help him/her through.” Such excuses are often ways to avoid responsibility and to put off growing up.

How to Conquer Relaxed Procrastination:

1. Identify your “reality gap.” For *Relaxed* procrastinators, there is often a gap between what you say you want for yourself (e.g., to get a 3.0) and what you do to achieve that goal (e.g., don’t study).
2. Close the “reality gap.” Make your actions more consistent with the goals that you set for yourself. If your original goal is overwhelming, set a more reasonable goal for yourself (e.g., to get a B in Chemistry).
3. Identify the steps necessary to get to that goal (e.g., to get a tutor and to study an hour every night). You may find it helpful to visit the SRI Action Plan tool at www.act.org/sri/studentguide
4. Identify your excuses. If your excuse is that you study an hour every night and have no success in school anyway, ask yourself how accurate that excuse is. Do you really spend an hour studying? Or do you spend 50 minutes cleaning your room and writing emails and 10 minutes reading the textbook?
5. Revisit your goal steps regularly. Are new excuses coming up? If so, repeat step 4.

If you chose *Type 2*, you are a *Fear of Failure* type of procrastinator. A *Fear of Failure* procrastinator is often very self-critical and may feel inferior. He or she will make statements like, “I won’t be able to do this well” or “This material is too hard for me” or “When I finish this, others will know that I’m not a very good student because I’ll have done such a poor job.” The worry that one won’t be able to do well becomes paralyzing, resulting in great anxiety and an avoidance of the work.

How to Conquer Fear of Failure Procrastination:

1. Conquer the mystery of failure. Ask yourself what is the worst that can happen if you don’t do well on an assignment. If you don’t do the assignment or if you do it at the last minute, how likely is it that you will fail? What will you do if you don’t do well? How will you cope?
2. Ask for help. If schoolwork is overwhelming and feels too challenging, find someone to help. Tutors at your campus learning center and other students in the class are often a good resource for help.

If you chose *Type 3*, you are a *Perfectionist* type procrastinator. A *Perfectionist* procrastinator sets unrealistically high expectations and standards. Because no one is able to do everything perfectly, at some point the perfectionist will fail, causing him or her to avoid trying again in the future.

How to Conquer Perfectionist Procrastination:

1. Remind yourself that completion is an achievement.
2. Recognize that you are in school to learn, and part of learning involves mistakes. No one is perfect, but the act of completing your work, turning it in, and getting feedback helps you to grow and improve.
3. Tell yourself that great writers, artists, and poets have, at some point, declared their work finished. Yours may be too.

If you chose *Type 4*, you are an *Angry* type procrastinator. An *Angry* procrastinator often fails to try as a way of expressing anger toward someone else and expresses rebelliousness by defying the rules, showing up late to class and/or failing to turn in assignments. Although it may feel that this is a good way of “getting even” with parents or professors, in the end the *Angry* procrastinator is the one with the poor grade.

How to Conquer Angry Procrastination:

1. Identify the reason that you are delaying work on a particular project.
2. Make a list of how your actions will hurt the person you are angry at, and how they will hurt you. You’re not going to let how you feel about a particular class or person hurt your future, are you?

Good Ideas for All Procrastinators:

1. **Break Your Project into Small Tasks.** Sometimes the very size of a task can make it seem overwhelming and impossible to tackle. Don’t try to do it all at once. Instead, break it into smaller segments. For example, if you have a 15-page paper due in a week, tell yourself that tonight, you will write just the introduction.
2. **Set a Clear Schedule for Task Completion.** Mapping out when and how you will do each step in your assignments helps to stay on task. You may find the SRI Tool “Planning and Managing My Time” helpful.
3. **Get Started.** Sometimes just the simple act of getting started will make a task easier to complete. So stop worrying and get working!