

Understanding and Overcoming Procrastination

Why do so many people procrastinate?

Procrastination is not simply a matter of poor time management skills but can be traced to underlying and more complex motives. A paramount psychological need of people is to be recognized as capable, competent, and able. Most college students believe that their performance equals their ability which equals their self-worth, which is not true. Our reasons for delaying and avoiding tasks are rooted in lack of motivation, anxiety about doing poorly, low self-confidence, feeling over-whelmed, having no control of outcomes, looking stupid, or having our sense of self challenged. Whatever the reason for putting things off, procrastination creates more stress in our lives and leads to lower performance.

What can be done to overcome our tendency to procrastinate?

Awareness of Avoidance Motives:

When you are delaying or avoiding a particular task, become aware of what you are thinking and feeling. We often use procrastination as a protective strategy, so we have an excuse for our failures. Are you afraid of not getting it done? Are you afraid of not doing it perfectly? Are you stuck between the forces of success and failure?

Focus on Approach Motives:

Focus on your reasons for learning and achieving that lead to positive, productive, satisfying feelings and actions. Engaging in a task out of fear of failing or looking stupid prevents you from asking questions, trying new methods, or taking the risks necessary to learn new things and achieve your goals. Consider this process:

- View task as an opportunity to experiment and learn.
- See task as a process that supports your learning.
- Make task part of your goals and mission.
- Begin with a small, manageable part of whole task.
- Simplify process of learning by improving organization and time management.

Staying Motivated:

Your motivation is strongly influenced by what you think is important and what you believe you can accomplish. Staying actively engaged in class by learning through reading, writing, listening, and reflecting can help you overcome procrastination. Other methods of overcoming procrastination include breaking larger tasks into smaller segments, setting goals and deadlines, eliminating competing distractions, and finding an environment conducive for study.