

GETTING AHEAD *of* PROCRASTINATION

You sit down at your desk and set out to work on a science project that is due tomorrow. Your phone buzzes and you can't help but check it – Wait! He said WHAT? Before you know it, you've gone down the procrastination rabbit hole, doing everything but the work you intended to do.

When this happens, it's easy to think you're just being lazy, but it's more complicated than that. Your brain is built to look out for and avoid "danger." Your science project isn't exactly dangerous, but your brain might feel overwhelmed by the task (or the "danger" is your fear of not doing well). So it makes sense that your brain will give you messages to avoid this task; your brain's job is to keep you safe at all costs, not to ask questions or analyze the threat.

The good news is there are several ways to tackle procrastination. See if you can relate to any of these common reasons for putting things off, and then try out the solutions to any that apply:

- I get really overwhelmed when work piles up*** – When there is so much on our plate, we can get paralyzed and not know where to begin.

Try this: When you feel overwhelmed, break the task into small, concrete and manageable pieces. Use an online calendar or school agenda to break larger tasks into a series of small steps. When you are uncertain about where to begin, just start somewhere—anywhere! Or ask for help. Asking yourself, "What is the smallest step I can take that I know I will be successful at?" can get some momentum going.

- I don't really understand what the teacher expects, and/or I find this material confusing*** – Sometimes we need more support and information. It's okay to ask for help.

Try this: Talk to your teacher about the task, or ask them to give you feedback on some early steps. Check to see if your school has peer tutors or if a relative can help. Meeting regularly with someone will help keep you accountable so you don't procrastinate. Look for YouTube videos on the topic you're working on. Study with a friend.

- I hate handing in work that doesn't feel good enough*** – If you feel you must give 100% to everything, it could be that your expectations for yourself are unrealistic. No one can be perfect or give 100% all the time. Setting yourself such a high standard can be paralyzing and self-defeating, and it is a common sign of perfectionism. Another sign of perfectionism is feeling like you need to wait for that "just right" feeling or perfect moment before you can start a task. Sometimes you just have to jump in without knowing how it will go, and trust that you will figure it out.

Try this: There are things you can do to help you feel okay about being "good enough." Find out more about perfectionism and tools for overcoming it: [How to Overcome Perfectionism](#) (Anxiety Canada, web page).

- I'm easily distracted*** – The human mind likes to focus on exciting or interesting things that grab our attention. It's easy to be distracted when there's lots going on around us.

Try this: Set yourself up for success by doing things like turning your phone off, sitting in a quiet place or removing things from your surroundings that will pull you in. Try earplugs or white noise if you are sensitive to distracting sounds in your environment.



MORE QUICK TIPS FOR OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION



Write down what needs to get done – This will get the wheels turning and help you feel productive when you cross things off the list. Pick two or three things to do each day.



Place homework where it's easy to see – If you leave your schoolwork open on your desk or in a high-traffic area, it will be harder to forget about or ignore.



Remind yourself why you want to get these things done – Maybe you really don't want to do summer school or let down your group members. Or maybe you just want to feel a sense of accomplishment or the relief of being finished!



Break tasks down into parts so small and specific that you feel confident you will be able to succeed – Try setting a timer for five minutes (you can do anything for five minutes!). Do the first question on a math worksheet or find two references for your essay.



Make time for breaks – Without breaks you can burn out. You'll be more productive if you make time to stop and breathe. Use a website like [TomatoTimer](#) to organize your study time.



Share your plans for success – Tell a parent or friend what your goal is. Telling others about your plan to succeed makes it more likely you'll stick with it.



Plan a reward! Give yourself something to look forward to when you're done—even something small, like watching a show or getting a treat when you finish a task.

Remember

You don't have to feel completely motivated or "in the right mood" to get started on a task. It's okay to feel resistant and angry when you start (*I hate that I am stuck at home doing this tonight! This sucks!*). Getting started is often the hard part, but relief will come once you get going. Finally, don't expect old habits to change quickly; adopting these new strategies is a process that takes time. But the first step in reducing procrastination and improving study habits is to start now!

More procrastination resources

A Soft Murmur – Website lets you choose ambient sounds (like rain, coffee shop noises, crickets) to reduce distracting noises

Focus and Concentration (CrashCourse) – YouTube video (10:12) offers tips for staying focused and improving concentration skills

Planning and Organization (CrashCourse) – YouTube video (9:25) on how planning and organizing can set you up for success at school

Procrastination (CrashCourse) – YouTube video (10:26) helps you understand your procrastination on a deeper level and offers some practical steps for overcoming it

