



University of Utah

PROCRASTINATION

·“William Knaus, a psychologist, estimated that 90% of college students procrastinate. Of these students, 25% are chronic procrastinators and they are usually the ones who end up dropping out of college.”¹



Procrastination

To put off doing something, especially out of habitual carelessness or laziness; to postpone or delay needlessly.



We have clever ways of fooling ourselves into postponing important tasks.

However, by avoiding important duties, we create more stress and pressure for ourselves.



Typical Excuses include:

- ◇ I'll do it later
- ◇ I'll wait until I'm in the mood to do it.
- ◇ There's plenty of time left to get it done.
- ◇ I don't know where to begin.
- ◇ I work better under pressure so I don't need to do it right now.
- ◇ I've got too many other things to do first.



Regardless of the reason or excuse, procrastination occurs because we are uncomfortable about, or fearful of something.

Telling ourselves to “get organized” or “try harder” may not work. It might just give us something else to concentrate on instead of the task at hand!



So how do we get around the fear, or uncomfortable feelings, that are stopping us from doing what needs to be done?

Just make your tasks:

- ◇ More Interesting
- ◇ More Simple
- ◇ More Pleasant

Think of these as the three "M's", or better yet, think of a good mnemonic, such as, "I Spy Procrastinators."



Let's consider the following task,
"Writing a term paper which is due at
the end of the semester." We'll use
this example throughout the next few
slides but the same three hints can also
be applied to other activities, such as:

- Cleaning out a closet, or your car,
- Studying for a test,
- Passing a Math class, or
- Reading the next chapter in your
chemistry book.



The first "M" is to make your task more interesting. You can:

- ◇ Find a topic you're interested in and manipulate it to fit your paper requirements. The writing lab in the library can help you with this.
- ◇ Explore different areas of the subject matter assigned. Brainstorm with your friends to come up the silliest ideas. These ideas can trigger even better ideas. You'll be surprised with what you can come up with, the topic will be less general, and the paper easier to write.



The best way to make something more simple, (our second "M"), is to break it down into many little steps.

Make sure the steps are small.
Experiment with what works for you. Just be sure that you are actually doing something that will help you accomplish the task!



Small steps could include the following:

- ◇ You could decide, "Every Tuesday of the semester I will go to the library at 2 P.M., and work on the paper for 30 minutes."
- ◇ For your first 30 minute time slot, ask someone to help you with the next step. There are people at the library who actually do this as their job! And since you haven't waited until the last minute to start, you have the time to learn what you need, and get it right.



Finally, you can make writing the paper more pleasant, (third "M"), by making it a game.

- ◇ For example, count how many references you can include in your 30 minutes. Then try to beat that number next week.
- ◇ Or just try to see how many different types of sources you can find in one session.
- ◇ Playing games can also work well when studying for a test. You could make a memory game: Questions on one index card, Answers on another. Then lay them all out text side down, removing cards when you match questions with the right answers.



Just coming up with creative ways to implement the three "M"s will get your brain in gear for what needs to be done when you don't feel like doing it.



To summarize:

1. Map out your task, decide when it needs to be done, and what time you're going to devote to doing it.
2. Use the three "M"s to help make your task less difficult.
3. Remember to always use Baby Steps at each stage of your task. (In order for this to work, you need to make sure you've taken care of #1 first!)



4. Remind yourself that the professor hands out the assignment, but you can use many methods to complete it.
5. Remember that overcoming bad habits takes time and practice, just like any other skill, such as typing, driving a car, or music.
6. And most of all, remember that perfection is not required. Getting less than an 'A' does not mean you, as a person, are a failure. You are a perfectly okay person, who just did not get an 'A' on that paper. Your self worth is not simply based on one school assignment or exam.



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