Academic Support, Student Services

What is procrastination?
Procrastination is avoiding doing things that need to be done or leaving things undone for as long as possible.

In the world of perfect there is no finish line

Perfectionism

Dealing with feelings

Awareness

Why procrastinate? (perceived benefits)

Preparation

Getting started (3-5 rule)

Realistic time management

Where and when to work

Self-care

Intrinsic v extrinsic rewards

Positive purpose (short and long-term goals)

Motivation

KEEP CALM AND STAY POSITIVE

http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supporttoryourstudies/academicsupport/index.aspx
Awareness

Be honest with yourself about why you procrastinate – what are your habits? What leads to procrastination?

• **Why procrastinate? (perceived benefits)**
  You may be putting things off for short-term pleasure or relief from stress because tasks are boring, difficult or feel overwhelming to complete. Procrastination can also feel like it avoids having your work judged by others (shame).

• **Dealing with feelings**
  Fear of failing, expectations (from yourself and your beliefs about what others expect), worries about self-worth and unrealistic schedules (taking on too much) can all lead to procrastination. Like an ostrich with its head in the sand, you may be avoiding confronting feelings as well as the actual study tasks you need to do.

• **Perfectionism**
  In the world of perfect there is no finish line

  In the world of perfect there is no finish line

  Taking on too much, and believing that you always need to do more for a task to be worth doing (or be sufficiently successful), can indicate difficulties with perfectionism.

[http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supportforyourstudies/academicsupport/index.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supportforyourstudies/academicsupport/index.aspx)
Academic Support, Student Services

Like its partner – procrastination – it can lead to study tasks not being finished or handed in.


To understand more about perfectionism and procrastination, check out the Counselling service workshops http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/groups/index.aspx

Strategies

If you change your study strategies and how you work, this can help overcome procrastination.

- Preparation
  Work out what is necessary to start a task in order to make it more manageable
  - Knowledge e.g. key facts and main themes
  - Skills e.g. how to access an online archive or software
  - Information and guidance e.g. assignment guidelines, past papers, booking a tutorial

- Getting started

  Break tasks into smaller steps and commit to one of these to get the task started. Try working in short bursts to a focused task.
  Remember: most tasks can be completed by using the 3-5 rule:
  - 3-5 sources
  - 3-5 themes
  - 3-5 paragraphs

  http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/documents/3-5-rule.pdf
• **Realistic time management**
  Are you doing too much? Committing yourself to too many tasks and obligations can add to procrastination. You may be underestimating how long something may take (not allowing enough time) or overestimating the complexity of a task (making it more complicated than it is). Check our time management resources [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supportforyourstudies/academicsupport/studyresources/timemanagement.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supportforyourstudies/academicsupport/studyresources/timemanagement.aspx)

• **Where and when to work**
  Choosing the right surroundings for you can significantly affect your studying. Think about what the benefits and distractions are associated with different spaces and times of the day when you could study. [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/documents/whereandwhentoworkonwritingtasks.pdf](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/documents/whereandwhentoworkonwritingtasks.pdf)

• **Self-care**
  Un-schedule things: time management tools should help support you, not feel negative. Make sure you still make time for rest and relaxation, for healthy eating and exercise. Look after your wellbeing. [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supportforyourstudies/academicsupport/index.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supportforyourstudies/academicsupport/index.aspx)
Motivation

Changing your purpose and how you think about your work can also help challenge the causes of procrastination.

- **Positive purpose (short and long-term goals)**
  Make positive and concrete goals for the short term: schedule rewards and get difficult tasks completed so you can move on. For long term goals: remember why you enrolled on the course, what interested you, and what you may do in the future.

  - Talk to Careers – you can discuss alternative options away from your subject or to change direction. There are positive things you can do for long-term development, even if you are not enjoying your degree studies as expected.

- **Intrinsic v extrinsic rewards**
  Find ways of challenging yourself and identify interest and purpose for its own sake in what you do (intrinsic rewards). Extrinsic rewards may not always be as satisfying and can overwhelm us by focusing on external objects, values and other people (e.g. money, your assessment marks rather than feedback and learning gained, or praise from others).

- **Language**
  How we talk about ourselves can reinforce procrastination and poor self-esteem.

  - Use positive self-talk: “I will....” (not “I wish I hadn’t...”)
  - De-label and de-magnify: “I can do this...” (rather than “I am completely incapable...”)
  - Keep a notebook of ‘three positive things about today’

[http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supportforyourstudies/academicsupport/index.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/supportforyourstudies/academicsupport/index.aspx)