



PROCRASTINATE NO MORE:

A TIME MANAGEMENT GUIDE FOR ONLINE STUDENTS

Many, if not most, people procrastinate from time to time, but there's a point at which procrastination goes from temporary laziness to an impediment to fulfilling your potential and taking care of the things that are essential to your success and well-being.

Procrastination can be particularly harmful for online students. By nature, online courses require students to be good at managing their time and learning and working independently. Additionally, regular weekly deadlines don't leave a lot of room for procrastination and failure to complete course requirements in a timely manner can quickly derail your grades in an online course.

How can you ensure that you don't miss critical deadlines and let procrastination become a problem for you as an online student? By being honest about your bad habits and making real changes to your behavior that will help you better manage your time. Ready to get started? (The answer is "yes," no procrastination allowed!)

WHAT KIND OF PROCRASTINATOR ARE YOU? ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Not everyone puts off tasks for the same reasons or in the same way. In fact, there are many different types of procrastinators out there. Diagnosing your particular type of procrastination can be a smart first step in figuring out how to make a change.

Here, you'll find descriptions of several kinds of procrastination as well as some helpful tips that each variety can use to modify their procrastination tendencies.

THE WORRIER



THE PROBLEM Worriers are convinced that they are going to make the wrong decision so they put off making any decision at all. These procrastinators run away from responsibility so that they cannot be blamed if something doesn't turn out well. They are highly concerned with what others think.

THE SOLUTION For worriers, avoiding procrastination is all about learning to be realistic. Most situations aren't nearly as dire as they imagine, and learning how to face their worries head on, at least in small chunks each week, is key to making progress.

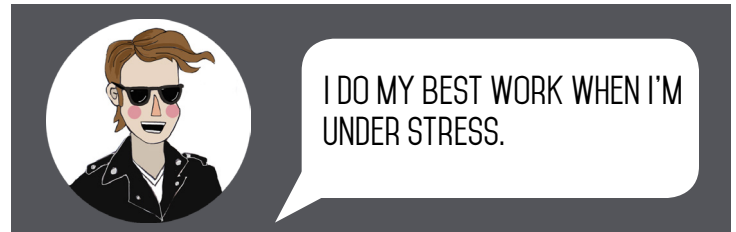
THE OVER-DOER



THE PROBLEM Over-Doers aren't lazy—in fact just the opposite. These procrastinators have so much going on that they can't decide what to do first. Because they can't figure out where to start, they never start at all.

THE SOLUTION Learning to recognize and respect their personal limitations is key to the Over-Doer, as is establishing a realistic view of their priorities. Many Over-Doers can also benefit from learning to say “no” and not taking on every task that comes their way. It will leave more time to actually accomplish things that are truly important.

THE THRILL-SEEKER



THE PROBLEM This type of procrastinator is convinced that they work better under stress, even if that isn't necessarily true. They are prone to creating false crises and seek out the rush associated with waiting until the last minute.

THE SOLUTION For the Thrill-Seeker, it can be helpful to create several deadlines before an assignment is due to keep on task—these smaller deadlines will still provide the rush of waiting, but will ensure that things also get done earlier. Thrill-Seekers should ultimately try to replace stress as their motivator by seeking out other ways to get an adrenaline rush.

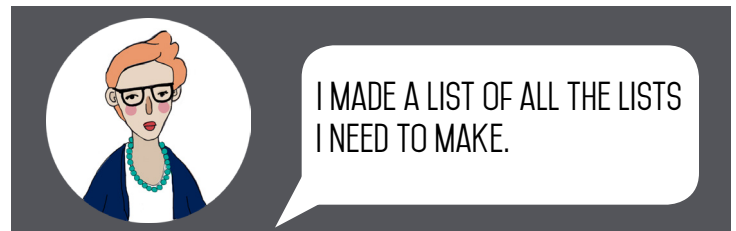
THE PERFECTIONIST



THE PROBLEM Perfectionists set such high standards for themselves that they quickly become overwhelmed by the work they need to get done. These types of procrastinators may start work, but they often do not finish it because they give up when they cannot meet the unrealistic standards they've set for themselves. If they cannot do it perfectly, they don't want to do it at all.

THE SOLUTION Perfectionists can benefit from focusing on establishing realistic goals and working on getting the basics done first before focusing on making things perfect. Making daily to-do lists, seeking support, and rewarding themselves for meeting realistic goals can be smart steps in battling procrastination.

THE PREPPER



THE PROBLEM These procrastinators are all about getting started, but they never get past that point. They use organization or other very basic tasks as a way to avoid doing any real work, saying if they can just get things organized and prepared that it will be easy to complete their work in a short period of time.

THE SOLUTION While being an organized and prepared student is a good thing, that alone isn't enough to be successful. Preppers must limit the amount of preparatory work they allow themselves to do, or create a strict to-do list system that combines organization with the impetus to act.

10 EASY STEPS

TO HELP YOU BETTER MANAGE YOUR TIME



1 ESTABLISH PRIORITIES

Jobs, family responsibilities, personal health, household tasks, and even sleep are all things that compete for the attention of many online students. Remember that not everything is important, needs to be done now, or needs to be done by you. By making online coursework a priority, students can ensure that they have time set aside to work, learn, and succeed.

2 KNOW DEADLINES

Many students, both online and off, use the excuse that they didn't know about deadlines when they miss them and fail to turn in assignments or complete work on time. As soon as you get your syllabus, put these dates into your personal calendar and set reminders for yourself a few days in advance. This will ensure that you'll always know what's due and when.

3 CREATE A SCHEDULE

One of the advantages of online courses is that they do not require students to do their learning on a strict schedule—students can fit in coursework when it works for them. But not having a schedule from your instructor doesn't mean you shouldn't have one at all. You need to develop a schedule for yourself that gives you structure and will clearly set aside time to complete your work.

4 ASK FOR HELP

Students often avoid asking for help out of fear or embarrassment, but it's one of the best things you can do to stay on track. Instead of putting off working on an assignment because you don't understand it, ask for help from your instructor. He or she may be able to explain things you find confusing, get you a tutor, or extend deadlines to allow you extra time to catch up.

5 REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

Life is full of distractions and it can be especially hard for online students to concentrate on coursework when the internet, TV, or even household chores are at right at hand. It can be helpful to set up a study space that limits your access to distractions, to turn off your phone or other devices when you need to focus, and even to set up software that blocks your access to all websites except Blackboard.

6 BREAK UP WORK

One reason many people procrastinate is because big tasks often seem intimidating. But if you break up these big projects into smaller pieces, they suddenly become manageable. For example, if you need to write a really long research paper, you can break that project up into smaller tasks, like going to the library, taking notes, creating an outline, writing different parts of the paper, proofreading, and making a works cited.

7 CHECK IN DAILY

Even if you don't have something due, it's important to check into your course on a daily basis. This will keep you engaged in conversation, ensure you see any notices that are posted about the course, and develop a routine that establishes your coursework as part of your everyday life. This will make it easier to stay on task and fight your urge to procrastinate.

8 STEP BACK

While you are taking your online courses, you are going to be much busier than usual. During this time, don't try to do too much. Have a conversation with your employer or your family and let them know that you will need to spend time focusing on your courses, so you may not have as much time for other tasks. Don't feel bad saying no if you simply don't have the time to take on additional responsibilities.

9 REWARD YOURSELF

Finding it hard to get things done? Rewards can be a great motivator. If you stick to getting things done when you said you would, offer yourself a chance to do something fun or to indulge. For example, allow yourself to take a day off from your studies after finishing a big project or go out to your favorite restaurant if you commit to studying for your exams for a set amount of time—whatever motivates you to get things done.

10 COMPROMISE

Sometimes, when you have a lot on your plate (a big project at work that's due at the same time as your final paper, for example) it just isn't possible to give everything 110%. Instead of putting things off because it all seems so overwhelming and you know that you can't possibly do everything perfectly, commit to doing the best you can and then letting it go.

MAKING IT STICK

How do you keep from sliding back into bad habits?

For many people, procrastination is a deeply ingrained bad habit that can feel overwhelming to break. Yet it's well worth the challenge to overcome because it can sabotage your success as a student and can rob you of opportunities that can help you achieve your dreams.

But once you've done the hard work of making a change how can you make sure these new habits stick?

One of the big keys is persistence. Change doesn't happen overnight and you may initially struggle to make changes. The more you practice these good habits, however, the easier they will become, so don't let frustration undo the progress you've made.

You also don't want to be too hard on yourself. Even those who aren't regular procrastinators sometimes struggle to stay on task and sometimes things come up in life that may derail your best efforts to stay on track. If you find yourself sliding back into procrastination, don't beat yourself up about it. Just start over tomorrow with a clean slate, get back on track and move on from there.

Finally, develop a support system. These people can be friends, family, coworkers or your classmates. These are people who can remind you why you're taking online courses and help you stay on track by offering motivation, helping you with some of your other tasks, and sharing their own struggles. Your support system will not only give you help but also accountability, which can make it easier to stick to your new anti-procrastination tactics.

For online students, learning how to effectively manage time is a critical part of success. While it can take a lot of time, effort and frustration to change your procrastination habits, the success it will bring as a student is well worth it.