

10 WAYS TO AVOID PROCRASTINATION

1. Create a to-do list or use a planner/agenda. List everything, big and small, that you have to do for your entire day; break big activities into smaller bits if necessary. Then, as you work through your day check off each of the items on your list. You will feel a growing sense of pride as you visually monitor your ever-diminishing list of projects.

- Focus your list on including the things you typically put off, not the things you are sure to do on a regular basis.
- Reevaluate your list halfway through your day to rank your items based on highest priority. Then, tackle the most important ones before looking back at the smaller things to do.
- As things come up, put them at the bottom of your to do list. Don't do it, put it on a list and do it later.

2. Finish the hard stuff. When you have a looming project that's bogging you down and making you unproductive in other areas, tackle it first. Finishing the largest item on your list of things to do will make you feel extra productive and give you the boost to do other things you've been pushing to the side.

- If your "big project" is something that can't be done in one sitting, make a list of small parts of it that you can accomplish today. Don't worry about completing the entire thing, but take steps now so that doing so in the future is a breeze.
- Make an ultimate to-do list for this single project, and have it placed somewhere you will see it on a regular basis. As you mark things off you will be motivated to continue doing so, and seeing it on a regular basis will remind you that your project needs to be done.

3. Do two-minute tasks. Whenever you are presented with something that you don't want to do or would consider putting off, ask yourself "will this take me less than two minutes to finish?" For many of us, this includes small chores like taking out the trash or pulling a few weeds, but can include simple tasks in all areas of life. Anything that you want to put off but takes two minutes to do - do it. Simply force yourself to use the next 120 seconds to be productive and do the duty you normally would push off for hours or days.

4. 10 and 2. If you find yourself being pulled off into the depths of daydreams, set a period of time to do nothing but work. Take ten minutes and remove all distractions - your phone, magazines, or thoughts of your attractive love - and go into a working frenzy. Force yourself to work productively for ten minutes, and then go back to whatever it was you were doing. Chances are, you'll get into a groove and keep working at a high pace even when your frenzy times out. Set a timer for two minutes, and read a book, get a snack, or call/text your friend. Do whatever it is you've been daydreaming about so that the temptation is removed once you get back to work.

5. Backwards Plan. Writing an essay the night before it is due is crazy. If you know you have a week to write the essay, break the assignments into parts. Come up with your topic one day, write the draft another day, edit the essay on another day, etc.

6. Remove your distractions. Although it may seem like calling your mom or finishing up the next chapter in your book are things you must accomplish in the near future, they're probably just distracting you from getting your work done. Put on some noise-cancelling headphones, turn off your phone, and hide your temptations (books, your guitar, cleaning, whatever it may be).

7. Don't be a perfectionist. If you're waiting for the perfect time, the perfect supplies, or you won't stop until you've "perfected" your project, you're putting off completing your task. Avoid this "perfect" thinking by considering quantity over quality. If your project doesn't require perfection but you're still focused on it, stop and move on to your next task. When you've finished everything, you can backtrack and finish perfecting your original task.

8. Motivate yourself. Many people claim the reason they procrastinate is because they work best under pressure. So what do you do if your projects don't have any deadlines? Make your own. Set a time that you must complete your project by, and either reward yourself at the end of that time or set up a punishment for yourself if you aren't successful in your endeavor.

- Positive reinforcement is the most effective means of motivating yourself. Give yourself a treat to look forward to as a reward for buckling down on your to-do list/planner/agenda; go see a movie, eat a chocolate bar, go out with a friend, whatever it is that will motivate you.
- Try using negative reinforcement - taking away something bad - as a motivator. For example, promise yourself that if you finish your essay by Friday night you won't have to run your errands, do your chores, or whatever it is that you don't want to do.
- If reinforcement isn't working for you, use punishment as a motivator. Use negative punishment - taking away something good - to try and work harder. Don't let yourself take that nap, eat your dinner, or finish your favorite book until your tasks have been done.
- For the most severe examples of procrastination, put your money on the line. Give someone you trust a certain amount of money, \$50 for example, and tell them to spend it on themselves if you don't finish your project by a certain time. This way, you have to work in order to keep your hard-earned money in your own pocket.

9. Get an accomplice. If you can't seem to work on your own, find a friend or family member to help you work. Have them encourage you to stay on task and help you when you need it. Telling someone about what you need to do will motivate you to finish your project, because if you don't you will have to suffer the embarrassment of admitting it to them.

- Set up a few hours of time where you go around and accomplish all your projects with a friend. This way, you will have someone with you while you work to keep you focused and on track.
- Schedule "check-ins" with your friend where they call to see where you're at. These can be deadlines for certain tasks, at which point you will either be praised or chastised by your friend based on your progress report.

10. Focus on the end goal. It's easy to see only the giant list of things to do, rather than the anxiety-free feeling of accomplishment at having finished them. As you work, focus on all the free time, relaxation, money, accomplishment, high grade, or whatever it may be that you get when you finish. This will help you to stay on task and work towards your goal.