



Overcoming procrastination

<https://www.screencast.com/t/ERaNCmyaG1>

Transcript

Introduction:

Welcome to this tutorial on overcoming procrastination from the University of Reading Study Advice team. The tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace and you can pause it at any time.

Slide 1: What is procrastination? You've had your essay title for weeks and you've even done a bit of writing, but you only really begin to take it seriously the night before it's due, and then you have to pull an all-nighter to get it submitted...

Or perhaps you've been working for weeks, reading dozens of articles and making sheaves of notes, but you just can't start writing - there's always one more book to read...

Does that sound familiar? You are not alone. Procrastination, the act of irrationally putting tasks off to a later time, is widespread in universities, with studies showing that over half of students regularly procrastinate. This is not surprising. Academic work is difficult - it involves understanding and bringing together lots of complex ideas, sometimes in new and untested ways. You will be using new skills that you may not feel confident about. Your assignment mark may count towards your final mark, which adds pressure to perform well.

However, procrastination leads to higher levels of stress, which can be damaging to your health and wellbeing, and it gets in the way of you reaching your full potential.

Slide 2: Why do you procrastinate? Can you identify what it is that makes you procrastinate? Let's look at some of the most common causes:

- **Perfectionism:** Perfectionism often goes hand in hand with procrastination. Perfectionists can be too overwhelmed by their own high expectations to start work. If

this applies to you, remember that the 'perfect' assignment would be the best one you can do within the limits that you have been set: the time you have to complete the assignment, the word count, and the resources you have available for your research. We are assessing how well you can work within those limits - not how well you could work if you had no limits at all. With this in mind, try to set realistic standards for yourself. Remember that making mistakes and learning from them is part of being a student.

- **Uncertainty:** Perhaps you're not sure about what an assignment brief means; or how to structure your ideas; or whether you're referencing properly; or you haven't grasped a technique or theory. Identify your block and talk to the people who can help: your tutor, a Study Adviser, Maths Support or a librarian, perhaps?
- **Lack of motivation:** The stronger your motivation, the less distracted you will be by other tasks that may get in the way of reaching your goal. Remind yourself of why you are doing your course, and think about the purpose of a piece of coursework or an exam. Identifying your goals and the rewards you hope to get in the future will help to motivate you to commit yourself to studying now.
- **'I need the pressure of a deadline':** You may think you perform better under pressure, but research has shown that academic work that has been produced at the last minute is of lower quality and receives lower grades. You will do yourself much more justice if you start in time.

Slide 3: Overcoming procrastination: Procrastination is a habit that can be broken. Try some of the following suggestions:

- **Deal with distractions:** It can be difficult to focus on studying when your mobile's ringing, new emails keep popping up, the washing-up needs doing and your friend wants you to go for a drink.

If you make yourself aware of the things that distract you from studying you can think in advance about strategies to deal with them. Click on the link to watch our video tutorial on how to find out what your time wasters are. Then decide how to manage these distractions.

If you find yourself spending a lot of time on social media or on a particular website, try a website-blocking app or plug-in to control the time you spend on this. Disable pop-up notifications so you're not tempted to read them as they arrive. Put the voicemail on and fix times when you will return phone calls or read and answer emails.

If your friends keep interrupting you, set a definite time and place to have a break and go for coffee together.

- **Set small, achievable goals:** You're much more likely to stay motivated if you break your work down into manageable chunks and work through one thing at a time. For instance, rather than thinking, 'Today I ought to write my essay', try thinking 'Today I will start by writing 300 words for my introduction'. Set your own deadlines for each of these smaller tasks. To help you focus, you can try the Pomodoro technique: using a 'tomato timer', you work for a maximum of 25 minutes at a time, then reward

yourself with a short break. Break down your work into things you can achieve within 25 minutes, and use the timer to give you a target to aim at.

- Make a weekly schedule: map the smaller goals that you have set yourself onto a weekly schedule. Click on the link to view our video tutorial on how to make a weekly study timetable for advice on how to go about this.
- Set deadlines for starting tasks as well as finishing them. This is especially useful for writing: decide when you are going to start writing and do it regardless of whether you feel you've read enough. Writing can help you to organise your ideas and identify gaps that you can plug with more reading later when you have a draft.

Summary: To summarise, to beat procrastination, work out why you are procrastinating, and take steps to tackle those issues. Remove temptations such as access to social media, break your work down into manageable chunks, and set yourself deadlines. In doing so, you will adopt study habits that are healthier and more effective, and conquer procrastination.