

The keys to success

**MOTIVATION
AND TIME MANAGEMENT**

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Procrastination: The play of habit... and emotion	3
What kind of procrastinator are you?	3
Motivation: The game of seduction	6
Valuing your work	6
How can I make an academic assignment seem worthwhile?	7
Feeling competent.....	8
How can I make myself feel competent?	9
Feeling in control	9
How can I take control of my academic fate?	10
Time management: Going step-by-step	11
1. Collecting information	11
2. Weekly planning	12
3. Evaluate and improve your planning	13
What to do in case of emergencies	13
Conclusion.....	14
Appendix: Timetable	15

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Procrastination: The play of habit... and emotion

Almost everyone can remember a time when they put off something they had to do until the next day because it seemed too boring, too difficult, or too stressful. The next day, they succumbed again to the temptation to push the fateful moment back; their excuses began to pile up. Only when the task at hand could no longer be put off was it finally accomplished. Disappointed with their results, they promise themselves not to get caught in that trap again.

One such misadventure will be enough to convince some people of the importance of self-motivation and organization. Unfortunately, for others, procrastination can become a distressing habit.

Procrastination is the habit of systematically postponing unpleasant tasks. Leaving an assignment unfinished for a more important one does not constitute procrastination. However, **it is procrastination when you know that**

postponing something is unjustified and you feel guilty about it.

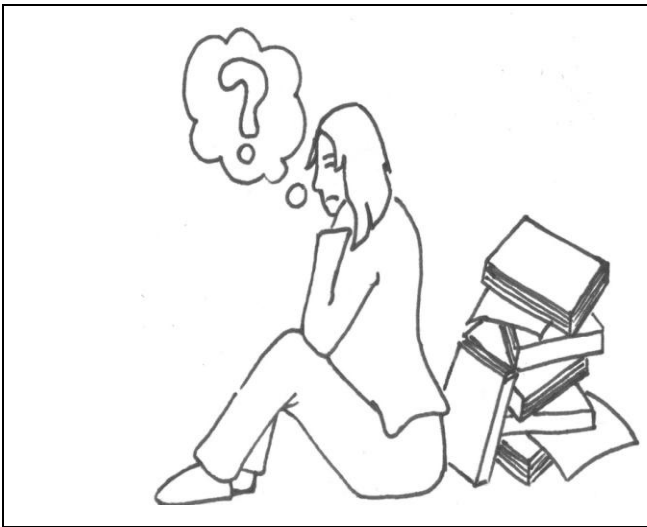
Students who suffer from procrastination know that even though their behaviour might give them immediate relief, it will only last for a short time. In the long term, you'll find yourself facing feelings of anxiety and pointless frustration that can seriously harm your self-esteem, not to mention the possibility of academic failure and missed opportunities, all because you couldn't organize yourself in time!

Procrastination falls under the rubric of conditioned behaviours, which explains why it often crops up unexpectedly, as an automatic or reflexive response - even when you want to avoid it.

What kind of procrastinator are you?

Getting rid of procrastination habits requires you to become aware of your favourite excuses. People who have tried to shirk this difficult step will tell you: *Habit is second nature.* Maybe you can see yourself in one of the following archetypes:

Hesitators have such a hard time making decisions that they often get to work rather late in the game, whether it's working on a paper or studying for an exam. Hesitators tend to avoid new situations because they're likely to cause anxiety and feelings of incompetence. Hesitators would gain a lot from trusting themselves more. If they think they'll have trouble with an assignment, they can always ask for help from a colleague or a teacher.



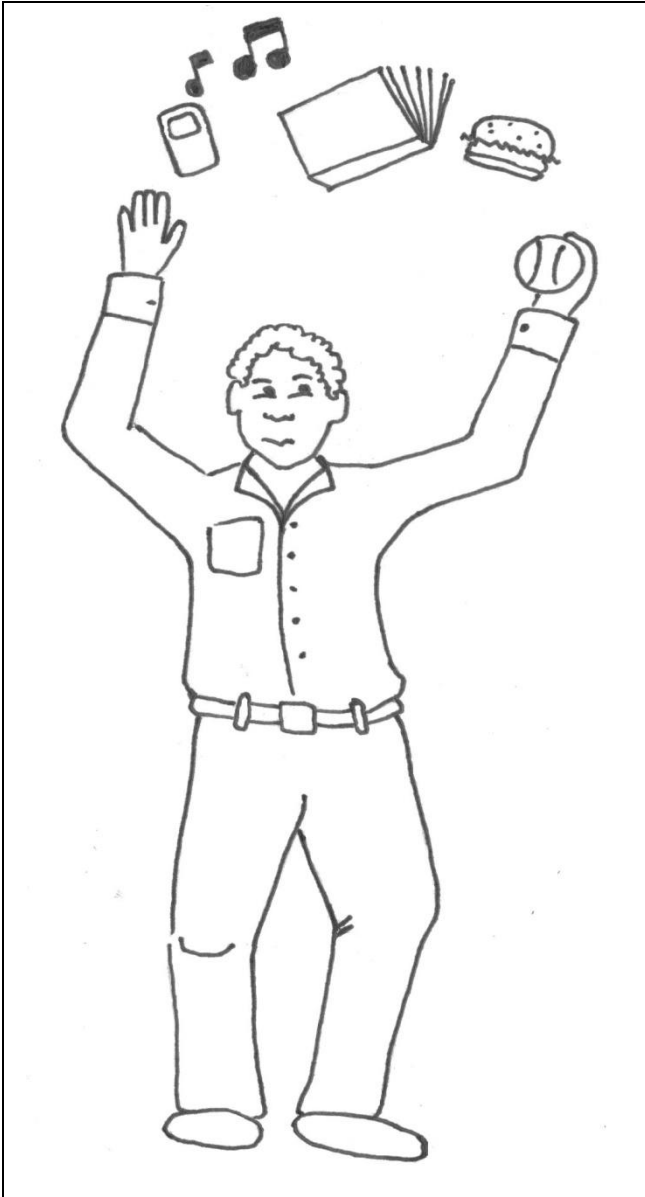
Shirkers try to avoid disagreeable or boring situations. They prefer to keep their minds distracted by busying themselves with other work. They probably feel anxious about being evaluated and prefer to hand their work in at the last minute.

This way they can justify their poor performance by saying they didn't have enough time. It's important for shirkers to increase their tolerance for activities that they don't particularly enjoy, and to realize that their teachers are evaluating the quality of their work, not their value as individual people.

Perfectionists are often chasing after such inaccessibly high standards they end up discouraged rather than motivated. Their quest for excellence leaves them chronically dissatisfied, which pushes them to perpetually postpone handing in their work. Luckily, by accepting their strengths and weaknesses and following project or homework guidelines, perfectionists can decrease their anxiety and get the work piling up on their desk done - on time!

Anarchists don't much like having to meet other people's standards. They don't feel very motivated when they see a task as imposed on them, and they react by postponing it so they can accomplish something more satisfying. They're sometimes very invested in extracurricular activities, which excite them more and might eat up all their time. (Opportunities are

certainly not lacking on campus!) To improve their work habits, anarchists might find reasons to get started by linking their assignments with their personal interests.



Becoming aware of the excuses we use to justify putting off our obligations enables us to recognize those moments in which we're in danger of succumbing to

procrastination. This is a crucial step if you're going to respond effectively next time!

The next step is convincing yourself to actually do your work, in order to ensure your academic success and maintain your quality of life.

Motivation: The game of seduction

What do motivation and seduction have in common? You need all the luck you can get when you play!

Whether you want to seduce or motivate, it's best to know your target. You'll have higher chances of success if you now how to present yourself or the task at hand in an advantageous light. With a little practice, you'll be able to develop your own "infallible" tactics!

The factors determining academic motivation are of two kinds. Internal factors are related to the way in which individuals perceive themselves (in the game of seduction, a confident player always has a head-start). External ones are related to the way in which those individuals perceive their context

(nothing will help you charm a loved-one like an evening in their favourite restaurant).

Motivation is the opposite of feeling powerless: far from being an abstract state that you can't do anything to influence, **academic motivation is a dynamic state the results from the image you have of yourself-as-student.** Our ideas of ourselves can easily encourage us to get involved in an activity... Or, on the contrary, push us to avoid it.

Because it's so dynamic, academic motivation often varies from one course to another or from one moment in the semester to the next. Luckily, by understanding the processes in play, you can influence your motivation levels and achieve your goals.

Three types of perception are particularly influential as far as motivation levels go: how you perceive the value of the assignment; how you perceive your own competence; and how you perceive your ability to control the task and its results.

Valuing your work

When an assignment seems pleasant, or at least important, you're much more likely to want to get started on it. In students' eyes, **the usefulness of an academic assignment depends above all on the goals that it allows them to achieve.** Though each of us has very personal reasons for undertaking our university educations, we can also often be classed in one of the two following categories:

-People with social goals aim to make a place for themselves in the world. In our society, higher education often allows you to earn the approval of others and to acquire a position of influence.

-People with academic goals seek to acquire knowledge and experience the pleasure of learning. These goals are often translated into the desire to perform well and to be rewarded.

It will help you to think of these goals as intertwined. While the pleasure of learning helps you start a difficult assignment, it might be the scholarly and social rewards attached to it that help you finish.

How can I make an academic assignment seem worthwhile?

Connect the activity to your personal goals. First, make a list of your long-term objectives. What forms of knowledge necessary to work in your field of interest? What kinds of skills should you be looking for to satisfy the demands of the labour market? Next, identify your short-term goals. How might the task at hand help you achieve your goals? Having practical goals will enable you to stay active and motivated throughout your educational career.

Connect the assignment to your interests. Mandatory academic work does not often appear deeply inspirational on its own. To motivate yourself, try connecting the task at hand and your interests. How might this work be connected to subjects that already interest you? If nothing does the trick, try thinking of the assignment as a personal challenge. Accomplishing it might motivate you to keep going in your studies.

When in doubt about the value of academic assignments, you can always discuss it with your colleagues and teachers or with professionals from the field. Reading specialized journals and going on stage or to orientation meetings can help you understand the practical applications of theoretical concepts.



Feeling competent

In an academic context, **feeling competent follows from your ability to complete each step of an assignment.** The more confident you feel, the more you'll be motivated to bring your work to a successful conclusion.

Our perception of our own competence is deeply influenced by past experience. Some people tend to remember their accomplishments with ease, while others will more often think of hard times they've been through.

Competence is not an innate talent, but a disposition that you can develop. In the same way, you can also develop feelings of competence by adopting a constructive attitude when confronted with gaps in your skills.

How can I make myself feel competent?

Change the way you interpret academic results. Many university programs have limited enrolment, which means that you'll find yourself in class with

students who have satisfied the same requirements. It can be difficult to stand out in such a context. That's why it's best to compare yourself to yourself first, and to congratulate yourself for personal progress.

Give yourself the right to make mistakes. Don't give up on something at the first stumbling-block. It's normal not to succeed in everything all at once. By keeping at it, you can maintain your motivation and increase your chances of succeeding in the long run.

Know when to ask for help. Caution! Not giving up does not mean banging your head against the same wall over and over again! Knowing to ask for help when you feel the need for it is a sign of autonomy. Don't hesitate to discuss the problems you're dealing with with your friends and family, colleagues and teachers. They might have useful advice that could help you make headway on a difficult assignment.

The more competent you feel, the more willing you'll be to take an assignment on - and all the more enthusiastic about seeing the results! You'll trust yourself and feel

more in control of your academic fate, which leads us to our next point...

Feeling in control

When we feel more in control of what we're doing, we're often less reluctant to get started. **This feeling of control applies as much to the act of completing your assignments as to your marks.**

Like in the game of seduction, people who attribute their success to their own efforts and abilities (*i.e.*, internal causes) will have more self-confidence, and thus will be more willing to get started, than those who attribute success and failure to chance.

The most successful students recognize that they're responsible for their successes and failures. They see that their difficulties derive from internal causes that they can both control and modify, *e.g.* effort, work habits, time spent to studying. This attitude puts them in a good position to motivate themselves to do better next time.

How can I take control of my academic fate?

Change the way you see your assignments. Rather than thinking of your work as a long list of chores, why not see them as a challenge you're setting for yourself? Won't it be enjoyable to prove you can do it?

Choose effective work habits. By using note-taking strategies to minimize the amount of time you need to complete your readings and to enhance your study techniques, you'll definitely feel on top of things. Increased efficiency will also give you time to spend on other activities you enjoy (if needed, see our guide on effective study habits).

Own the work you have to do. It's easy to feel unmotivated when an assignment you haven't started yet is looming. By taking the time to sketch out a study or work plan, you can take ownership of the guidelines and steps to complete. And don't they say that getting started is half the battle?

Talk yourself through it! If you're having trouble sticking with your assignment, don't

be afraid to give yourself feedback throughout the work. Congratulate yourself each time you complete a step. If things aren't going exactly as you'd like, calmly bring yourself back to work. Remember that you're in control!

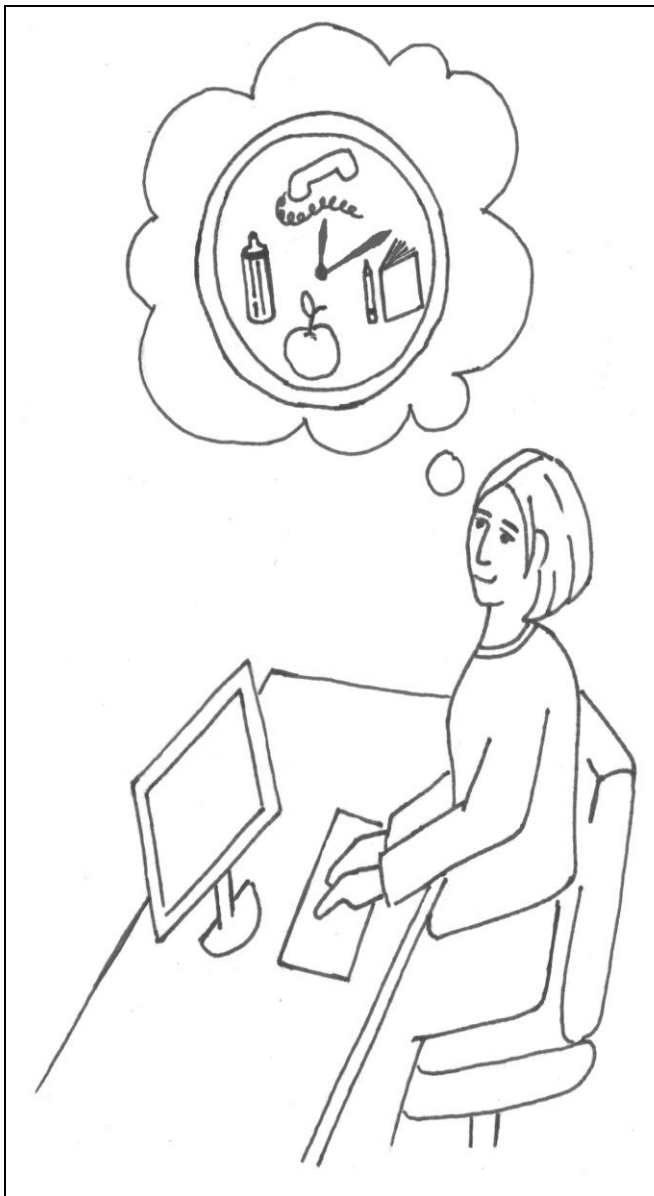
Time management: Going step-by-step

People who procrastinate know that justifying yourself requires a lot of effort. Rather than constantly losing your motivation, why not put that energy toward work by replacing your bad habits with good behaviour?

Organizing your time well is the best way to avoid last-minute stress and guilt, stay motivated and set aside quality time for leisure and your friends and family.

Students who know how to manage their time generally come out on top in terms of academic performance. They've learnt how to use their agendas as tools to help them achieve their short- and long-term goals.

By writing up a weekly plan, you'll keep yourself ahead of approaching deadlines and counteract the feeling that you don't have any pressing work to be done. To get a good start, let's go through time-management strategies step by step.



1. Collecting information

Know your habits. It's difficult to make a realistic plan without evaluating the situation first. Filling out the attached timetable as honestly as you can will help. You'll be asked to keep track of your day, hour by hour, for a week. As well, take the time to note what excuses you use to put certain assignments off.

By knowing how much time you already dedicate to your other obligations, it will be easier to set realistic study goals.

Know your best times. The most appropriate time to approach intellectual work generally varies from one person to the next. Some students find it easier to concentrate early in the morning, whereas others prefer to work in the evening.

It's important to set aside the time when you feel the most alert for assignments you find boring or complicated.

Give yourself an overview of the semester. Using your course syllabi, take note of important deadlines and write them

in your agenda. You should also write down those activities that you'd like to give some time to (work, birthdays, sports, going out, etc.). This way you'll see scheduling conflicts, during the end of the semester for example, well in advance and be able to plan around them.

By taking time to identify your priorities, you'll be able to make more informed choices and avoid cancelling meetings at the last minute.

2. Weekly planning

Make a list of your goals every week. A good action plan will take into account both short- and long-term goals. A good plan will be flexible, offering you the versatility necessary to accommodate possible rearrangements.

Take a look at the closest deadlines first, but don't forget to block out time to spread out your research projects and prepare for your exams.

Make a timetable. You can use the attached table as a model. When estimating the amount of time necessary for each

assignment, remember that people tend to underestimate how much time they need. It's better to give yourself the gift of finishing early than having too tight a schedule!

a) Note down activities with set times. Based off the observations you recorded in the attached timetable, fill in the time slots that are already taken (by class, work, meals, etc.).

b) Find times in the day that are available for schoolwork. Which of the open time slots seems like it will be the most productive?

c) Set yourself the most difficult tasks first. This way you'll be sure to work on them when you feel most effective.

d) Favour shorter work sessions. These are much more profitable than long study sessions. You can divide longer assignments into smaller parts. It's best not to do intellectual work more than ten hours a day, which includes time spent in class.

3. Evaluate and improve your planning

It's not uncommon to have to try a number of different schedules before coming up with one that works. Take the time to look over your plans at the end of the week to see what problems you encountered.

If you're having trouble meeting your goals, you may have underestimated the time that should be given to each assignment. Maybe you've taken on too many responsibilities, or perhaps your goals weren't very realistic. Time management often means thinking strategically and employing preventive measures to avoid procrastination. You can't change your habits overnight.

What to do in case of emergencies

- 1.** Make a to-do list, starting with the most urgent assignments.
- 2.** If you don't have enough time to study everything, cut the same proportion of material for each course. It's better not to be as prepared as you'd like than to risk failing in one class.

3. Cross out each completed task. At this stage, you won't be able to accomplish very high quality work. Just be sure that you've done everything required.
4. Start earlier next time!

Conclusion

It's never too late to develop good work habits! It's not relaxing, but you'll feel the benefits in your personal as well as your professional life. Give yourself ample time to achieve the changes you'd like to see.

It's quite possible you'll experience moments of weakness on your way to those goals. It's important to forgive yourself for detours and relapses. Remember that persistence is acquired through practice. And also that you're never starting from scratch - you're just continuing down the same path!

Appendix: Timetable

Hours	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6h-7h							
7h-8h							
8h-9h							
9h-10h							
10h-11h							
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21h-22h							
23h-24h							

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