

# Procrastination

**Paria** Procrastination is a catch-all word to describe all the ways that we find to avoid doing something we should do. Procrastinating is easiest to do when we make general plans for doing the task.

I'm going to study all Saturday afternoon, after doing a bit of housework.

*Result:* After working around the house for several hours, I start studying around 3 p.m., read a few sections and stop because I'm tired and hungry.

Rather than making general plans for a long time period, make specific goals for shorter time periods. For example, our student could plan to:

- Clean the bathroom.
- Do the dishes.
- Take time for lunch and to relax.
- Read and summarize one chapter and review terminology from the previous chapter.

A specific plan gives you measurable goals to work toward and several opportunities to evaluate your progress and adjust your plans. You may not be able to get everything done (your laundry is still piled in heaps on the floor and you need to finish the next chapter by Monday), but you have made good progress toward completing what you need to have done.

Many people who procrastinate also have unrealistically high expectations of their own work. Their feelings about what they believe they *should* do, prevent them from actually doing it.

## Strategies

1. **Set priorities.** The most important step is to pick one project and focus on it.  
**Not:** *I don't know where to begin, so I can't begin at all.*  
**Not:** *I have to do EVERYTHING! Nothing else is worthwhile.*
2. **Break the task down into manageable amounts.** I don't have to do the whole task at once. I can take separate small steps to complete the task.  
**Not:** *There's so much to do and it's so complicated. There's no way I can do a research paper in time.*
3. **Set small, specific goals.** If I write 2 pages everyday, I can finish the first draft of my paper in two weeks with a week left to revise it.  
**Not:** *I have to write a major research paper in 3 weeks.*



4. **Take one step at a time.** What is the next step on my list? I'll concentrate on that step right now.

**Not:** *It's too much. I'll never get it all done.*

5. **Reward yourself right away when you accomplish a small goal** - I spent an hour working, now I'll call a friend.

**Not:** *I can't take any time out until I'm completely finished.*

6. **Use a time schedule.** I can use these times this week to work on my assignment: Monday 7-8, Tuesday 7-9, Saturday 10-12.

**Not:** *I must devote the whole week to this project*

7. **Know where your time is going.** I will look for resources using one database and then see if I have enough information to start on my paper.

**Not:** *I'll just go online, find a couple of good sites and then start my paper.*

Hours can pass when you are online. Set specific plans for your time online. Write out the goal of your search and refer back to it every 5 or 10 minutes. You can even set a timer to go off every 10 minutes as a reminder to check that you're still on task.

8. **Optimize your chances for success.** I'll start my research paper in the library.

**Not:** *I'll start my research paper on Sunday evening at home.*

In an online course, a good example of optimizing your chance of success is planning to download a program, especially if you've never done it before, when technical help is available from your Internet Service Provider or the helpdesk. If you have problems, you will be able to get help at that time, rather than having to wait until the next day.

Another example is to schedule time to work on the course just before or during your instructor's online office hours. You will be able to get answers to your questions when you need them, rather than being stuck until your question is answered.

9. **Just get started.** I'll write what first comes to mind, then improve it later.

**Not:** *I can't write until I'm inspired and can write it all out perfectly the first time*

Computers make revising your work easy. Although organizing your thoughts may be difficult later on, it's usually easier to revise and add to existing work than to think up ideas from scratch.

10. **Be realistic.** I have limits. I can take on fewer responsibilities and still like myself.

**Not:** *I should be able to work full-time, take classes, take care of my children, and spend time with friends with no trouble.*

This strategy particularly applies to an online environment. Competent and knowledgeable adults can have problems with even basic computer tasks. Learning everything there is to know about computers is not realistic for most people. Focus on the task you want to accomplish and not on having the technology work how it's "supposed to". If, for example, you can't figure out how to submit your work using the course e-mail, use your personal e-mail or fax it in.

