

12 GUARANTEED WAYS FOR STUDENTS TO IMPROVE FOCUS AND REDUCE PROCRASTINATION

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1. IDENTIFY EXACTLY WHY YOU PROCRASTINATE

There are many possible reasons why you sometimes procrastinate.

It's hard to address the issue of procrastination unless you know the exact reasons why you procrastinate. Here are some possible ones:

- You don't see the purpose behind what you're doing
- You don't think you're good at the subject, so you feel discouraged
- There are distractions that you haven't eliminated yet
- You're tired
- You don't know where to start

Take a few minutes and write down the reasons you procrastinate. Based on what you write down, use the relevant tips in the rest of this checklist.

2. TIME YOUR STUDY SESSIONS AND BREAKS

If you lack focus when it comes to academics, it's probably because you aren't taking an intentional approach towards it.

Start using a stopwatch to time your study sessions and breaks, and your studying efficiency will immediately increase.

3. DON'T STUDY FOR TOO LONG AT ONE GO

Most students focus best when they study for about 30 to 45 minutes at a go.

There's no point trying to focus for 2 or 3 hours straight, because it's impossible for you to focus for that long. This is proven by research.

After 30 to 45 minutes of studying, take a 5- to 10-minute break. This approach will make you more productive overall.

4. BEFORE STARTING WORK, WRITE DOWN THE 3 TO 4 TASKS YOU WANT TO COMPLETE FOR THE DAY

If your to-do list is extremely long, you're more likely to feel overwhelmed. And when you feel overwhelmed, you're more likely to procrastinate and to give in to distractions.

Before you start work, take out a rough sheet of paper and write down the 3 to 4 key tasks that you want to complete for the day.

For example, you might write down:

1. Read Science textbook, pages 21 to 25
2. Complete Math assignment, questions 1 to 4
3. Create outline for English essay
4. Read History notes for Chapter 4

This way, you'll be focused on the most important tasks you have to complete.

5. AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, STUDY AT THE SAME TIME EACH DAY

In the long run, effective students don't rely on willpower to get the work done. Instead, they rely on systems and routines. This way, they get the work done even when they don't feel motivated.

I know that it isn't possible to study at exactly the same time each day, but keep to the same rough schedule as much as you can.

6. DON'T MULTITASK

Research shows that multitasking simply isn't effective.

When people multitask, they're just switching from one task to another. Each time this happens, focus and productivity decrease.

I recommend that students never multitask. Instead, focus on one task at a time. If you feel like you really can't do this, it's better to work in shorter, focused bursts and take more frequent breaks.

7. DO DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES DAILY

Studies have proven that deep breathing exercises reduce stress and increase willpower. It takes just a couple of minutes a day to do these exercises.

Once a day, close your eyes and inhale for 4 counts, then exhale for 4 counts. Repeat this 8 to 10 times. Over a period of a few weeks, you'll notice that you're calmer and more focused.

8. BEFORE STARTING WORK, REMOVE ALL POSSIBLE DISTRACTIONS

This may sound like common sense, but most of the students I've talked to don't apply this tip. Here are some suggestions:

- Turn off your phone and put it in another room
- Turn off your computer
- Unplug the TV or put the TV remote in another room
- Use earplugs if your surroundings are noisy
- Put any distracting books, magazines, etc. at the other end of the room
- Delete the apps or games on your phone that distract you

9. GET AT LEAST 8 HOURS OF SLEEP EVERY NIGHT

It may seem like this is impossible to do, but it isn't. You just need to make sleep a priority. I did this when I was in university, and I became far more productive.

Research shows that sleep is a crucial factor that affects focus, memory and brain function. So if you aren't sleeping 8 hours a night, this is probably a major reason why you struggle with procrastination and a lack of focus.

10. BREAK DOWN BIG TASKS INTO SMALLER TASKS

When students are presented with a big task (e.g. write 5-page History paper), they often procrastinate because the task seems too daunting.

Break down the task into smaller tasks, and you'll be more likely to get to work, one bit at a time. For example, you could break down the task, "write 5-page History paper", into the following tasks: (a) Find 5 reference articles online, (b) read pages 50 to 60 of the textbook, (c) write outline, (d) write introduction, (e) write body paragraphs, (f) write conclusion, (g) edit, (h) proofread.

Write down these smaller tasks, then work on just one task at a time.

11. REWARD YOURSELF AFTER EACH TASK

Studies have proven that when you reward yourself after you complete a task, you're more likely to establish healthy habits and routines.

The reward doesn't have to be big. For example, after you finish a homework assignment, you could reward yourself by playing the guitar for 5 minutes.

If you finish reading one chapter of the textbook, you could reward yourself by going for a short walk.

12. IF A TASK TAKES 3 MINUTES OR LESS TO COMPLETE, DO IT IMMEDIATELY

This is a tip adapted from productivity expert David Allen. The reason that many students lack focus and procrastinate is that they have a long list of "small" tasks to complete. As such, their to-do list seems never-ending, which makes them feel overwhelmed.

The solution is to complete "small" tasks immediately when they arise, instead of allowing them to pile up. For example, complete these tasks right away:

- Pick up a book on the floor that doesn't belong there
- Clear your desk after you've completed your work for the day
- File a set of notes or graded assignments
- Make a quick phone call
- Ask your parents to sign a consent form
- Create a checklist

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