



Procrastinating Again?! by Dr. Henry Khat, UniSIM

Procrastination is the act of delaying doing high priority tasks by replacing them with lower priority ones. In higher education, **80% to 95%** of students engage in procrastination (Steel, 2007). And procrastination leads to students not completing their study tasks and in turn, affects their learning negatively. Thus, you have to learn to manage procrastination effectively if you happen to be one of those procrastinators. Effective procrastination management lies on your ability to set **SMART** (Specific - Measurable - Attainable - Realistic - Timely) study goals, plan and actualise study tasks to achieve these goals, monitor the completion of these tasks and reflect on, and adjust your goals and tasks flexibly. Some of the tried and tested procrastination management measures are described below.

- a) Create a study timetable that schedules study tasks to achieve your study goals set.
- b) Set a reward for yourself for achieving a study task. Use the reward as a pull motivation to stay on task.
- c) Alternatively, recognize the negative consequences you may suffer if you do not complete a study task. Use this as a push motivation to ensure that you stay on tasks,
- d) If you are resistant in starting a scheduled study task, reduce this inertia by working on it for **10** minutes first and gauging how it goes. You can then decide if you want to carry on with that task after the **10** minutes are up. If you choose not to carry on with that task, consider exchanging it with another study task that is scheduled to be done later. Go back to the original task again afterwards. The key here is you should never take this as an excuse to discontinue the study process.
- e) Sometimes, you may have an unexpected chore to do during a scheduled study time.
 - If this chore is just an excuse you conjure up in order to procrastinate, try strategies in b), c) or d) and carry on with the task according to your set schedule.
 - If it is a chore that is of high priority and it requires immediate attention, you can proceed to do it first. However, you must make time elsewhere to complete the originally scheduled study task as soon as possible.
 - If this chore is of low priority and it can be delayed in completing, you can arrange to do it during the subsequent time period you have scheduled for non-study related or relaxation activities.



- f) If you discover that you have not completed a study task within its scheduled time due to any other procrastinating acts, focus on making up for the time lost by using some of the time you have scheduled for non-study related or recreational activities to complete the task as soon as possible. The important thing here is you should not miss task completion deadlines back to back. Once you do not complete more than two scheduled tasks in a row, the tendency of you missing the remaining task completion deadlines will increase.
- g) Self monitoring and reflection of your study progress is an important part of procrastination management. They help you to improve your level of confidence, commitment and persistence in achieving the study tasks. Enhance effective strategies or react flexibly to ineffective strategies through consciously reflecting on:
- **REFLECT: Has a particular strategy worked for me?**
 - ✓ If yes, what makes it work and how I can further leverage on it to make my procrastination management more effective?
 - ✓ If no, what are the causes? How can I readjust the strategy or change to another one to stop me from procrastinating?
 - **REFLECT: What are the learning emotions that I have experienced when I am actualising a particular strategy?**
 - ✓ How can I leverage on the positive emotions to improve the effectiveness of the strategy?
 - ✓ How can I remove the negative emotions that weaken the effectiveness of the strategy?

In short, effective procrastination management relies very much on a student's level of confidence, commitment and persistence in setting up, actualizing, monitoring, reflecting on and adjusting his/her study goals and tasks flexibly. The list of strategies mentioned above is not exhaustive. If you have effective ways to deal with procrastination, just drop me an email at henrykhiat@unisim.edu.sg to share with us your experience.

References:

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