

Dealing with Procrastination

RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS AND TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR TIME AND FOCUS

1. What is Procrastination

Procrastination is the unnecessary delay of an important task, even when you know putting it off may make things harder later.

It is usually not about laziness, lack of motivation, or poor time management. More often, procrastination is an emotional response to a task that feels overwhelming, boring, stressful, or unclear. Avoiding the task may feel better in the moment, but it often leads to more stress, less time, and rushed work later.

2. Signs of Procrastination

Common signs include:

- Avoiding an assignment even when you have time
- Doing easier, low-priority tasks first
- Waiting until you feel “in the mood” to start
- Getting distracted by your phone, social media, or other tasks
- Leaving work until the last minute, then rushing to finish

Quick self-check: If you experience 2–3 of these regularly, you may be in a pattern of procrastination.

3. Why We Procrastinate – and What Helps

Different reasons call for different strategies.

- **If the task feels vague:** Make the first step specific.
Example: instead of “work on essay,” write “choose a topic” or “draft the introduction.”
- **If the task feels overwhelming:** Break it into smaller steps.
Focus on one part at a time.
- **If the task feels boring:** Use short work sprints, accountability, or a small reward.
- **If the task feels stressful:** Lower the pressure.
Start imperfectly instead of waiting to feel fully ready.

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4. Tips for Getting Yourself Started

Use the 5-Minute Rule

Tell yourself you only need to work on the task for 5 minutes. Starting often reduces the stress around the task, and once you begin, it is easier to keep going.

Start Small

Choose the smallest useful action you can take right now. Small progress is often enough to build momentum.

Break Tasks Into Clear Steps

Big tasks are easier to avoid. Smaller tasks are easier to start. Turn “study for midterm” into actions like:

- review lecture 3
- make flashcards
- complete 5 practice questions

Set Short, Realistic Deadlines

Mini-deadlines can make a task feel more manageable and help you build momentum before the final deadline sneaks up.

Prioritize With the Eisenhower Matrix

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	Do  Tasks you will do immediately Ex: Project Planning	Schedule  Tasks you will schedule to do later Ex: Health checkup, Exercise
NOT IMPORTANT	Delegate  Tasks you will delegate to someone else Ex: Replying to certain emails	Eliminate  Tasks that you will eliminate Ex: Web Surfing, Watching TV

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5. Keeping Yourself Going

- Change your environment if your space is distracting
- Put your phone away and close unnecessary tabs
- Share accountability with a friend or classmate
- Use short work sprints, such as **25 minutes on, 5 minutes off**
- Reflect on why you are avoiding the task, but do not dwell on guilt
- Treat your future self like your best friend: do work now that will help them later

6. Getting Back on Track

If you have already fallen behind, it is still possible to reset. The goal is not to be perfect. The goal is to restart.

- Start with one small action
- Focus on the next step, not the whole problem
- Let go of guilt and return to action

Quick tip: Getting back on track quickly matters more than catching up perfectly.

7. Resources and Tools

If procrastination is getting in the way, support and structure can help.

- [ThriveTMU](#) for student wellbeing resources and support
- [TMU Student Learning Centre \(SLC\)](#) or library study spaces for focus
- [A Pomodoro timer](#) such as Pomofocus or another 25/5 timer
- **A friend, classmate, or study group** for accountability