



# Procrastination



## Causes, Tips and Questionnaire

### Causes

- **Lack of relevance:** If something is neither relevant nor meaningful to you personally, it may be difficult to get motivated even to begin.
- **Acceptance of others' goals:** If a project has been imposed or assigned to you and it is not consistent with your own interest, you may be reluctant to spend the necessary time to see it to conclusion.
- **Perfectionism:** Having unreachable standards will discourage you from pursuing a task. Remember, perfection is unattainable.
- **Fear of disapproval or criticism:** Overvaluing others' responses to your work can create anxiety that will interfere with getting the work accomplished.
- **Ambiguity:** If you are uncertain of what is expected of you, it may be difficult to get started.
- **Fear of the unknown:** If you are venturing into new territory, uncertainty may inhibit your desire to begin.
- **Inability to handle the task:** You feel you lack the personal resources to do the job, so you may avoid it completely.
- **Hopelessness:** When you are depressed or overwhelmed, you may believe any activity will be pointless.
- **Helplessness:** You believe your situation is caused by factors beyond your control and therefore, nothing you can do will make a difference.
- **Overwhelming yourself:** You may assume you must do everything at once instead of breaking each job down into small, discrete, manageable units which you can complete one step at a time.
- **Self-labeling:** You label yourself "a procrastinator" or a "lazy person" and this labeling causes you to expect little or nothing from yourself.
- **Undervaluing the rewards:** You fail to initiate any meaningful activity because you feel the reward simply wouldn't be worth the effort.
- **Fear of failure:** You imagine that you will fail and therefore, think, "why bother" or "why even try." This attitude will ensure that you will fail – not because you aren't capable, but because you don't believe you can succeed.

- **Fear of success:** Because of lack of confidence, success may seem even more risky than failure. You may fear what will be expected of you next if you succeed on this project.
- **Low frustration tolerance:** Rather than being patient and persistent when life gets tough, you may rebel against the “unfairness” of it all and give up completely.
- **Guilt and self-blame:** If you are firmly convinced of the negative appraisals you make about yourself, for example, that you are inherently bad, worthless, unlovable, or unchangeable, you will naturally feel depressed and unmotivated.

**What to do about procrastination:**

**Begin now.**

- **Monitor your internal self-talk.** You can learn to identify negative, self-statements by asking yourself when depressed, anxious or bored, “What am I believing about myself this time?” Make positive self-statements.
- **Write reminders.** Even with the best intentions, human memory is highly fallible, subject to all sorts of distractions.
- **Make honest decisions about your work.** If you wish to spend only a minimal amount of effort or time on a particular task, admit it – do not allow guilt feelings to interfere with your realization of this fact. Weigh the consequences of various amounts of investment in a project and find the optimal return for your investment. This step exposes intentional reasons for avoiding work. If you have been unintentionally avoiding work, admit to yourself that you do want to achieve certain goals and accept the responsibilities involved in meeting those goals.
- **Understand what is required.** Work to acquire an adequate understanding of what is necessary to accomplish a task within a given time frame.
- **Be honest with yourself.** Distinguish between activities that dramatize your sense of commitment and those that will help you accomplish the task. Devote only that amount of time that is appropriate for each part of a task. Develop an overview of the entire project and visualize the steps that are needed to reach completion.
- **Realize that human beings need variety and relaxation.** Intersperse rewards, relaxation, and gratification for work completed. This will help you feel less resentful of the task and the work that still needs to be done.
- **Reassess time commitments as necessary.** Address problems when they arise and do something about them quickly.
- **Be reasonable in your expectations of yourself.** Perfectionist or extremely strict expectations may cause you to rebel or may sabotage your progress.
- **Practice good time management principles.** Learn how to schedule your time wisely and increase your productivity. See Counseling Services’ information on Time Management.
- **Build fun into your life!**

## Procrastination Quotient

Directions: Mark an "X" in the column for your response to each of the twelve items. Total the "X"s in each column, and then multiply by the number at the bottom of each column, then add the products.

|   | Almost<br>Always | Frequently | Occasionally | Almost<br>Never |
|---|------------------|------------|--------------|-----------------|
| I find reasons for not acting immediately on a difficult study assignment                       |                  |            |              |                 |
| I know what I have to do but find that I do something else                                      |                  |            |              |                 |
| I carry my books, notes, and study material with me to various places but do not study them     |                  |            |              |                 |
| I work best at the "last minute" when the pressure is really on                                 |                  |            |              |                 |
| There are too many interruptions that interfere with my most important study goals              |                  |            |              |                 |
| I avoid setting priorities for the day which keeps me from doing the most important tasks first |                  |            |              |                 |
| I avoid or delay unpleasant decisions   |                  |            |              |                 |
| I like to get my room in excellent order before starting on my assignments                      |                  |            |              |                 |
| I wait for inspirations before becoming involved in important study tasks                       |                  |            |              |                 |
| I fear that most of my study techniques don't work  |                  |            |              |                 |
| I demand perfection in my study performance   |                  |            |              |                 |
| I have been too tired, nervous, or upset to get started on my assignments                       |                  |            |              |                 |

Total Responses in each column:                                                  
x4            x3            x2            x1

**P.Q. below 22 = minor concern**

**P.Q. 23 to 32 = moderate concern**

**P.Q. above 32 = major concern**

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_  
**TOTAL SCORE \_\_\_\_\_ = P.Q.**

## Causes of Procrastination

The following mind-sets are most commonly associated with procrastination and do-nothingism. Becoming aware of such mind-sets and working to change them will help you to overcome procrastination.

### 1. **Hopelessness**

When you are depressed, you feel so overwhelmed by your present pain that you forget you felt better in the past and find it inconceivable that you might feel more positive in the future. Therefore you believe any activity to be pointless because you are certain your lack of motivation and depressed mood are endless and irreversible.

### 2. **Helplessness**

You believe you can't possibly do anything that will make yourself feel better because you are convinced that your moods are caused by factors beyond your control, such as fate, hormone cycles, dietary factors, luck, and other people's evaluations of you. In essence, you feel as if you have no control over your life and your future.

### 3. **Overwhelming yourself**

There are several ways you may overwhelm yourself into doing nothing. You may magnify a task to the degree that it seems impossible to tackle. You may assume you must do everything at once instead of breaking each job down into small, discrete, manageable units which you can complete one step at a time. You might also inadvertently distract yourself from the task at hand by obsessing about endless other things you haven't gotten around to doing yet.

### 4. **Jumping to conclusions**

You believe that it's not within your power to take effective action that will result in satisfaction because you are in the habit of saying "I can't" or "I would but . . ." A related mind-set involves making broad generalizations which are based on scanty, incomplete, or erroneous information, such as the "real you," and in turn, you expect little or nothing from yourself.

### 5. **Self-labeling**

The more you procrastinate, the more you condemn yourself as inferior. This further saps your self-confidence and ability to act. This problem is compounded when you label yourself "a procrastinator" or a "lazy person." This labeling causes you to see your lack of effective action as the "real you," and in turn, you expect little or nothing from yourself.

### 6. **Undervaluing the rewards**

When you are depressed, you fail to initiate any meaningful activity because you perceive most any task as being terribly difficult or because you feel the reward simply wouldn't be worth the effort.

7. **Perfectionism**

You defeat yourself with inappropriate goals and standards. Because you will settle for nothing less than a perfect performance in most everything you do, you frequently end up making tasks take more time consuming and laborious than they need be. This ritual commonly results in avoidance and procrastination.

8. **Fear of failure**

Another mind-set which paralyzes you is the fear of failure. Because you imagine that putting in the effort and not succeeding would be an overwhelming personal defeat – one of the most common over generalizations. You reason, “If I fail at this, it means I will fail at anything.” This, of course, is impossible. Nobody can fail at everything. A second mind-set that contributes to fear of failure is the tendency to evaluate your performance exclusively on the outcome and to discount your individual effort. This mind-set reflects a “product orientation” rather than a “process orientation” and can be detrimental to your self-esteem.

9. **Fear of success**

Because of your lack of confidence, success may seem even more risky than failure because you are certain it is based on chance. Therefore, you are convinced you couldn't maintain success, and you believe your accomplishments will falsely raise the expectations of others. When the awful truth that you are basically a “loser” ultimately comes out, the disappointment, rejection, and pain will be all the more bitter. Since you feel sure you will eventually fall off the cliff, it seems safer not to go mountain climbing at all.

10. **Fear of disapproval of criticism**

You imagine that if you try something new, any mistake or flub will be met with strong disapproval and criticism because the people you care about won't accept you if you are human and imperfect. The risk of rejection seems so dangerous that to protect yourself you adopt as low a profile as possible. If you don't make any effort, you can't foul up!

11. **Coercion and resentment**

A deadly enemy of motivation is a sense of coercion. You feel under intense pressure to perform, and much of it is self generated. This happens when you try to motivate yourself with moralistic “shoulds” and “oughts.” You tell yourself, “I should do this” and “I have to do that.” Then you feel obligated, burdened, tense, resentful and guilty.

12. **Low frustration tolerance**

You assume that you should be able to solve your problems and reach your goals rapidly and easily, and you react with a frenzied state of panic or rage when life presents you with obstacles which aren't easy to overcome. Rather than being patient and persistent with life gets tough, you may rebel against the “unfairness” of it all and give up completely.

13. **Guilt and self-blame**

If you are firmly convinced of the negative appraisals you make about yourself, for example, that you are inherently bad, worthless, unlovable, or unchangeable, you will naturally feel depressed and unmotivated.

## Procrastination

Think about the following: There are only a certain number of hours a day. Are you using these hours the way you really want to? The way that is necessary to meet your life goals?

1. Identify your Life Goals. (How to get control of your time and your Life, by Alan Lakein)
  - A. Make a list of life time goals (i.e., success, security, happiness, etc.) Take five minutes to do this.
  - B. Make a list of goals you would like to accomplish in the next 3-5 years. Another five minutes.
  - C. If you were to be struck by lightning in six months, what would you do between now and then? List in five minutes.
  - D. Prioritize – from each list identify your top three goals. Prioritize these A-1, A-2, A-3. (This should give you nine goals.
  - E. List your A-1's on a clean piece of paper. Set deadlines and post on a calendar. Tell your friends about your goals and deadlines. Under each A-1, list the activities you would need to carry out to complete the goals. Decide which activities you can do today. Be realistic. Make a "To Do" list for the day. Carry over undone tasks to tomorrow's list.
2. Include fun in your goals (make a list of fun things you like to do, i.e. read the newspaper, read a novel, watch television, garden, play tennis, read a magazine, etc.) It is good to know which fun things you like best, then find time for those. Did you ever think you may be cheating yourself by spending too much time on something you enjoy the least? (Maybe too much time spent on TV).
3. Be kind to yourself! Give praise for tasks completed! Block negative thoughts. You accept others who are not perfect, accept yourself.
4. If you procrastinate because you are afraid, identify what it is you fear. Exactly what is it? What are the chances what you fear could really happen? What are some alternatives? Where can you get help?