

# HOW TO AVOID PROCRASTINATION

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We've all been there: you're sitting in front of your laptop, the intention being to start that academic paper, scientific report or thesis, but, instead, you end up procrastinating: you just remembered that you need to check your bank balance; you haven't checked your email accounts for an hour, maybe you've received something important; you *will* start writing, but you simply must clean your hard drive first...

Below are a few tips to help you *do* as opposed to dawdle.

## ■ Reasons (and strategies) for procrastination

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People can procrastinate for a number of reasons. Below are a few of the main ones, along with strategies to get around them.

- ▶ **You're not interested in the topic:** there might be a compulsory module that you just don't care for, but, sadly, you're stuck with it.
  - Sometimes, people don't like a topic because they don't fully understand it. If this is the case, go back to the basics of the subject and see where you're tripping up.
  - Ask your peers if they'd be up for a study session where you could discuss ideas and issues.
  - Try and relate the topic to your own interests and/or current events. Making such associations can help make the topic more appealing.
- ▶ **You have trouble getting started:**
  - Have a definite starting time. If it helps, arrange to meet a friend at the library at a certain time.
  - Know where you plan to study. If it's at home, make sure your work area contains only essential items. If you're going to the library, remember all the supplies you'll need.
  - Remember: the sooner you start, the sooner you can finish...
- ▶ **You view the task as one unmanageable chunk:** regarding a report or paper as a whole can be overwhelming.
  - Instead, break it down into a list of manageable parts that you can complete one by one.
  - Some people find making a work plan helps to keep them on track. However, make sure that it's realistic; otherwise, it could end up having the opposite effect.
  - Plan what it is you want to achieve each session, and work until you've accomplished this.
- ▶ **You struggle with reading and note-taking:** it could be that you lack important studying skills.
  - Check out "**Getting started: understanding the question and note-taking**" in this series.
  - Look for further guidance online.
  - Set up a study group with your peers.

► **As hard as you try, your mind just wanders...**

- Only allow yourself to check emails, What's App, Facebook, etc., after a certain period of time, or the completion of a particular task.
- Block distracting websites with online software.
- Have a pad or piece of paper on your desk for scribbling down thoughts you have. You can then deal with them later.
- If you find you're more distracted alone, go the library. If people distract you, find a solitary environment.
- Take regular breaks. For most people, their brain can only run effectively for certain amounts of time, say half an hour to an hour. Take a ten minute break when you feel your energy levels waning: clean the bathroom, read a few pages of a book, watch a YouTube video. But, be careful not to let your 10 minute break turn into the whole afternoon...

► **As soon as you start, your eyes just begin to close...**

- First of all: make sure you get a good night's sleep.
- Diet and exercise really do affect your energy levels so keep an eye on these aspects of your life.
- Keep well watered: enjoy a coffee, but also keep stocked up on water.
- Figure out what time of the day you work best.
- Make sure you have a good air supply: stale, stuffy air will slow down your brain function.
- Take regular breaks.
- Mix up your activities: don't simply concentrate on one topic or chapter.

► **You can't concentrate because of personal problems:** if you're suffering from persistent personal issues, from financial and grade worries, to anxiety or depression, you may find that your brain simply cannot block these out. In these circumstances, it might be worth dealing with them as much as possible first.

- Talk to friends and family.
- If you're worried about your grades or a particular assignment, speak to an approachable professor or supervisor. If not, you can also contact Katrin Winkler ([katrin.winkler@uni-hohenheim.de](mailto:katrin.winkler@uni-hohenheim.de)) or Kerstin Hoffbauer ([kerstin.hoffbauer@uni-hohenheim.de](mailto:kerstin.hoffbauer@uni-hohenheim.de)) to discuss any general study issues.
- Contact Hohenheim's Student Counseling Center (Zentrale Studienberatung (ZSB)). Their website address is (in German): <https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/institution/zentrale-studienberatung-7>
- Visit your local doctor and ask about counselors and/or therapists in the area. There are English speaking options available.

## ■ **General helpful strategies**

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- Set-up your own **support group**. You could meet with these people in person, or create a group online. Through this, you can discuss any issues. Simply knowing that there are others in the same boat as you can be motivation enough. Be careful not to use it as another procrastination channel though!

- ▶ You'll no doubt have to deal with interruptions. There are ways to help prevent some of these, for instance, put your mobile on flight mode, and/or let friends know that you'll be in "hermit mode" that day and to avoid contacting you.
- ▶ When you complete a section or goal, reward yourself!
- ▶ Try not to stress yourself out: this is not conducive to productivity. This assignment is probably not the be-all and end-all of your life. Do what you can, get assistance where possible, and hand it in on time.

## ■ Additional guidance

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Further assistance can be found in "**Ways to improve concentration**" in this series.