

Procrastination and Motivation:

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The game of “Get Started”

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Do you put off doing things like studying for a test, starting on a written assignment or doing your homework? From time to time, most of us put off doing tasks we find challenging or uninteresting, but if you do this on a regular basis and if it is

affecting your achievement in school or at work, you may be caught up in the **Procrastination Game** – otherwise known as the **‘I’ll Do It Later’ Game!**

Procrastination is like a little lie we tell ourselves. You think you will feel better if you do something fun, like watch TV, instead of studying or finishing homework, but in the LONG run you end up feeling WORSE not better. The Procrastination Game can negatively affect your grades, but here are some easy strategies to help you overcome this habit of procrastination.

1. Procrastination is a **mind game** where your inner voice is talking to you. So use that inner voice to change the game and how you think about the tasks you have to do.



- Tell yourself how great you will feel once the task is finished, rather than how you hate doing the work.
- Don’t say, ‘it will take me forever to do this’, when you have to study for a test. Instead use your inner voice to say, ‘in 30 minutes I can review my notes and the main ideas for the test, then I am done for today. Tomorrow I will spend another 30 minutes memorizing key facts.’
- If you get bored just thinking about homework, instead try to think about the rewards of accomplishing your work. Is your goal to get into a

high school or a college program? Put up posters or reminders around your room as reminders of your goals.

- Rather than complain about that large assignment, break it down into smaller steps and tell yourself you will do 3 out of the 10 steps TODAY. Making a small dent into a larger job will make you feel better.
 - Start with the small goals if you are facing a big assignment. Accomplishment feels great, so set small goals first, and take it day by day.
2. Watch out for **mindless procrastination**. If you often say ‘I just spent the whole evening doing homework but I can’t seem to finish everything in time’, be aware of mindless procrastination.
- **TURN OFF** all your instant message tools. Don’t get distracted by e-mails, facebook, etc. Just concentrate on the work at hand.
 - Turn off TV and the phone. Reading and responding to texts, or watching a bit of that TV program takes time away from your work and is a form of mindless procrastination. It ends up taking MORE time to finish that task because you constantly have to go back to review where you were before the disruption. If you really want to finish that project, make sure you are able to concentrate and focus without disturbances.
 - If you often get up to grab a snack while doing homework, make sure you have your drink or snack right there before you start. That way you won’t be tempted to get up and walk away from your studying.
 - Avoid wasting time each evening looking for study materials. Make sure your study area has all the paper, pens, pencils, books, etc. you need, so you can sit down and focus on working.

3. The **enemies of procrastination** are calendars, agendas and lists! Using these tools will help you accomplish your tasks.

- Make sure you write down ALL of your homework, long-term projects, tests, etc. into your agenda book. As you finish off each item, cross it off your agenda.
- For those larger projects or when studying for tests, break down the tasks into smaller steps and then LIST what needs to be done today, tomorrow and so on. The most logical place to write this down would be into your agenda, but you may prefer to keep your to-do list in a notebook, larger wall calendar or on an electronic device. It doesn't matter what tool you use, but it is very important to make these lists.



Finally, don't forget to **reward** yourself for a job well done. For instance if you have difficulty starting on that big science project, use the strategies listed above, break the project into smaller items and then each time you finish a step successfully, reward yourself. Small rewards for small steps, e.g., calling a friend or playing a game for 20 minutes, and bigger rewards for finishing the whole project, e.g., going to a concert but **only** when you have reached your goals.

It takes effort to change the '**Procrastination Game**' to the '**Get Started Game**'. The above tips and suggestions will help get you started.

For further information and suggestions contact the psychology staff at your school or Dr. D. Lean, Chief Psychologist.

