Overcoming Procrastination

I think I procrastinate. Where do I start?

Identify your signs of procrastination:

- How do you know you are procrastinating?
- What do you do to procrastinate?
- Identify situations or areas in which you procrastinate, (e.g., social relationships, school, finance, household, etc.)
- When do you procrastinate?

What might be underlying issues or causes of procrastination?

- Lack of relevance
- Lack of interest
- Perfectionism: having extremely high standards which are almost unreachable
- Evaluation anxiety: concern over other's responses to your work
- Ambiguity: uncertainty of what is expected to complete task
- Fear of failure and self-doubt
- Fear of success: (e.g., if succeed, concern over having to maintain same level of performance; concern over jealousy from others.)
- Inability to handle the task: lack of training or skill necessary to complete task
- Lack of information needed to complete task
- Environmental conditions:
  - Orderliness of work area
  - Availability of needed materials
  - Adequate lighting
  - Distractions
  - Temperature
  - Physical conditions (e.g., fatigue)
  - Anxiety over expectations that others have of you (e.g., high pressure to succeed; expectations that you will fail)
• All-or-nothing thinking (e.g., seeing one setback as total failure)
• Task seems overwhelming or unmanageable
• You are actually overextended, trying to manage too much

What can I do to manage procrastination?

• Identify what is necessary to accomplish task in a given amount of time; Get a sense of the entire project and what is required to complete it.
• Set goals for what is to be accomplished
• Break goals into smaller sub-goals (e.g., concentrate on one section of a paper at a time)
• Accept that there are no magical cures.
• Struggling with Fear of Failure?
  ○ Acknowledge strengths skills
  ○ Recall previous successes
  ○ Work on weaknesses
  ○ Take risks
• Struggling with Fear of Success?
  ○ Get accurate perspective of what your success will mean
  ○ Focus on your own needs and expectations rather than those of others.
• Perfectionism [1]:
  ○ Examine your standards. Are they realistic? Are they set so high that they are causing you distress?
  ○ Adjust your expectations and set realistic goals.

What are behavioral strategies I can use to overcome procrastination?

Identify and Plan:

• Identify your special behavioral diversions
• Note when and where you use them
• Plan how to diminish and control their use

Bits and Pieces:

• Break large tasks into small ones.
• Prioritize work and set deadlines.
• Use behavioral suggestions, e.g., lay the book you have to read out in plain view.
The Ten Minute Plan:

- Work on a dreaded task for ten minutes, then decide whether or not to continue.

Bogged in the Middle:

- Change location or position; take a break; switch subjects or tasks.

Contracts:

- Make contracts with yourself or someone you see regularly.

Premack Principle:

- Reward yourself for accomplishment.

**What are cognitive strategies I can use to overcome procrastination?**

Prepare yourself mentally. Think of:

- When, not if
- The price of delay
- Positive thoughts
- Learn to tolerate discomfort

Watch for mental self-seductions into behavioral diversions. Examples include:

- "I'll do it tomorrow"
- "What's the harm of a half-hour of TV now? I've still got time"
- "I deserve some time for myself"
- "I can't do it."

Dispute mental diversions: Ex. "I really don't have that much time left, and other things are sure to come up later," or "If I get this done, I'll be better able to enjoy my time," or "Once I get started, it won't be that bad."

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**Links**
[1] [https://campushealth.unc.edu/health-topics/stress-and-anxiety/perfectionism](https://campushealth.unc.edu/health-topics/stress-and-anxiety/perfectionism)