

PROCRASTINATION

How can we define Procrastination?

Putting it off

• Coming back
• to it later

Postponing

Leaving it
to the last
minute

Delaying

Procrastination Definition (www.cci.health.wa.gov.au)

“Making a **decision for no valid reason to delay or not complete** a task or goal you’ve committed to and instead **doing something of lesser importance** despite there being **negative consequences** to not following through on the original task or goal.”

Indicators that you may be procrastinating

- Filling your day with low priority tasks
- Waiting for the ‘right mood’ or ‘right time’ to tackle an important task
- Checking social media frequently
- Saying ‘yes’ to tasks that others ask you to do.
- Ignoring an important item on your ‘to do’ list for a long time.
- Sitting down to start work, and immediately deciding to make a hot drink.
- Checking emails frequently but not dealing with content.
- Check news websites frequently / browsing favourite sites

Procrastination Activities

- When you are procrastinating, what lower priority activities are occupying your time?



Procrastination Excuses

- When we don't get on with the task we have set ourselves we often experience a nagging sense of guilt.
- To help us feel less guilty, we often come up with ways to justify our procrastination activities, making it seem OK to put off the important task until later. How do you excuse procrastination?

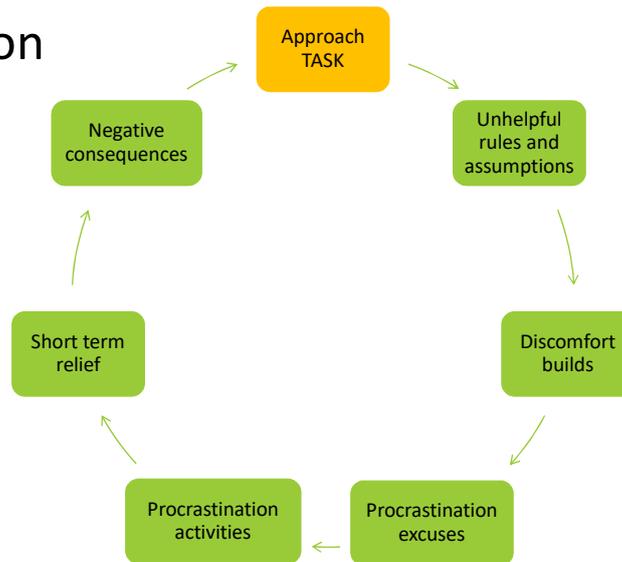
It's too late to start now.

I'm not in the right mood today.

Working on it today won't make any difference.

I work better when I'm stressed, I'll leave it to the last minute.

Procrastination Cycle



Unhelpful Rules and Assumptions

- Developing awareness of any underlying thought processes linked to procrastination can help us to break the procrastination cycle.
- What do we expect of ourselves in relation to this task? What sort of personal “shoulds” and “musts” are being activated?
- What sort of uncomfortable feelings / negative consequences are associated with this way of thinking?
- Psychologists have identified six common mind-sets that can contribute to procrastination.

(1) Need to be in Charge

- ❖ You feel resentful when faced with a task that is imposed by someone else.
- ❖ You don't like not being in control of how you spend your time.
- ❖ Procrastination pays off in the short term because it eases anger, and allows you to regain control, because you are doing (or not doing) the task on your own terms.

(2) Pleasure seeking

- ❖ When faced with an uninteresting task, you feel frustrated and bored.
- ❖ You take the view that life is too short to do boring or difficult things and that fun should come first.
- ❖ Procrastination pays off in the short term because you feel less frustrated and bored and get to do something more enjoyable.

(3) Fear of failure or disapproval

- ❖ You don't want your work to be judged negatively by others.
- ❖ You have very high standards for yourself and believe that if you can't do something 'perfectly' there is no point doing it all.
- ❖ Procrastination pays off in the short term because you haven't produced any work that could be criticised by others – it's better not to try and produce nothing rather than risk failing in any way.

(4) Fear of uncertainty or catastrophe

- ❖ You are fearful of things changing in uncertain ways.
- ❖ How well you achieve on this task may change what happens in the future for the worse.
- ❖ Procrastination pays off in the short term because it ensures that nothing changes for now.

(5) Low self-confidence

- ❖ You don't believe you are good enough to do the task.
- ❖ You feel that the task is too difficult for you.
- ❖ Procrastination pays off in the short term because the inadequacies you perceive in yourself won't be on show to others.

(6) Depleted energy

- ❖ You believe that being mentally or physically fatigued or unmotivated prevents you from getting started with any part of the task.
- ❖ You believe that you need to be in the right mood and not feel tired at all to be able to work on the task.
- ❖ You see procrastination as being a helpful way of rebuilding energy levels. You believe that by relaxing/resting instead of studying, motivation and/or energy levels will improve.

Consequences of procrastination

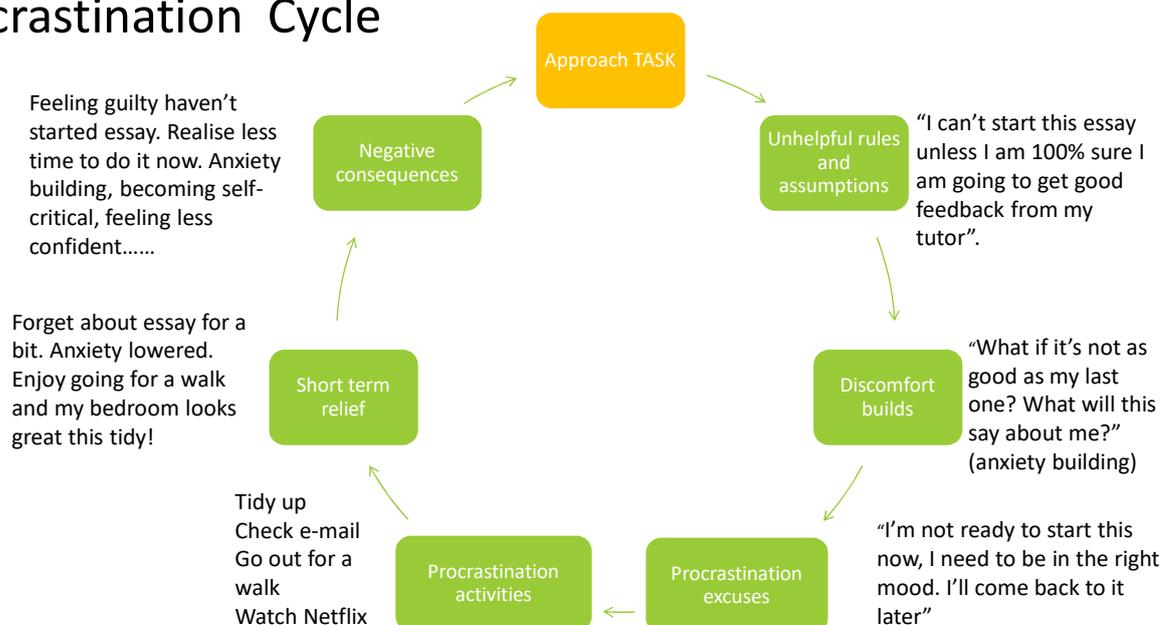
POSITIVE – SHORT TERM

- Relieves discomfort (e.g. anger, resentment, frustration, boredom, anxiety, embarrassment, exhaustion).
- You've stuck to your old rules / assumptions (stay in charge, keep having fun, avoid being evaluated, avoid things changing, avoid exposing perceived inadequacies, avoid challenging self).
- Gain pleasure – procrastination activities are often enjoyable.

NEGATIVE- LONGER TERM

- More discomfort (feeling guilty or ashamed, task becomes more overwhelming the longer you put it off, start feeling anxious / despairing).
- Your old unhelpful rules stay intact, avoid finding out new things about yourself and others which would help you adjust your rules/assumptions to make them more flexible.
- Become very self-critical – leads to anxiety / despair.
- Stress/pressure builds – time to complete task reduces – task becomes more overwhelming.
- Underperform on task – don't meet deadline or hand in work which you are disappointed with.

Procrastination Cycle



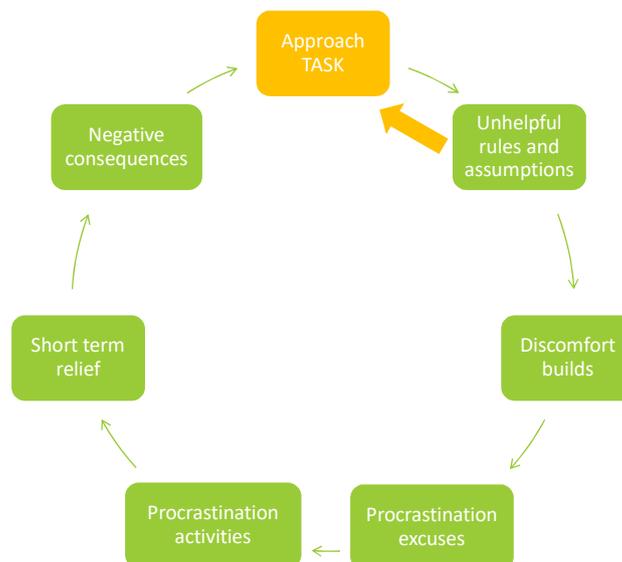
Challenging Procrastination

There are different points in the procrastination cycle where you can try and intervene to get yourself back to the task.

We shall focus on three areas:

- A. Adjusting unhelpful rules
- B. Managing distractions / practical strategies to help you get started on task.
- C. Dismissing procrastination excuses

A. Adjusting unhelpful rules



A. Adjusting unhelpful rules

- ❖ This can be hard to do after all these rules may have developed over a long time.....
- ❖ If you have identified an unhelpful rule – it could be useful to look at some alternative perspectives and generate a new, more helpful rule to guide your approach to important tasks.
- ❖ Summary of alternative perspectives follows.



(1) Need to be in charge

- ❖ I can tolerate doing things I don't want to.
- ❖ It's OK to follow others' instruction at times
- ❖ Doing things that don't suit me doesn't make me weak
- ❖ Things don't always have to be my way.

(2) Pleasure seeking

- ❖ I can tolerate short term boredom for long term gain.
- ❖ Pleasurable things are often more enjoyable after I've achieved something
- ❖ Fun and achievement are equally important.

(3) Fear of failure or disapproval

- ❖ Being imperfect is part of being human.
- ❖ I can tolerate not doing well as well as I would prefer or receiving some criticism. I can learn from this.
- ❖ If I produce something that isn't 'perfect' that doesn't always mean I will experience failure or disapproval.

(4) Fear of uncertainty or catastrophe

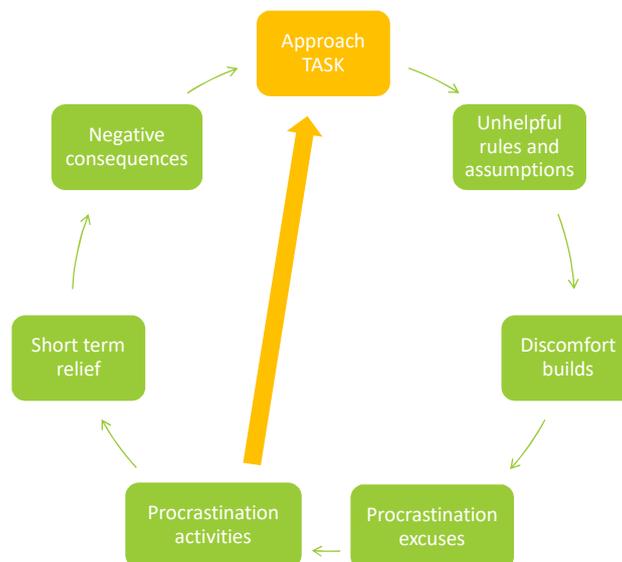
- ❖ Uncertainty is part of life that everyone has to tolerate.
- ❖ Catastrophes are unlikely events.
- ❖ I can take action and cope with any consequences that arise.
- ❖ I can cope if bad things happen, and worrying about it won't prevent it.

(5) Low self-confidence

- ❖ I have strengths and weaknesses just like anyone.
- ❖ I am capable and adequate in most things.
- ❖ I can do more than I give myself credit for.

(6) Depleted energy

- ❖ I can do more than I think when my energy is low.
- ❖ Rest is not always the answer, often taking action is.
- ❖ Tackling things step by step, when I'm tired could help me feel more energised and motivated.

B. Managing distractions

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In a recent survey of 1500 US undergraduate students.

- 74% - thought that social media and internet distractions fuelled their procrastination to a 'significant and worrying' extent.
- 51% - estimated that they lost over an hour of study time a day due to social media / internet browsing

Managing on-line distractions

- Internet blocking Apps

<https://freedom.to>

Users can choose how long they want to be blocked completely from the internet, social media and Apps for up to eight hours. Works for iPhone, iPad, Windows and Mac computers.

<https://getcoldturkey.com>

Blocks access to a selection of websites chosen by the user. Designed primarily for students as users can schedule websites to block at certain times, which can be repeated on a weekly basis. Can allow yourself breaks in which access is restored.

- Pomodoro technique

Work in focussed timed short study slots with regular breaks. Distractions are strictly managed to maintain concentration and productivity.

Pomodoro technique



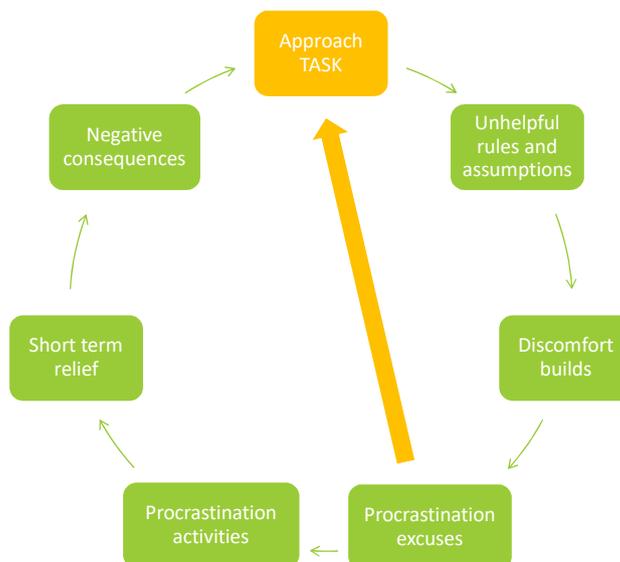
<https://cirillocompany.de/pages/pomodoro-technique>

- Choose a task to work on.
- Set timer for 25 mins (a Pomodoro).
- Log any distractions on notepad.
- Work on task until time is up
- Take a 5 minute break.
- After 4 Pomodoros take a 30 minute break



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0k0TQfZGSc>

C. Dismissing procrastination excuses



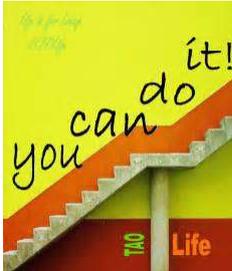
Dismissing procrastination excuses

- ❖ Procrastination excuses tend to involve
 - A. Identifying a truth about the situation (**Truth**)
 - B. Concluding from this truth that it would be better to delay the important task to another time (**Unhelpful Conclusion**)

- ❖ To move ourselves back to the task, we can **challenge** an unhelpful conclusion and come up with a **New Helpful Conclusion**

Truth	Old unhelpful conclusion	New helpful Conclusion
I'm really tired	I'm better off coming back to this when I've rested.	I can still make a small start on it now, and then rest.
I don't want to do it now.	I might feel more like doing it tomorrow.	I might not feel like doing it later, so I might as well get started now.
I'm missing out on the fun happening now.	I'll wait to do it when nothing social going on with friends.	If I make a start now, I can reward myself with meeting up with friends later.
I work better under pressure.	I'll leave it to the last minute.	It's still worth making a start now, it might backfire if I leave it too late.
I don't have enough time to get it all done.	I'll wait until I have a lot of time to do it.	I'll get part of it done in the time I have now.
I don't feel inspired.	I'll wait until I do.	If I get started inspiration may follow.
I have plenty of time.	I don't need to start now.	I'll get on top of it now, better not to leave it to the last minute.

Encourage rather than Criticise

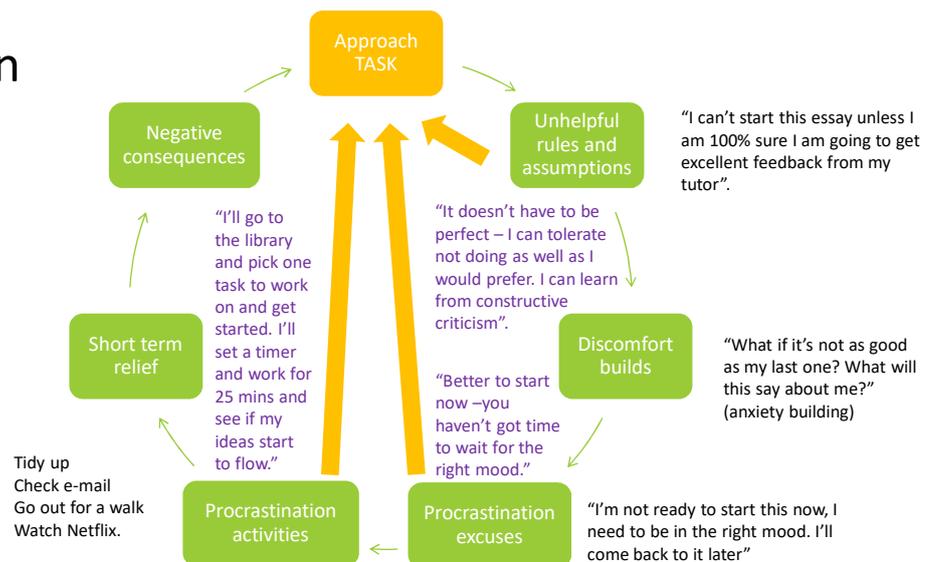


make it happen.

- ❖ We often criticise ourselves as a way of trying to motivate ourselves.
- ❖ This is often counterproductive and leads to anxiety.
- ❖ Try changing the way you talk to yourself.
- ❖ Avoid “should”, “musts” and “oughts”.
- ❖ Try using motivating self talk to encourage yourself to get started on a task.



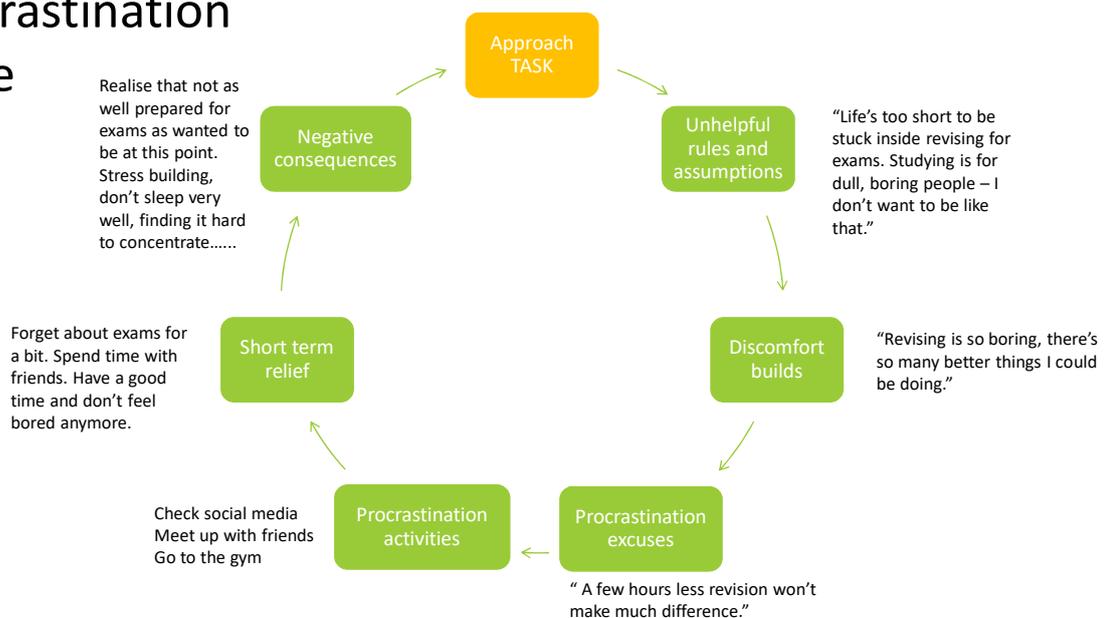
Procrastination Cycle



Summary

- Developing awareness of your procrastination behaviour is important first step.
- You approach changing procrastination in a number of ways:
 - ❖ Adjust old unhelpful rules / assumptions
 - ❖ Dismiss procrastination excuses
 - ❖ Use positive motivational self-talk
 - ❖ Manage distractions / develop practical strategies to help you get started.

Procrastination Cycle



DON'T PUT OFF TILL TOMORROW
THE THINGS THAT CAN BE DONE TODAY

