

Learning Online: Establishing and Maintaining Motivation: Managing Procrastination (Slide 1)

I'm Jennifer Parsons, an Academic Development Specialist at the Student Success Centre. In this video, I'm going to discuss some of the negative thought patterns that can lead to procrastination and how to address them.

When you are procrastinating.... (Slide 2)

How do you procrastinate (i.e. What are you doing instead of the task?)

Procrastination is choosing to put off what you have intended to do, even though you know that this is not in your best interests – that is, it has a consequence that you don't want, such as a lower grade. The consequence may also be the toll it takes on your stress levels, your feelings about your academic work, or your opinion of yourself.

If procrastination is an unhelpful habit for you, please take a moment to consider how you are procrastinating. That is, what are you doing instead of the work you had planned? Most of us have a go-to distraction when we are avoiding a task – perhaps checking social media, sleeping, or cleaning the house. Avoidance tasks may seem harmless or even positive and necessary, but if they take the place of intended work, they can be part of procrastination.

Why are you procrastinating? (Slide 3)

Perhaps more importantly– WHY do you think you are avoiding the intended task?

Let's look at some common reasons we tend to procrastinate. You will notice that the outer circle is mostly focused on prioritizing and managing our time, understanding the task itself, as well as being distracted or fatigued. While these all affect our motivation, they can generally be managed through planning and scheduling. Building regular habits can also help. These are topics we address in other segments of our video series.

The inner circle is our focus today. These have to do with our thoughts and feelings and how they affect our procrastination behaviours. Some of these feelings may relate to a fear of failure, or the idea that if we cannot achieve perfection in our efforts, there is no point in trying. We may feel overwhelmed by the amount of work, getting behind in a course, or the difficulty of the material. Sometimes there is a sense that if we cannot work under the right conditions – feeling motivated, having everything in place, having exactly the right amount of time – then we cannot accomplish anything at all. And negative emotions and thoughts can also impact procrastination.

Example (Slide 4)

A negative mindset can affect the likelihood of procrastination and other unproductive behaviours. When we experience or anticipate an event, our thoughts about it can bring up feelings and these feelings can lead to certain behaviours. Thoughts, feelings, and actions are

interconnected – when you notice one of the three, reflect on the other two as well. If something happens, what are you telling yourself? How does that thought make you feel? What are you doing in response to those thoughts and feelings? If you notice your behaviour is unhelpful, ask yourself how you are feeling and what are you telling yourself that is leading to that mindset.

For example, someone who has received a poor grade may feel depressed after seeing it. Negative self-talk furthers that feeling by moving to a conclusion such as “I will never graduate” or “there’s no point in trying anymore”. The student then begins to avoid classes and assignments and the cycle of procrastination and avoidance contributes again to lower grades.

Addressing an unhelpful thought pattern (Slide 5)

You may realize that your thought pattern is unhelpful – that is, it is leading to feelings or behaviours that are not moving you towards your goals.

When you notice this kind of thinking, you can catch it, challenge it and change it!

Evaluating Thoughts (Slide 6)

Ask yourself if the thought is true. What evidence do you have that it is? Is that always the case? Is it true to the degree you are suggesting? Now what can you say to yourself that would be more accurate, more helpful, and more positive? Perhaps instead of “I’m never going to learn this”, you could remember that you have learned other material before, that you actually know several parts of the topic already, that you can break it into small sections and test yourself until you learn a portion of the material today. Think about what you can control in the situation. How would it make you feel to talk to yourself in a more positive way?

As you evaluate your thoughts, you may also want to consider available supports to move forward. Check and challenge any unhelpful thoughts you may be having about accessing these.

We’ve looked at some of the reasons people procrastinate and the thoughts that may lie behind that behaviour. Taking time to notice and evaluate your thoughts, emotions, and behaviours is a step towards enhancing and maintaining motivation to complete your intended study each day.

What’s Next? (Slide 7)

Watch the next set of videos related to online learning created by the Student Success Centre.

If you want additional help or support, visit our website to book an appointment <https://www.ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success>

If you would like to book an appointment with Student Wellness Services, visit the website <https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellness-services>

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