



Procrastination

Directorate: Counselling and Career
Development
KZN Counselling and Career Development

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Define tomorrow.

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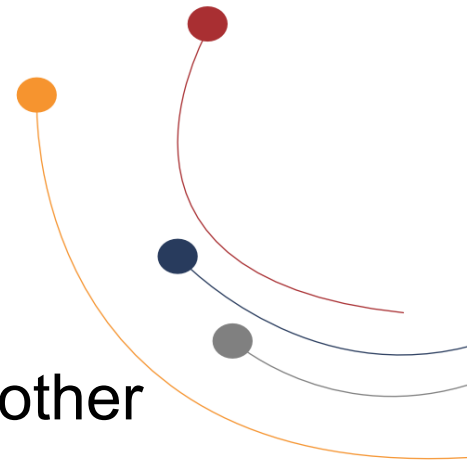
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In this session...



1. Understand procrastination
2. Know about the common reasons for procrastination
3. How to deal with procrastination

What is procrastination?



- Delaying something to do it later: “I will do my assignment some other time”, “I will start studying next week”, or “I will start my diet and exercising sometimes”.
- It is a habit of avoiding urgent tasks despite negative consequences and delaying priorities - focusing on less important, more enjoyable, simpler tasks instead
- We all put things off now and then and that is okay but if you do this too often, some delays can impact the quality of your performance and overall well-being. For instance, you may rush through assignments and not hand in your best work – that can in turn affect the year mark.
- After too many “laters” the work piles up so high that any task seems impossible.

Why procrastination?

- Contrary to popular belief, **procrastination is more than just laziness or poor time management.** Laziness suggests apathy, inactivity, and an unwillingness to act.
- When people procrastinate, they know they should work on a certain task but **actively choose to do something else.** Telling someone to “just do it” often doesn’t work.
- So you can stop feeling bad about your tendency to put things off and know that it is something that you can work on. That is good to know right?



Dangers of procrastination



Academic procrastination is associated with various **negative effects** and can be detrimental.

Procrastination is associated with a **wide range of academic issues** such as lower-quality work, lower marks, failures, and an increased likelihood of dropping out.

Procrastination can **affect our emotional well-being**. For example, procrastination can lead to various negative emotions such as guilt, shame, and sadness.

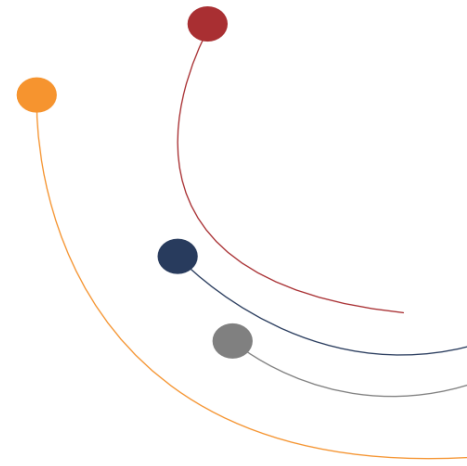
Procrastination can **affect our mental health and physical health**: depressive symptoms, such as lack of sleep, and exhaustion; people avoid important wellness habits like going to the doctor or regular exercise.

Most importantly, procrastination **prevents you from reaching your full potential**.

So, it's critical to proactively develop strategies to prevent it.

If you're a procrastinator, at some point,
you've probably asked yourself:
“Why do I procrastinate so much?” or
***“Why do I keep procrastinating even
though I know that it's bad for me?”***

**Understanding why you
procrastinate is crucial if you
want to figure out how to stop
doing it!**



Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



- People procrastinate for different reasons.
- The next 3 slides will discuss common reasons why people procrastinate
- As you listen or look at the slides, try to be reflective and see which may apply to you, since figuring out the underlying causes of your procrastination is crucial if you want to be able to successfully overcome it.

Anxiety. People sometimes procrastinate because they feel anxious about a task that they need to handle. This issue can be especially problematic in cases where a person's anxiety increases as a result of their procrastination, which can lead to a *feedback loop* where someone feels anxious about a certain task, which causes them to procrastinate instead of doing it, which makes them even more anxious, which in turn causes them to procrastinate even further.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Fear of failure, for example, when it comes to worrying about failing an upcoming exam. People often procrastinate because they're afraid of failing at the tasks that they need to complete. This fear of failure can promote procrastination in various ways, such as by causing people to avoid finishing a task, or by causing them to avoid getting started on a task in the first place.

Perfectionism, for example, when it comes to wanting to write an essay draft without any flaws. People sometimes procrastinate as a result of their perfectionism. Perfectionism can lead to procrastination in several ways, such as by making someone so afraid of making a mistake that they end up not taking any action at all, or by making someone so worried about submitting something with any flaws that they end up reworking their assignment indefinitely instead of releasing it when it's ready. Perfectionism isn't always a negative thing, and only leads to issues when it causes people to unnecessarily delay things because they're overly worried about their work not being flawless.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Task aversion, for example, when it comes to wanting to avoid dealing with an assignment that you find boring or a person might procrastinate because they perceive a task as frustrating, tedious, or too hard. People often procrastinate because they are averse to the tasks that they need to perform. For example, the more people find a certain task unappealing, the more likely they are to want to avoid it, and therefore the more likely they are to procrastinate.

Sensation seeking. People sometimes procrastinate because they like to wait until right before the deadline to start working on tasks, to add pressure, challenge, and excitement to those tasks. A student might wait until the night before a class presentation is due to start working on it because they feel that doing so will make the otherwise boring act of preparing the presentation more exciting. In some cases, this type of delay can lead to positive outcomes, such as when it motivates a person to work hard on a task that they would otherwise find tedious. However, in most cases, this sort of delay leads to negative outcomes in terms of performance. Furthermore, postponing tasks, for this reason, can often increase the amount of stress that people experience, and can also hinder their performance in situations where the delay means that they don't have enough time to deal with any unexpected issues that they encounter in their work.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Feeling overwhelmed. People sometimes procrastinate because they feel overwhelmed by the tasks that they need to handle. A feeling of overwhelm can occur due to a variety of reasons, such as having a single task that feels huge in terms of scope or having a large number of small tasks that add up. When this happens, a person might simply decide to avoid the tasks in question, or they might attempt to handle them, but then end up feeling paralysed before those tasks are completed.

Lack of study or organisational skills, for instance not knowing how to set an effective study schedule.

Self-handicapping. People sometimes procrastinate as a way of placing barriers in their way, so if they fail, their failures could be attributed to their procrastination rather than their abilities, a behaviour which is referred to as self-handicapping. For example, a student might procrastinate instead of studying for a test. They prefer knowing that they failed due to their procrastination, instead of knowing that they failed because they were unable to understand the material well and especially if they feel that failure will reflect badly on them.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Self-sabotage. People sometimes procrastinate due to their tendency to engage in self-defeating behaviours, which means that they actively try to sabotage their progress. For example, a person might delay applying for a new job, even though they knew that it represents a great opportunity for career advancement, because they feel that they don't deserve to be at a better place in life. There are various reasons why people engage in self-sabotage.

Abstract goals. People are more likely to procrastinate when their goals are vague or abstract, compared to when their goals are concrete and clearly defined. For example, goals such as “get fit” or “start exercising” are relatively vague, and are therefore likely to lead to procrastination. Conversely, a goal such as “go to the gym on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday right after work, and spend at least 30 minutes on the treadmill, running at high speed” is concrete, and is therefore much more likely to lead you to take action.

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INTERNAL REASONS



A disconnect from our future selves. People sometimes procrastinate because they view their future selves as being disconnected from their present-self. What I mean for instance is that someone might delay when it comes to eating healthy for instance, even if their doctor told them that it's important, because the harmful impact of their present diet will only start being a serious issue in a couple of years (i.e. as the problem of their future self). It can cause them to think that their present self shouldn't have to worry about the future since their future self will be the one who has to handle any tasks that they postpone or deal with any consequences for failing to complete those tasks on time.

A focus on future options. People sometimes avoid taking action in the present because they intend or hope to pursue a more attractive course of action in the future. For example, a person might avoid starting to exercise on their own at home, because they plan to join a gym and start a detailed workout plan later, even though getting started now would still be beneficial and wouldn't prevent them from switching to a more serious exercise plan in the future.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Optimism or pessimism. People sometimes procrastinate on tasks because they are overly optimistic about their ability to complete those tasks in the future. For example, a student might decide to postpone getting started on an assignment that is due a few weeks from now, because they feel that there will be plenty of time to get it done later. In many cases, this form of optimism might occur as a result of underestimating the time it will take to complete the tasks in question. Pessimism can also lead people to procrastinate in some cases, such as when it causes them to believe that their attempts to complete a task are bound to fail, so there's no point in starting in the first place.

Fear of evaluation or negative feedback. People sometimes procrastinate because they are afraid of being evaluated or because they are afraid of receiving negative feedback from others. For example, someone might delay publicizing a project that they worked on because they're worried about what other people are going to think about it.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Indecisiveness. People sometimes procrastinate because they are unable to make decisions promptly. This can be an issue in various ways, such as when a person can't decide which course of action to engage in, or when a person needs to make a certain decision before they can move ahead with their general plan of action. For example, a person might delay getting started on their research paper, because they can't decide which topic to write about. Various factors generally make it more likely that someone will get stuck overthinking the situation while trying to make a decision, a phenomenon which is sometimes referred to as analysis paralysis or choice paralysis. The main factors to consider, from a practical perspective, are the following: The more options you have, the harder it will be for you to choose. Essentially, the more options you have to choose from, the harder it will be for you to evaluate them and decide which one is preferable. The more similar your options are to one another, the harder it will be for you to choose. Essentially, the more similar the available options are, and the closer they are in value, the harder it will be for you to decide which one is better, especially in cases where there isn't a single option that is preferable to the others. The more important the choice is, the harder it will be for you to choose. The greater the consequences of making a decision, the harder it will be for you to finalise your decision so you are generally more likely to delay before making a major decision than you are before making a minor one.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Low self-efficacy. Self-efficacy reflects a person's belief in their ability to perform the actions needed to achieve their goals. In some cases, having low self-efficacy can cause a person to procrastinate. For example, if someone is given a task that they don't think they can handle, they might delay getting started on it, because they feel that they will most likely fail to complete it anyway.

A perceived lack of control. People sometimes procrastinate because they feel incapable of controlling the outcomes of events in their life. For example, a person might delay getting started on an assignment at work, if they feel that their boss will criticize it regardless of how much effort they put into it. Some people are more predisposed to feeling a general lack of control than others. This issue is operationalized through the concept of locus of control, which is the degree to which people believe that they have control over events in their life. The locus of control is described on a spectrum of internality and externality: Individuals who are internally oriented believe that they have a high degree of control over their life. Individuals who are externally oriented believe that they have a low degree of control over their life, and think that external factors, such as other people or their environment, influence them more strongly. Individuals who are internally oriented tend to get started and complete tasks on time, while individuals who are externally oriented tend to procrastinate more.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Depression. Some people procrastinate because they suffer from underlying depression. This is because depression can lead to issues such as fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and a reduced interest in activities, which in turn can cause people to procrastinate. For example, someone who is depressed might repeatedly postpone, because they simply don't have enough mental energy.

Lack of motivation. People often procrastinate because they are not motivated enough to work on a given task. For example, a student might procrastinate when it comes to studying for a test in a subject that isn't relevant to their major because they don't care about getting a good mark on it. This is often an issue when the main motivation for performing a task is extrinsic, as in the case of someone who is pressured by their parents to do well in school, rather than intrinsic, as in the case of someone who simply wants to feel that they've successfully learned the material. Accordingly, when people are driven to complete a certain task by an external source of motivation, they generally display higher levels of procrastination than when they are driven by an internal and autonomous source of motivation.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Lack of energy. People are generally more likely to procrastinate if they suffer from low energy levels, in terms of physical or mental energy. For example, someone who is tired after having worked hard all day might find it harder to exercise self-control when they get home late at night, which could cause them to procrastinate on things they need to take care of. Physical or mental exhaustion, due to a demanding academic workload as well as work, studies, other roles and responsibilities

Laziness reflects a person's intrinsic unwillingness to put in the effort needed to achieve their goals, even when they can do so. In some cases, a person's laziness can be one of the driving forces behind their procrastination. For example, someone might procrastinate when it comes to doing the dishes because they simply don't feel like getting up and doing it.

In addition, note that although laziness and lack of motivation appear similar, these are two separate issues. For example, it's possible for someone to be highly motivated to pursue a certain goal, but at the same time not make any progress toward it because they're unwilling to put in the necessary work.

Why do people procrastinate?

INTERNAL REASONS



Prioritisation of short-term mood. People often procrastinate because they prioritize their feelings in the present, and do things that will help them feel better right now, even if this comes at the expense of taking action that aligns with their long-term goals. For example, a student might delay getting started on an assignment by wasting hours on activities such as browsing social media, playing video games, and watching TV because doing so is more pleasant in the short-term than working on the task at hand. This kind of behaviour relates to the tendency to seek out pleasurable activities and avoid unpleasant ones. While this tendency is natural and instinctive, it becomes a serious issue when a person is unable to control it, since it causes them to continuously pursue short-term satisfaction, at the expense of long-term achievement and development.

Low capacity for self-control. Self-control reflects a person's ability to self-regulate their behaviour to bring themselves to follow through on their intentions, and take action that is in their best interest, particularly in the long term. For example, a person low on self-control might browse social media for hours, while continually telling themselves that they'll get started on their work in just a few minutes, even though there is no reason for them to delay.

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INTERNAL REASONS



Lack of perseverance. Perseverance is the ability to maintain goal-driven behaviour in the face of obstacles. A lack of perseverance makes people more likely to procrastinate, especially when it comes to finishing tasks that they've already started working on. A lack of perseverance could cause someone to stop working on their favourite side project because they feel that they've reached a stage in development that is challenging.

Distractibility is the inability to focus your attention on one thing at a time or to stay focused for a long in general. For example, a person who is studying for a test might end up procrastinating because they are constantly distracted by the notifications on their phone. Similarly, someone might delay finishing various projects that they started working on because they keep getting distracted by ideas for exciting new projects.

Impulsivity is the tendency to act on a whim, without planning or considering the consequences of your actions. For example, an impulsive person might end up procrastinating on an assignment that they're currently working on, by suddenly deciding to go out with friends, even though the assignment is due soon and they need to work on it now if they want to be able to turn it in on time.

Why do people procrastinate?

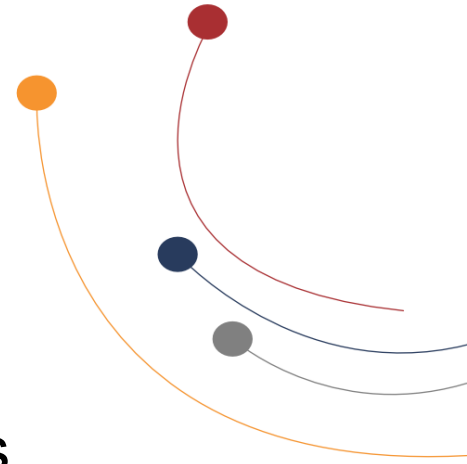
EXTERNAL REASONS



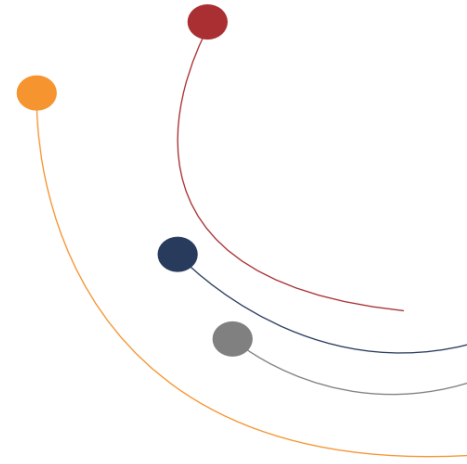
- **Poor study environment**, for example, because this environment is overly loud or filled with distractions.
- **Uninteresting assignments**, for example, because the assignments are monotonous or require you to use a limited range of skills.
- **Lack of clear directions or expectations**, for example, when it comes to explaining how to do something or how it will be marked
- **Lack of clear due dates**, for example in terms of when the first draft of an essay should be submitted.
- **Lack of communication**, for example in the case of a lecturer not responding to a request for clarification.
- **The lecturer is too lax**, for example by never enforcing any deadlines in their course.
- **The lecturer was too harsh**, for example by providing unnecessarily unpleasant feedback on assignments.
- Note that external issues can sometimes lead to or exacerbate internal ones. For example, an instructor being too harsh can lead to fear of failure in a student who wouldn't have it otherwise, or it can increase anxiety in an already anxious student.

Anti-procrastination strategies

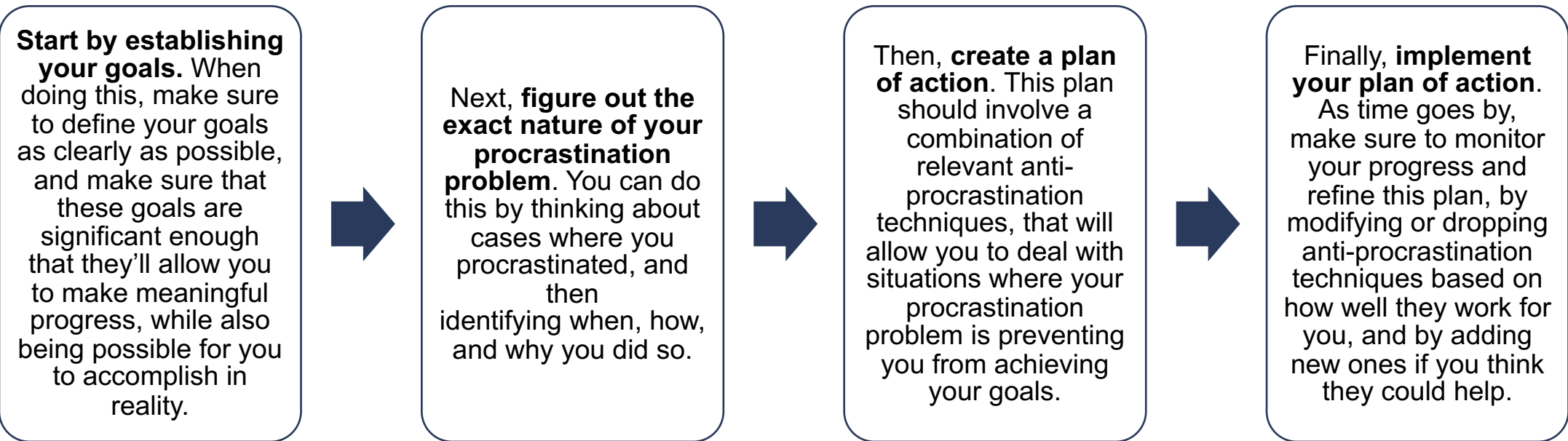
- To successfully deal with your procrastination, you need to figure out why you procrastinate and how your procrastination is preventing you from achieving your goals,
- Understanding why people procrastinate can help you understand why you procrastinate, and once you understand that, you can successfully figure out how to solve your procrastination problem. so you can formulate a concrete plan of action, based on appropriate techniques, that will help you deal with your reason for procrastination.



How to fight against procrastination

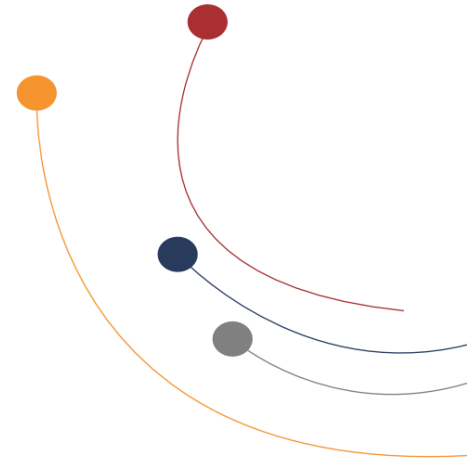


Here are the main steps that you should follow:



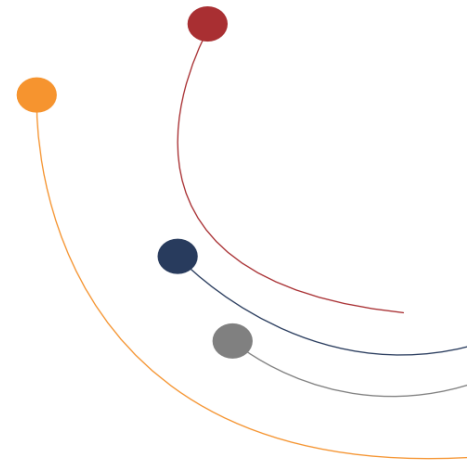
Anti-procrastination strategies

- Break big tasks into smaller pieces
- Prioritise tasks based on how important they are.
- Get started on tasks by committing to only work on them for a few minutes.
- Try to eliminate distractions
- Identify when you're most and least productive, and schedule your tasks accordingly.
- Set intermediate deadlines for yourself on your way to your final goals.

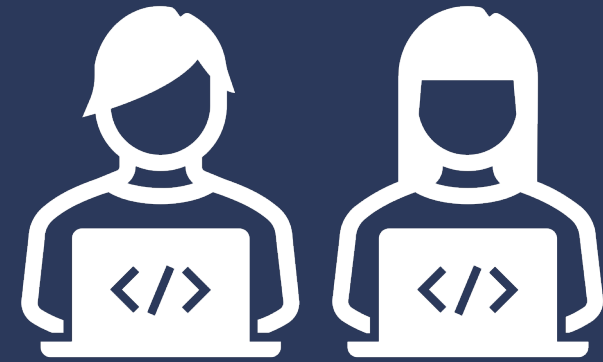


Anti-procrastination strategies

- Create a daily goal and mark streaks of days on which you've successfully achieved it.
- Reward yourself when you successfully implement your plan of action.
- Focus on your goals instead of on the tasks that you have to complete.
- Visualise your future self experiencing the outcomes of your work.
- Count to ten before you indulge the impulse to procrastinate.
- Avoid a perfectionist mindset by accepting that your work will have some flaws.
- Develop a belief in your ability to successfully overcome your procrastination.



Further reading



- <https://solvingprocrastination.com/academic-procrastination/#:~:text=Examples%20of%20academic%20procrastination,-An%20example%20of&text=A%20student%20who%20wastes%20hours,their%20room%20or%20baking%20snacks>
- <https://solvingprocrastination.com/why-people-procrastinate/>
- <https://soulsalt.com/what-causes-procrastination/>
- <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Counselling-and-career-development/Downloads-and-podcasts>

Contact us



We are available by e-mail:

Send an e-mail to counsellingkzn@unisa.ac.za or counselling@unisa.ac.za should you need to discuss any needs you may have in terms of further support

For more resources like these, visit our website:

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Thank you

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