



EFL “Brieflet”: Engaging with Procrastination

Procrastination is opportunity's assassin
Victor Kiam

Whilst there are individual differences, the experience of procrastination is common. Let's get straight into some strategies to manage it. Here's one of mine:

1. Diarise - when you plan to do the task
2. Publicise - tell people that you are going to do it, and when
3. Theorise - ponder what you are going to do: jot the ideas down (especially if it's a written task). If it's a more physical task, prepare the area a little at a time. Engage the ideas of others (especially if it's an interpersonal task)
4. Visualise - what and how you have done such a task before. Think about what the first sentence, or action, is going to be (esp. if you've not done it before)
5. Prioritise - turn off your phone/emails; refuse potential diversions; identify optimal time and space. Be realistic about what is needed
6. Focused eyes - Get into it when you said you would, taking one step at a time
7. Be wise - to the possibility that you might be distracted. Do one more thing before you follow a temptation; see if you can do another; and another ... If you get diverted, don't punish yourself, but come back, review and acknowledge progress to date. Then pick up from where you left off
8. Incentivise - and always encourage yourself¹. Plan breaks and interim rewards. Maybe even try to break a little bit later than you intended
9. Recognise - how completion of the task contributes towards your own values, and to those of whom you care about
10. Realise - it doesn't have to be perfect first time round: you can perfect it once you have something done to perfect!

Often procrastination can be overcome simply by *choosing* to motivate ourselves. No doubt you also have other strategies. However, sometimes the reasons for procrastination are powerful. For instance, we might like to think that we “work better under pressure”, or we say to ourselves that “this has got to be perfect: I'll start once I'm really sure that I will do a good job”. Procrastination is also often linked to a reluctance to tolerate short-term emotional discomfort. For instance, we might be worried about the possible consequences of how we handle the task, or we might think that it is boring, or that it is beyond our ability. In any event, procrastination denies us the opportunity to learn.

You can edit a bad page, but you can't edit a blank page
Jodi Picoult

¹ You may find it helps you if you remind yourself of the cost of not doing the task. However, confidence and energy tend to be better sustained through positive motivation



Understanding the thoughts and feelings leading to your procrastination is crucial to managing it effectively. Sims (2014) describes a Four-Factor Task Likeability Model that might be helpful in pointing towards the causes of your procrastination:

- Enjoyment - you might be less likely to do a task if you think that it will be boring or that you won't like doing it
- Consequence - you may fear failure or desire perfection. Or you may even fear success, because you might end up getting more tasks
- Ability - you might fear that you are not capable to do the job
- Competition - there are other things competing for your attention

Once you have understood the causes of your procrastination, the key elements to managing it need to include:

1. Recognition that procrastination is a common experience
2. Both curiosity and clarity about why you are procrastinating
3. Preparation of some strategies to manage the reasons
4. Breaking the task into small manageable chunks
5. Regularly reminding yourself of the personal values you are fulfilling by undertaking the task
6. Riding temptation waves by acknowledging uncomfortable emotions and thoughts and: using the strategies prepared in 3. above; focusing on the task

Remember, one of the most obvious yet forgotten coping strategies is to recognise that someone else might be able to help you - or even do the task for you! Other people can also be used as reference points or supporters to keep you on track.

Sources for your further interest

Sims, C. (2014) Self-regulation coaching to alleviate student procrastination: addressing the likeability of studying behaviours. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, **9(2)**, 147-159.
Bradberry, T. (2016) 11 ways to beat procrastination. Huffington Post Blog: 5 July: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-travis-bradberry/11-ways-to-beat-procrasti_b_9647406.html

Sam Farmer is Owner-Director of Enhance Facilitation Limited and strongly advocates that leadership is a team responsibility. He coaches leaders and large organisations across the state, not-for-profit and corporate sectors. Strength-based in his approach, Sam is passionate about collaborative coaching. As well as offering professional supervision, he provides psychosocial support to professionals working within high emotional impact contexts. He is a registered psychologist, has regular professional supervision and is bound by the Psychologists' Code of Ethics. **Contact Sam if you would like more ideas to manage your procrastination.**

Only put off until tomorrow what you are willing to die having left undone
Pablo Picasso