



# Procrastination

TU DUBLIN STUDENT  
COUNSELLING SERVICE



# What is Procrastination?

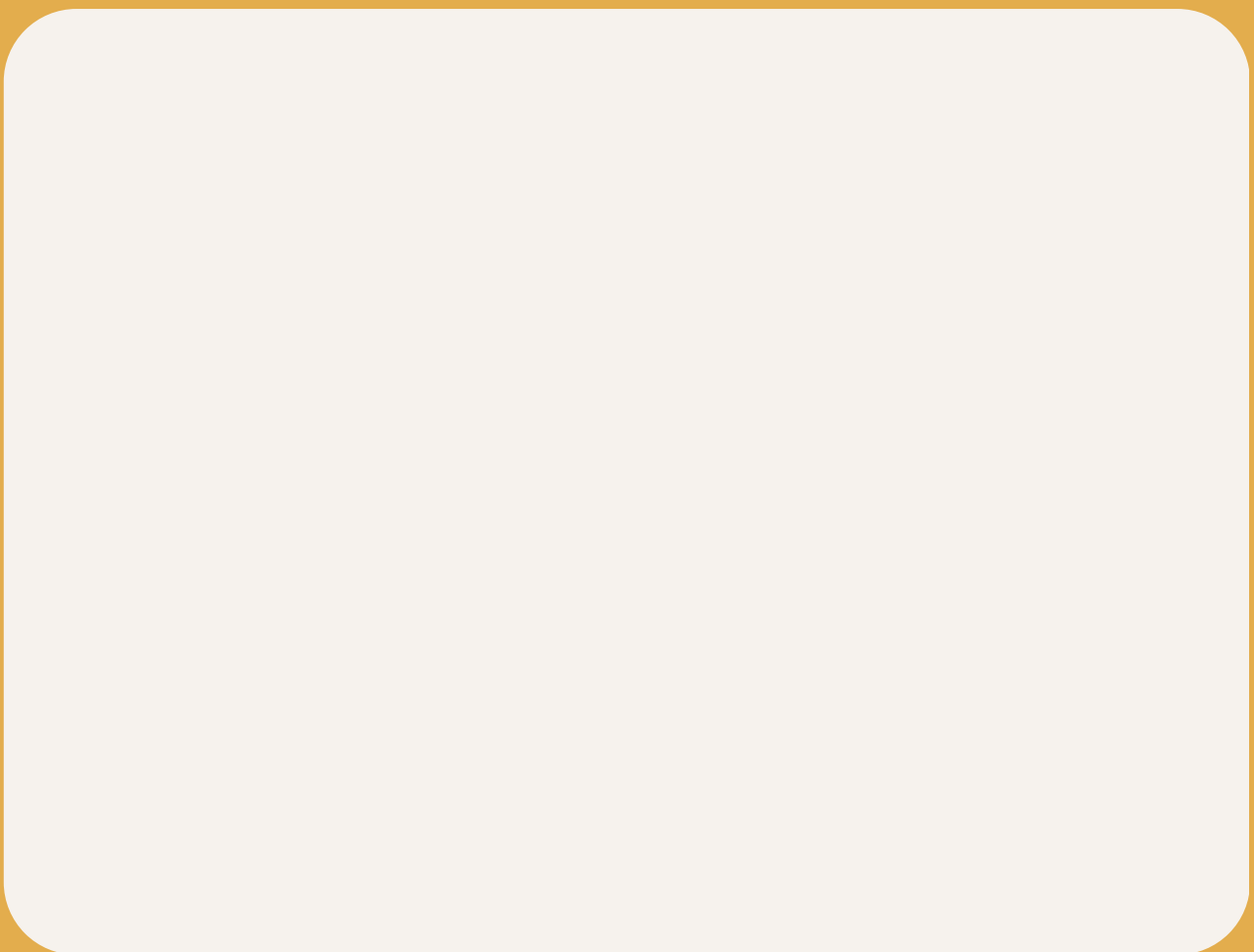
Procrastination is a common part of human behaviour. Often people mistake procrastination for “laziness”. In everyday language people use definitions like, “putting off”, “postponing”, “delaying”, “deferring”, and “leaving to the last minute”. Procrastination is...

...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.

It is important to remember that everyone procrastinates. However, problematic procrastination can be distinguished from more general procrastination, by how bad the negative consequences are of us not following through on things

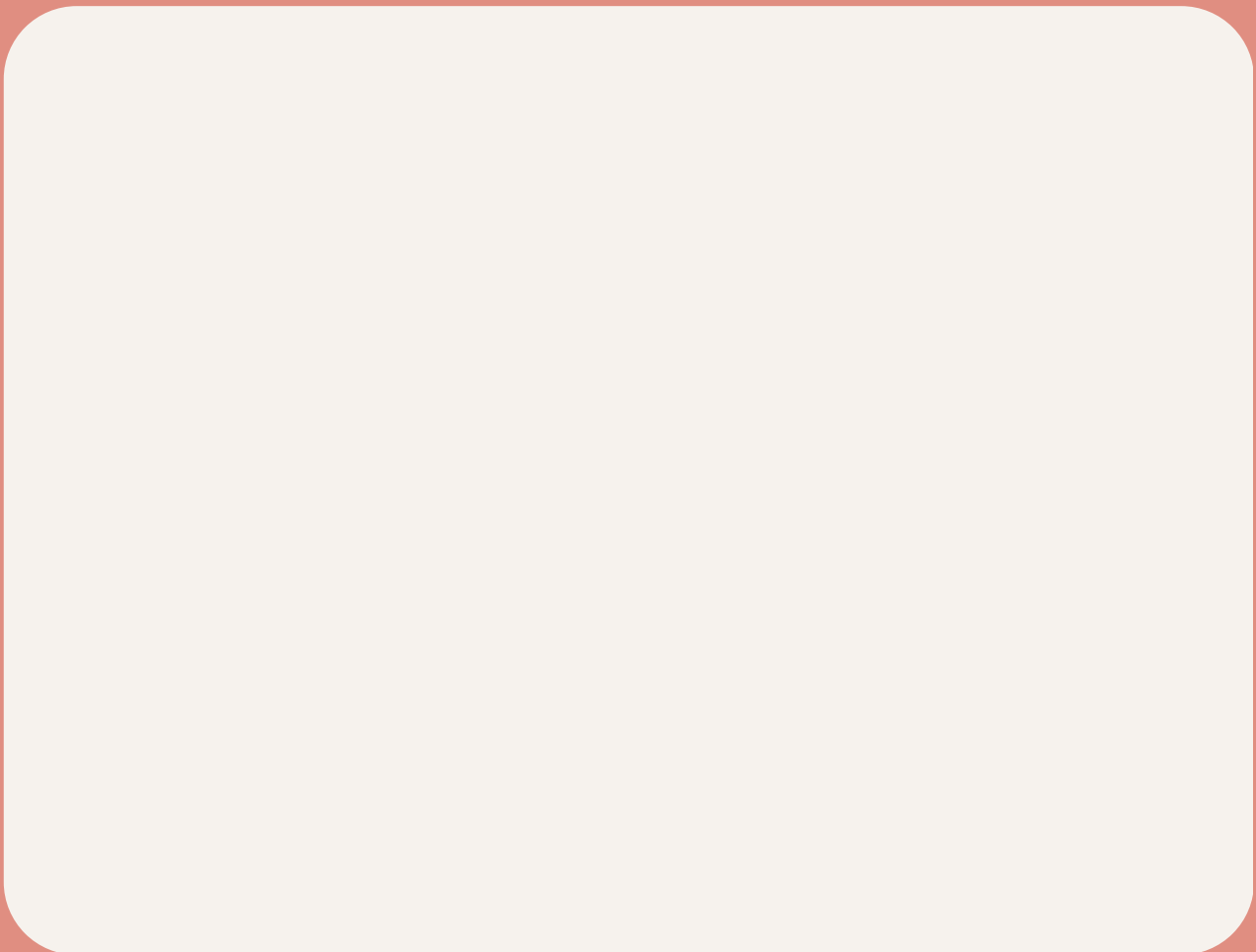
# What Do You Procrastinate About?

Procrastination can occur in many different areas of one's life. It can involve tasks or goals in life domains such as work, household, study, health, financial, social, family, relationships, self-development, and decision making. Really any task we need to complete, any problem we need to solve or any goal we might want to achieve, can be a source of procrastination. For many people, there will be certain areas of their life they are able to follow through on, and certain areas where procrastination reigns. Using the box below, make note of the areas where you tend to procrastinate most.

A large, empty white rounded rectangle with rounded corners, intended for the user to write their answers to the question above. It is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half of the image.

# Procrastination Activities

Procrastination activities are the things you do as a diversion from or substitute for the key task or goal you need to accomplish. These can involve activities such as pleasurable tasks (e.g., movies, reading, surfing the net, etc), lower priority tasks (e.g., sorting, tidying, checking emails, etc), socialising with friends/family/your partner, distractions (e.g., sleeping, eating, smoking, etc) or daydreaming. Using the box below, write down your procrastination activities.



# Why Do We Procrastinate?

The reason people procrastinate, is because they hold unhelpful rules and assumptions about themselves or how the world works. These unhelpful rules and assumptions often generate some form of discomfort about doing a task or goal (e.g., anger, resentment, frustration, boredom, anxiety, fear, embarrassment, depression, despair, exhaustion, etc), and procrastination then becomes a strategy to avoid the discomfort.

The unhelpful rules and assumptions most often linked to procrastination are:

- **Needing To Be In Charge** (e.g., “Things should be done my way. I shouldn’t have to do things I don’t want to, or just because someone else says so”);
- **Pleasure Seeking** (e.g., “Life’s too short to be doing things that are boring or hard, fun should always come first”);
- **Fear Of Failure Or Disapproval** (e.g., “I must do things perfectly, otherwise I will fail or others will think badly of me”);
- **Fear Of Uncertainty Or Catastrophe** (e.g., “I must be certain of what will happen. What if it’s bad? I am better off not doing anything than risking it”);
- **Low Self-Confidence** (e.g., “I can’t do it. I am just too incapable and inadequate”); and
- **Depleted Energy** (e.g., “I can’t do things when I am stressed, fatigued, unmotivated, or depressed”).

# Do I Want To Change?

To help you weigh up how much you do want to change, it can be helpful to consider the following.

- Being a procrastinator, what do I get out of it that is negative? What are the disadvantages? How does it hurt me?
- Being a procrastinator, what do I get out of it that is positive? What are the advantages? How does it help me?
- If I do change and no longer procrastinate, what will be good about that? How will my life be better? What will be the benefits of change for me?
- If I do change and no longer procrastinate, what will be bad about that? What will I have to give up? What will be the costs of change for me?

| <b>Being a procrastinator</b>                     |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>How does it hurt me?</b>                       | <b>How does it help me?</b> |
| <b>If I change and no longer procrastinate...</b> |                             |
| <b>What will be good?</b>                         | <b>What will be bad?</b>    |

# Procrastination Excuses

Procrastination excuses usually involve some grain of truth about the current situation we are facing, from which we conclude we are better off postponing a task or goal to another time. These excuses make us feel that our procrastination is justified, reasonable, and acceptable. As such, these excuses play a big role in leading us to procrastinate, and we need to learn how to dismiss them. Here are some common procrastination excuses. Each excuse is divided into 2 parts, the grain of truth and its unhelpful conclusion.

| <b>The Truth</b>                         | <b>Unhelpful Conclusion</b>                      |
|--|--|
| I am really tired                        | I am better off doing it after I have rested     |
| I will miss out on the fun happening now | I can always wait till nothing much is happening |
| I don't have everything I need           | I will wait till I do                            |
| I have plenty of time                    | So I don't have to start it now                  |
| I have other things to do                | I will do it once those things are finished      |



# Challenging Your Conclusions



Unhelpful conclusions follow the unrealistic notion that tomorrow will somehow miraculously be a better time to get productive and follow through with things. The real truth is that no time is probably ideal for doing something we don't feel like doing, hence now is just as good as any other time to get cracking!

You can challenge your unhelpful conclusions and develop more helpful conclusions by asking yourself:

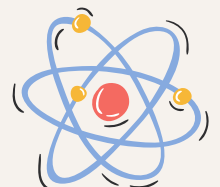
- What is the factual evidence or reasons that it is better for me to put off this task or goal?
- What is the factual evidence or reasons that it is better for me to start this task or goal now?
- Is it really true that I will be better off in the long run delaying this task or goal?
- Is it really true that I can't make even a small start on the task or goal right now? Can I still get some parts of the task or goal done now, even though conditions aren't ideal?
- Is it really true that later is a better time to do it?
- If I do make some start on the task or goal right now
  - What might happen? How might I feel?
- If I don't make a start on the task or goal right now
  - What might happen? How might I feel?



# Challenging Your Conclusions

| The Truth                                | Helpful Conclusion   |
|--|--|
| I am really tired                        | But I can still make a small start right now                           |
| I will miss out on the fun happening now | But if I get some of it done, I can reward myself with other fun later |
| I don't have everything I need           | But I can still try to make a start on some bits of the task           |
| I have plenty of time                    | But better to get on top of it now than leave it to the last minute    |
| I have other things to do                | But they are not more important and can be done after this             |

**Tip:** Conduct an experiment. For example, if your excuses relate to the notion that you can't do it now because you are too fatigued, first rate how fatigued you are (0-10), then spend 5 or 10mins doing the task. Following this re-rate your fatigue and examine what you were able to achieve in that short time.



### Procrastination Excuse

#### The Truth

I am really tired

#### Old Unhelpful Conclusion

I am better off doing it after I have rested

### Answers to Disputation Questions

I have done things before even when I was tired and I have felt better for having gotten started and accomplished something.

### End Result

#### The Truth

I am really tired

#### New Helpful Conclusion

But I can still make a small start right now and then rest

### Procrastination Excuse

#### The Truth

#### Old Unhelpful Conclusion

### Answers to Disputation Questions

### End Result

#### The Truth

#### New Helpful Conclusion

# Practical Strategies To Stop Procrastination

## What Do I Need To Do?

To gain clarity as to exactly what tasks or goals need to be done, try the following:

1. Write a 'To Do' list of tasks and goals you need to work on. This could be a list for the day, the week, the month, or longer, depending on what makes most sense for your circumstances
2. Prioritise the list of tasks, numbering them from most important to least important
3. Grade each task, that is, break the task into all the small steps or 'chunks' that are involved in achieving the task
4. Accurately estimate how much time each step of each task or goal will take (Note., people who procrastinate often overestimate or underestimate the time it will take to do something, so you may need to actually time tasks to practice getting more accurate at your time telling).



# Practical Strategies To Stop Procrastination

## How Can I Do It?

- **Worst-First:** knock out the worst task first, so all other tasks after that are easy by comparison.
- **Using Momentum:** start doing a task that you like and that energises you, and then without a break quickly switch to a task that you have been putting off.
- **Just 5-Minutes:** plan to spend just 5 minutes on the task. This is such a small amount of time, so you will feel you can tolerate just 5 minutes. At the end of the 5 minutes, reassess and see if you can spend just another 5 minutes on the task, and so on.
- **Set Time Limits:** set a specific amount of time to work on a task (e.g., 30 minutes), and stick to just that, rather than extending things even if you feel you can.
- **Prime Time:** work out what time of day you are most productive or energised or creative, and use this time to get started on your tasks or goals. The idea is to attempt tasks when you are at your optimum.
- **Prime Place:** be aware of what types of environments you get more done in, and what types of environments have distractions that make you more likely to procrastinate. Isolate yourself if necessary to minimise social and other distractions.

# Practical Strategies To Stop Procrastination

## How Can I Do It?

- **Remember-Then-Do:** as soon as you remember you need to do a task, seize that moment to follow through.
- **Reminders:** if you often forget tasks, use visual reminders and prompts to help you (e.g., place notes or lists in prominent places like on the fridge or bathroom mirror, or program reminders in your mobile phone).
- **Visualise:** use imagery to clearly visualise the task being successfully completed in your mind, and use the momentum from the visualisation to get going on the task in real life.
- **Focus:** if you are feeling unsettled, take a moment to close your eyes and focus on your breath. Try to lengthen out each breath in and each breath out. Spend 5-10 minutes using your slow breathing to settle and focus, and then return to the task.
- **Plan Rewards:** reward yourself after something has been achieved or as a well earned break from a task. The more you reward yourself for small achievements, the less you will feel like you are missing out or being deprived, hence you will procrastinate less.



# My Procrastination Strategies

Use the below space to write down what you learned from this workbook. Include some of your favourite strategies that you might use to combat those procrastination habits!

A large green rectangular area containing seven horizontal white rounded rectangles, stacked vertically, intended for writing notes.