

# UNDERSTANDING PROCRASTINATION

## INTRODUCTION

Procrastination is the most common student time management problem. Although the challenges to time management posed by the university environment contribute to students' vulnerability to procrastination, they are not the sole cause. Many students, particularly those who found high school easy, are already highly skilled and experienced procrastinators when they arrive at university. Undoing years of habitual procrastination isn't easy, but it can be done. This section contains both information to help you understand procrastination better, and strategies for managing it.



A simple framework in which to analyze the decision to procrastinate is to use journalism's W5 questions: who, what, when, where, and why. Before you close the book, turn off the computer, or leave the library, answer these questions to help slow down the decision-making process and recognize why you're about to procrastinate.

## WHO IS MAKING THIS DECISION?

Are you putting off this task because you need to or because friends (particularly boy/girlfriends and even more particularly those who are not in university), room/housemates or family are putting pressure on you to do what they want you to? Keep in mind that peer pressure is very much a part of university life, particularly in residence. When you feel pressured to stop studying or delay getting down to work, learn to say "yes, but later."

Don't let others plan your time for you - negotiate spending time for fun when it meets your study needs and goals. After all, it's your time and (at least some of) your money being invested.

## WHAT KIND OF TASKS DO YOU PUT OFF?

Analyze the work before you. It's common for everyone to put off working on difficult, frustrating or overwhelming tasks. If you're finding it tough to make a start on a major project or difficult assignment, see "Making a Mound out of a Mountain" in [Getting Started: Just Do It](#). If you find yourself repeatedly putting off work for the same subject or course, have a look at the ideas in [Finding Your Best Time of Day](#). It's also important to recognize that "stewing" is not necessarily the same as procrastinating. Particularly when working on a project that requires original work or creative thinking, you may need time to digest

information and think about the topic and how you will approach it. Many students don't realize the importance of allowing time for ideas to simmer in the back of their minds. You'll have a better chance of meeting your project deadline if you allow for this time in your time plan.

## **WHEN DO YOU PROCRASTINATE MOST OFTEN?**

Many students are able to pinpoint particular times during the day when they seem most prone to putting off schoolwork and/or wasting time. An hour between classes, late afternoon, and right after lunch or supper are common problem periods. For ideas on using these periods more effectively see [Finding your Best Time of Day](#).

## **WHERE ARE YOU WHEN YOU PROCRASTINATE?**

Changing your study location can be one of the simplest yet most effective ways to improve your productivity. See the External Study Environment in [Managing Distractions](#) for lots of ideas on finding a place to work that works.

## **WHY DO YOU PROCRASTINATE?**

The most necessary but probably the most difficult part of getting procrastination under control once and for all is understanding why you do it in the first place. While [band-aid](#) solutions can help temporarily, figuring out why you procrastinate is the key to figuring out how to control it once and for all.

Many students assume that they procrastinate because they are irresponsible, immature, lazy, or lack self discipline. In some cases this is undoubtedly true, and for many of us, students or not, this is true some of the time. For some students, however, the reason is more complex, and with the high percentage of high-ability or intellectually "gifted" students attending university, this reason is more common than is generally realized.

There is an interesting connection between procrastination and perfectionism. Perfectionism is common among the intellectually gifted (ie. those with a high level of intellectual ability, often defined as an IQ of 130 or higher, that is if you believe that IQ is a valid measure of intelligence). Perfectionism can have an immense and pervasive influence on how students work and manage their time. Even if you don't think of yourself as a perfectionist, you could probably benefit from exploring this issue with one of the staff from Learning Services. For information on individual appointments, see the [Learning Services'](#) website.