

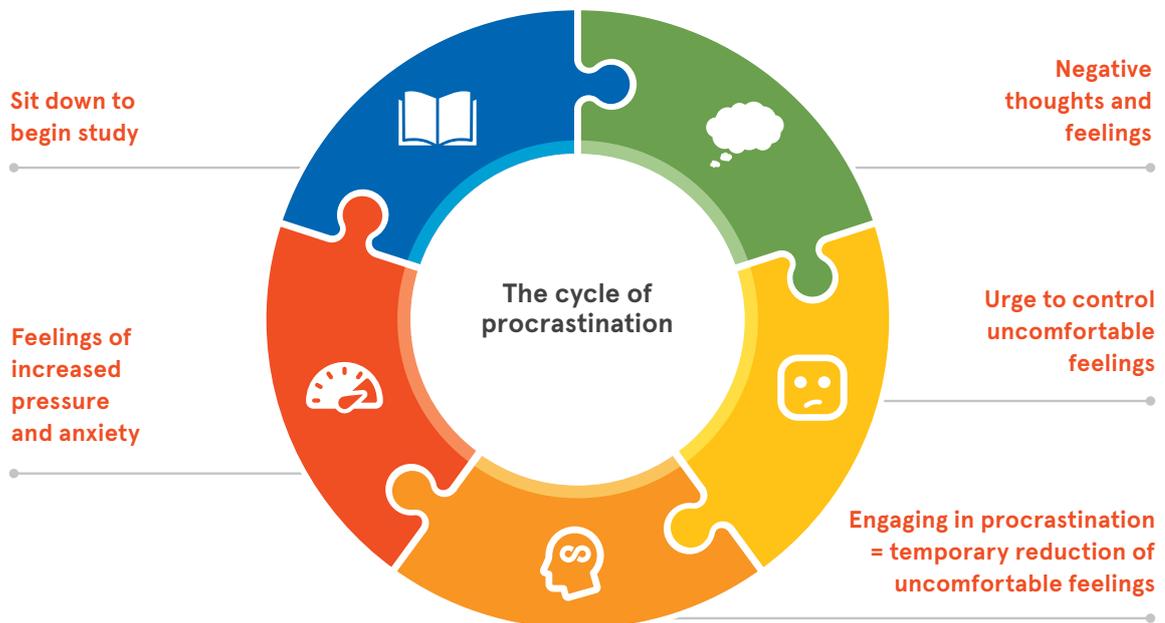


THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Beating procrastination



Procrastination is a normal part of life. However, procrastination becomes problematic when it starts to affect our ability to achieve our goals; e.g. leaving an assignment to the last minute, despite incurring late penalties.



The cycle of procrastination

When we approach a task, like starting an assignment, it can activate negative or unhelpful thoughts such as “I am going to fail” or “writing essays is boring.” These thoughts generate discomfort about the task and because our brains are hardwired to avoid discomfort, we experience an urge to escape. Engaging in procrastination activities allows us to avoid the discomfort momentarily, which initially feels rewarding but works to increase the likelihood that we procrastinate next time around.



Beating the cycle of procrastination

To break the cycle of procrastination, we first need to identify what we want to achieve and then apply practical strategies to get the task done.

Identify what you need to do

- Write a to-do list.
- Break down the task into manageable components.
- Be realistic about how long it will take to complete each task.
- Make a weekly schedule of tasks that you have been putting off.

Identify a strategy for getting the task done

Worst-first: Starting with the worst task first is often a good approach for getting small, but dreaded tasks completed (e.g. writing an email you have been avoiding).

Easiest-first: Start by doing the task that feels most manageable, then gradually build to more difficult tasks.

Just 5-minutes: Challenge yourself to tolerate doing the task for just 5 mins. After completing 5 mins, assess whether you can manage another 5 mins.

Set time limits: Set a timer for 20 mins and work to get as much done as possible while the timer is counting down. Delay any distractions (calls, texts, email, cup of tea) while the timer is running. When the timer runs out, have a break, then reset the timer.

Prime time: Identify your best “brain time” and aim to use this time on the tasks that require the greatest concentration.

Prime place: Identify what place that historically has allowed you to work the best (e.g. library, kitchen table, common room).

Eliminate distractions: Identify and remove distractions (e.g. phone, social media). Use apps to block these devices and websites.

Visualise: Imagine the task successfully completed.

Plan rewards: Rewarding yourself each time you complete a task can make you less likely to procrastinate in the future.

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