Practical Strategies to Stop Procrastination

Overcoming procrastination in practical ways involves knowing **what** needs to be done, **how** to do it and **when** to do it. Clarity, task approach and time availability is the key.

What Do I Need To Do?

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

- 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;
- then **prioritise** the list of tasks, numbering them from most important to least important;
- then **grade** each task, that is, break the task into all the small steps or 'chunks' that are involved in achieving the task; and
- finally, 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).

How Can I Do It?

When contemplating how to do a task, there are numerous ways you can approach any given task to make it easier. The following are some methods you can try. Keep in mind that not all of these are suited to every person or every situation, so it will take a bit of trial and error to see what works for you in different situations.

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.

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.

When Can I Do It?

To manage your time availability, so that you know when you can do your tasks and goals, use a timetable to either **schedule** or **unschedule** your week. Scheduling is a more structured method, where you write into your timetable your existing commitments and routine, and then plan into your timetable specific times in your week for doing specific tasks and goals you have been putting off. Unscheduling is a more flexible method, where like the schedule you write into your timetable your existing commitments and routine, this then allows you to see when you have blocks of time in your week to devote to the tasks and goals you have been putting off. When these blocks of free time arise, mark on your timetable every 30 minutes you spend working on a task or goal.

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