

## Beating Procrastination

Some people who put things off have what seems like an internal, almost knee-jerk resistance to doing jobs they believe *they* **have to do** or **should do**. If you procrastinate more than you like, you may be unconsciously struggling with this internal resistance. Fortunately, there are ways to use that resistance to your advantage in your battle to reduce procrastination.

One way involves putting off something that you feel you **should do** or **have to do** and do something less pressing instead. You may set this up so that what you actually do is what you need to do in the first place.

For example, to help you do this innovative exercise in **BEATING PROCRASTINATION**, tell yourself your job is to procrastinate. Your job is to put this enjoyable exercise off. You do not have a choice; you **have to** put off doing this enlightening exercise.

As you tell yourself you **HAVE TO PROCRASTINATE** on doing this exercise, you may feel your built-in resistance start to rise against to things you have to do. Because it is required in this exercise that you **HAVE TO PROCRASTINATE**, and because you seem to naturally resist what you have to do, it would not be surprising that you begin to feel a desire to do this exercise. While this may sound strange, these are normal feelings and reactions for many people who have been in the habit of putting things off more than they prefer.

At this point, it would not be unexpected for some people to feel curious as to what the rest of this handout is about and want to go on. If you feel like that, you might choose to read on. You may stop any time you wish. You might even be curious about what are the possible alternatives to procrastination and want to read the first one. If you don't want to read any further, that's OK. You may prefer not to do anything about procrastination, now.

### Possible Solutions

1. Some people begin to see possible solutions to procrastination at this point and some do not, yet. Either way is okay.
- 2.

If you choose to do a log, you may want to **look for common "delaying tactics"**. Many procrastinators discover an "inner voice" telling them what to do just before something is put off. This inner voice is normal and exists in all of us. You may feel like jotting down some of the things this inner voice says just before you put things off. This inner voice is called "self-talk."

**It is normal for people to do what they tell themselves to do. Maybe when you put things off you do a normal thing and do only what your inner voice is telling you to do.**

Some people become curious about this "inner voice" and want to know more about what it says. This inner voice is normal and is called **self-talk**. You may choose to listen more conscious-

ly for any negative or delaying self-talk when faced with commonly put-off tasks. You might discover what your self-talk is saying to you when facing commonly procrastinated tasks. You may even realize that, like many other people who put things off more than they want to, that you are likely to do what you tell yourself to do when facing unpleasant tasks or even unpleasant tasks. It might be interesting to see what happens if you change your self-talk and repeatedly tell yourself not to put something off. Some ex-procrastinators have found that describing exactly what they intend to do and for how long, just before doing it, makes procrastinating more difficult.

3. You may believe it is good news when you **realize that negative or delaying self-talk can be consciously changed to positive self-talk**. For example, if your self-talk when facing a disliked task is, "*I don't want to do this,*" you are likely to do what is normal and do what you tell yourself to do. "*I don't want to do this*" is only a small logical step away from, "*so, to hell with it!*"

Perhaps you might like to experiment and see what happens to you if you attempted the kind of positive self-talk which says the opposite of your habitual negative or delaying self-talk.

Some ex-procrastinators jot down positive self-talk phrases on notecards that they carry with them. If you feel this may be a good idea, you might use notecards for reminders of what to say to yourself when facing commonly put off tasks. Some examples of positive self-talk that you could put on a notecard are:

1. I will do it now.
2. I may not want to do it, but I will for ½ hour.
3. I'd rather swim, but it won't help me graduate so I will study first.
4. I'll feel better when it's done, so I'll do it at 2pm.
5. I'll do this for 1 hour and then go out.
6. I'm a good student and good students do this, so I will do it now.
7. I may hate this, but I will finish it before I watch TV.
8. I haven't liked this in the past, but maybe I can learn to like it.
9. I haven't done well on this in the past, but I will learn to do it well.

You may come to agree that more positive self-talk involves saying the opposite of what you used to tell yourself just before you procrastinated.

4. Just as most people can't eat a whole birthday cake in one bite, **some jobs cannot be done all at once**. Some people come to realize that it is harder to put something off if they slice a job up into manageable pieces and do the task piece by piece, little by little. This might mean **breaking down the time required to-do a task into smaller chunks** that are spaced over several days or weeks. Some people don't like large doses of something distasteful. They find that smaller doses spaced over time makes things easier to do and less able to be procrastinated.
5. Another way some people have reduced procrastination is to **begin with an easy, an enjoyable, or the least distasteful piece of a job to get started**.

6. Many ex-procrastinators have realized that **working with someone else** makes it less likely that they will put something off. Perhaps being held accountable like this would work for you.
7. It could be that you will come to realize **that making a commitment to someone or setting a deadline** for completing a task is one way to make procrastination more difficult. It is known that for many people, setting a goal results in motivation. For this to work, ex-procrastinators have found that the goal must be something they want to achieve. For example, **you don't want to study, but you want to do well on your test.**
8. Maybe you will discover that **doing a job in the least distracting environment** makes putting off work a little harder. For many college students, homes, dorm rooms, or apartments have many distractions and potential distractions. Perhaps you will find a place like the library to study where it is quiet and is going to stay quiet until you are ready to leave.
9. Like many non-procrastinators, you may find it enjoyable to **reward yourself** for doing a part of a job and for completing a task. Some examples of rewards are treating yourself to some ice cream, going to a movie, visiting with friends, or just doing something that you enjoy.
12. A normal reason for procrastinating is because a person is **trying to do something they really and sincerely do not want to do just now.** After acknowledging that something may be difficult or distasteful, it is not uncommon for people to get the help of a friend or counselor. Many former procrastinators have found that doing something they deeply and truly don't want to do just now is a primary reason why they put things off.
13. You may discover, as other have, that this is a **normal response** to distasteful tasks. By making a change to do something they *really want to do*, many people like you have reduced or eliminated procrastination in their lives.
14. Sometimes people are **unaware of a degree of self-criticism or self-anger** which is a common cause of procrastination. Through no fault of their own, procrastinators in this escapable trap lapse into a cycle of thinking, feeling, and behavior that promotes procrastination. You may choose to examine the cycle below to see if any part of it fits you. If any part fits you, you may choose to enlist the help of a professional counselor to eliminate this possible cause of your procrastination.

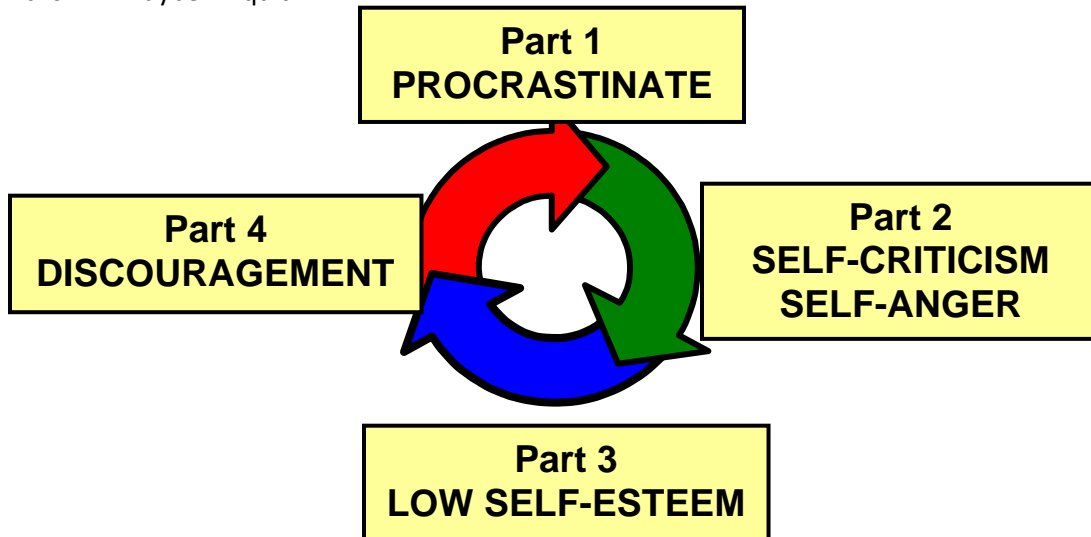
When some people procrastinate, they become critical of themselves and that cause them to become angry at themselves. This leads to low self-esteem and discouragement. The self-talk language may go something like this.

**Part 1** "I'll do that later."

**Part 2** "Now it's too late and I screwed up again!" "Why do I do this? It makes me so angry when I get into this situation."

**Part 3** "I just don't have what it takes to succeed, I guess."

Part 4 "Maybe I'll quit."



The sinister part of this cycle is that you may inadvertently enter at any point and continue circling until you realize what is happening. To exit this cycle, many ex-procrastinators have chosen to practice one or more of the possible solutions listed above.

By using some of these solutions to procrastination, you may realize that you are not stuck with your present degree of procrastination, if you don't want to be. You may also begin to realize as others have, that you are not powerless to modify and eventually control this behavior. You may even find that reading over this handout several times could possibly give you more ideas to try in order to reduce your procrastination behaviors. You may come to believe, as many ex-procrastinators have, that you may choose to control and even eliminate procrastination by making habits out of one or more of the suggestions listed above, when you are ready.