Overcoming Procrastination

Having trouble starting that 20-page paper? Struggling to knock things off of your ever-expanding "to do" list? Procrastination -- the avoidance of a specific task or work that needs to be done -- can affect your ability to succeed in college and enjoy your personal life. What causes procrastination? What small steps can you take to avoid procrastination and its often unpleasant consequences?

For many, procrastination is linked to perfectionism. How? Thinking that you must do your work perfectly on the first try will likely prevent you from ever getting started! For others, procrastination is linked to poor time management, a desire to spend time having fun instead of working, or feeling overwhelmed with all that there is to do.

The ABCs of Procrastination

Why is it more difficult to start that Anthropology paper than to finish your math homework? What is it about talking to your roommate about her inconsiderate behavior that causes you to keep putting off a conversation with her? At root level, all tasks are neutral. The ABCs of procrastination may help to explain the disparity in one's motivation for specific tasks.

A = Activating Event. The activating event is whatever we are delaying, such as studying, working on a paper or project, or some other "unpleasant" task.

B = Belief System. These are our “hidden” feelings about the task; our feelings govern our motivation. If we have ‘negative’ feelings, we tend to put off or delay our work. These feelings play a large role in our response to the activating event.

C = Consequence. This is what we actually do in relation to the activating event. There are two approaches -- rational and irrational. A rational response is, “I don’t like writing papers at all, but I better get going on it anyway.” An irrational approach is, “I hate writing papers, and, even though it’s due tomorrow, I’ll start it later.”

How can you use your Life Skills to tackle procrastination? Examine your self talk, uncover your schema, and engage in some thought shifting about the task or project at hand.

3 Easy Steps to Managing Procrastination

Try these easy steps

1. Don’t put anything on your “to do” list that takes more than 30 minutes! Break large tasks into smaller, more manageable bits. Recognize that you don’t have to tackle all the steps of a project or paper in one sitting.

2. Use a good friend as a positive role model! If you have trouble concentrating, study in the presence of someone who doesn’t.

3. Modify your environment! Minimize or eliminate noise and distraction. Ensure adequate lighting, and have necessary equipment at hand. Don’t get too comfortable when studying. A desk and straight-backed chair is usually best - lying on your bed is probably not the best choice for a place to study. Be neat! Take a few minutes to straighten your desk or work area.