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Overcoming Procrastination

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The purpose of this article is to provide guidance on how to minimize procrastination — and the fallout that comes with it. Through these helpful recommendations, you can take steps to reduce procrastination and elevate your academic quality – not to mention your grade.

Our Own Worst Enemy

Procrastination is one of the most dangerous obstacles for the writer, especially for the college writer. With numerous commitments and hectic schedules, it is unsurprising that many assignments are completed dangerously close to the deadline, increasing student stress and decreasing the likelihood of success. Many students are involved in multiple classes each semester, extracurricular activities, and part-time or full-time jobs. Most of them also try to have a regular social calendar as well. With such an overpacked schedule, procrastination becomes an enticing intriguing solution to managing stress. After all, why bother working on an assignment that is due several days from now when you could be doing other things? Procrastination also presents itself as a self-protection opportunity for students to provide an excuse for a poor grade, making it easy to blame the schedule rather than themselves.

Despite its attractiveness (and many students' claims that waiting until the last minute helps them perform better), research has shown that procrastination is a harmful practice that can have detrimental effects on academic outcomes and mental health. Associated with procrastination are increased anxiety, stress, fatigue, and disappointment from falling below standards. Additionally, putting an assignment off until later increases the chances that something will go wrong, such as illness or computer failure, causing your grade to plummet. Even if everything were to go smoothly, it is still likely that the quality of your work will be lower, particularly regarding writing, which takes significant planning, drafting, and revising.

Breaking the Cycle: Strategies

How, then, can procrastination be avoided? You can use several strategies to avoid putting those assignments off until the last minute. First, reduce the number of decisions you make throughout the day by planning ahead of time and mentally finishing your day before it even starts. Another option is the Nothing Alternative, a two-option mindset in which you set aside time to work on an assignment or to do nothing at all. Nothing at all quite literally means nothing at all – no reading, no watching TV, and, yes, no social media. These elements are extremely distracting and contribute heavily to habits of procrastination. This option also has wide-reaching effects on other parts of your life. One important tip is to divide your work into smaller tasks, thereby making an assignment more manageable. This one-foot-in-front-of-the-other approach is a surefire way to complete an assignment. In many cases, you will realize that the assignment was not as horrible as anticipated. You might also employ the Pomodoro Technique, a method of time management comprised of 25-minute stretches of work broken up by five-minute breaks. Finally, adjust your environment to remove distractions. If you are easily tempted by the television, move to another room – or have your roommate hide the remote. These tactics may seem challenging, but discipline today means less difficulty tomorrow.

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Example

Brian is a busy college student and a heavy procrastinator. His papers, always due at 11:59 p.m., are rarely begun before 9:00 on the same night they are due. Not only have his grades begun to suffer because of his habits, but he has also found himself to be angrier and more unpleasant toward his roommates. To complete his papers earlier, Brian has resolved to create a planner to schedule his days ahead of time and created a deadline for each phase of the writing process. He has also turned off access to Instagram during the times he has set aside to work. He also employs the Pomodoro Technique, working in 25-minute stretches broken up by frequent short breaks. Finally, he has resolved to go to the library to complete assignments, as he tends to be distracted by his roommates. By taking these steps, he hopes to avoid working under pressure so he can write a stronger paper and boost his grade.

Tips

1. Assess the reasons why you procrastinate, as well as the feelings that cause procrastination.
2. Change your outlook on an assignment, specifically through the lens of its size and its value.
3. Commit to small tasks and write them down.
4. Choose your surroundings wisely. If your dorm is too distracting, perhaps the library is a better option.
5. Focus on what long-term goals you want to accomplish rather than the short-term pain you hope to avoid.

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