

Motivation and Procrastination

Motivate: to cause a person to act in a particular way. Concerned with movement.

Many of us can feel a lack of persistence, self-discipline, or courage in facing a task. Sometimes we feel the pay-off will be worth the effort...and sometimes we aren't sure! But we can help ourselves act, which is what motivation is all about!

What makes us want to do something?

We usually act because of a reward that we'll receive.

Rewards are either intrinsic or extrinsic

- **Intrinsic rewards** are thoughts or feelings within us: we may feel proud, satisfied, delighted, relieved, exhilarated, confident, encouraged, amazed, secure, intelligent, ambitious, intrigued, pleasantly surprised. Intrinsic rewards are very powerful motivators as they are under our own control, and they lead to increased self-esteem. "I said I'd do it ...and I did!"
- **Extrinsic rewards** are responses from the world around us: we may be paid, win the prize, achieve an award, graduate, take a holiday, be voted Most Valuable Player, have our photo in the newspaper, etc. Extrinsic rewards are also powerful motivators, as they make us feel valued and recognized by others. However, they are much less under our control (eg. who is the competition? what factors will I be compared on? how many prizes will be given out?). Motivated people cultivate an intrinsic reward system. The prizes, money, etc. are the bonus!

What might be contributing to a lack of motivation?

- **Ability:** You don't believe you have the ability to do something. Therefore, you won't feel like doing it.
- **Agency:** Motivation is gone because you feel you have no control with outcome. No matter what you do = bad = low motivation.
- **Value:** If you don't value it, you will not feel motivated about it. You can value something without being interested.
- **Interest:** Taking something you are not interested in leads to low motivation.

Strategies to Overcome a Lack of Motivation

- Make a promise and keep your word
- Set a specific long- range goal (read Anatomy text by end of week 13) and break it into smaller steps or goals (read 1 chapter every 6 days). Be clear in your intentions.
- Tell someone and ask them to follow your progress. Be accountable.
- Keep a log or journal of your goals and achievements.
- Praise yourself.
- Begin with a small step and make a plan for the next step.
- Develop a routine. Link a new activity with one that you do routinely, like do your sit-ups (new activity) before drinking your morning coffee (old habit).
- Include the words “goal, persistence, self-discipline, effort and intrinsic reward” in your vocabulary.
- Observe when you are becoming uncomfortable thinking or doing particular tasks.
- Think positive: “This will feel great when it’s done” or “I can do it!” instead of “I can’t stand doing this”!
- Act like the person you wish to become. Picture yourself as being successful.
- BELIEVE in yourself. Reflect on times when you were motivated. Is there anything in common between then and now? Can you make a small change, so this situation is more like those times?
- Adopt a hero. Ask yourself “what would _____ be doing now?”
- Hang out with motivated people.
- Guard your health so you have strength, energy and enthusiasm.
- Get support before the downward spiral: behind in assignments→ feeling “stupid” in class→ not attending class→ not understanding the next readings→ losing touch with classmates→ feeling ashamed → falling further behind→ feeling discouraged→ not wanting to start...
- Use time management and organizational tools: term or monthly calendars, weekly schedules, To Do lists, prioritizing activities.
- Turn up the pressure. Move a deadline forward 2 weeks if you like pressure.
- Turn down the pressure. Eliminate extra responsibilities and plan small steps if you don’t like a lot of pressure. Focus on the “must” not the “should” activities.
- Ask for help when you start to see a pattern of poor motivation, rather than waiting. A teacher, mentor, parent, friend, or counsellor will try to encourage and support you.
- Start small. Try one of these strategies that appeals to you and give yourself time to develop it before starting new strategies. New habits take 21-30 days to “stick”.
- Get more sleep: BUT don’t use sleep as an avoidance tactic
- Make better choices (if you have the option): Be flexible; don’t take a General

What Motivates Me?

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions.

1. How do I define motivation?
2. What motivates me?
3. What gets in the way of my motivation?

Procrastination

What leads to procrastination?

- Fear of failure: Fear that you won't do it correctly, so prevents you from doing it at all.
- Lack of knowledge: Feel anxious because you don't know enough about what need to do to feel comfortable with it.
- Perfectionism: Keep doing things over again and again until you reach the "perfect" way of doing it.
- Anxiety: Overall fear about going to school and what it means to your life.
- Lack of Purpose
- Lame task: May seem overwhelming, repetitive, or boring

Strategies to Overcome Procrastination

- Concentrate on ONE task at a time: Master Schedule – allows you to come up with a plan and stick to it; be realistic
- Prioritize: Little assignments to build on success and decrease stress
- Make a list: Keep it real and visible! Cross items off when complete
- Define task: Make clear what it is you want to accomplish
- Divide tasks into smaller chunks: Makes tasks more manageable and less overwhelming
- Find meaning
- Increase knowledge: Get rid of the feeling that you don't know what you are doing
- Reward your accomplishments
- Chart your progress
- Get help from others: Connect with people who can help hold you accountable

Procrastination Sentence Stems

Provide 5 or 6 answers for each of the following sentence stems:

1. I tend to procrastinate most when I....
2. If I didn't procrastinate I . . .
3. If I didn't struggle with procrastination how would my life be different? What would I do differently?
4. If I stopped procrastinating what new problems or situations would I have to face that I don't have to contend with now?

Reasons Why People Procrastinate

THE “BIG FIVE”

1. Fear of Failure You cannot control other people's responses to your work; overvaluing these responses can create anxiety.
2. Fear of Success Afraid of what might happen if we were successful
3. Fear of Losing Control When feeling out of control, a person may develop a rebellious attitude in order to gain a greater sense of control. (i.e. A professor wants an assignment in by a certain date, and I chose to submit it 2 weeks later)
4. Fear of Separation Afraid that successful completion of work could pull us away from others.
5. Fear of Attachment Afraid that successful completion of work could draw others too close.

Others:

- Fear of unknown
- Fear of change
- Low motivation
- Peer influence
- Lack of relevance
- Lack of self-confidence
- Uncertainty of what is expected
- Acceptance of another's goals
- Difficulty making decisions
- Dependency and help-seeking
- Poor time management
- Learned helplessness
- Uncertainty about career objectives
- Excitement of last minute work
- Beliefs that time pressures produce best work

NOTE: Mental health issues (e.g. serious depression and anxiety) may also contribute to the habit of procrastination. Medical consultation is advised under these circumstances.

Adapted from Simon Frazier University Student Learning Commons 2018

THE PROCRASTINATOR'S CODE

(from Burka and Yuen)

- I must be perfect.
- Everything I do should go easily and without effort.
- It is safer to do nothing than to take a risk and fail.
- I should have no limitations.
- If it's not done right, it's not worth doing at all.
- I must avoid being challenged.
- If I succeed, someone will get hurt.
- If I do well this time, I must always do well.
- Following someone else's rules means I'm giving in and not in control.
- I can't afford to let go of everything or anyone.
- There is a right answer, and I'll wait until I find it.
- If I expose my real self, people won't like me.
- I will not put in my best effort so if I do poorly, I will be able to tell myself that if I worked harder, I could have done better.

Anti-procrastination strategies:

- Procrastination is just a habit
- Change your attitude: “I used to be able to do everything to my best, all the time.”
NOW: No one can do it all to 100%, all the time.
- Change your usual habits:
 - Set priorities and be strategic.
 - Balance “what’s important?” with “what’s hard?” Do some of both, each day.
 - Decide if in these circumstances, something must be done less well than your best.
- Get started with the “5 More Rule” i. Set a modest target, e.g. 5 sentences to write, or 5 pages to read, or 5 problems to do, or 5 minutes of work
- Keep Going: Improve focus and concentration
 - Unplug (seriously!)
 - Do “hard” things first, early in the day and at the beginning of the week.
 - Use the “best” location & time of day for you.
 - Work ~50 minutes, 10 min. break, for up to 3 hours. Take a ~1 hour break, then repeat.
- Know when to stop

Change Plan Worksheet

(Adapted from MTAC Change Plan Worksheet 2018)

The changes I want to make (or continue making) are:
The reasons why I want to make these changes are:
The reasons why I want to make these changes are:
The steps I plan to take in changing are:
Some resources I could turn to are:
The ways other people can help me are:
I will know that my plan is working if:
Some things that could interfere with my plan are:
What I will do if the plan isn't working: