

Dealing with procrastination

How procrastination works

You sit down to start working on your assignment ... but before you start you just need to quickly check your email... Post something on Facebook... Grab a snack... Get a drink...

...And then you realise an hour has flown by and it's time for your next lecture.

Why do we procrastinate?

How you spend your time depends on **the value you place on** what you are doing **at that moment**.

We tend to value tasks that reward us immediately.

When we procrastinate **we are placing a higher value** on these other **activities with immediate rewards**.

To stop procrastinating, you need to **increase the value** of doing the assignment and **decrease the value** of messing about.

Increase task value

If I work on my assignment now, I can:

- Have time to go out this weekend.
- Write a better assignment and get a better grade.
- Pick up an extra shift at work (to pay for going out).

Decrease task value

I can leave the other stuff because:

- There's nothing really interesting on social media.
- I can check my email when I take a break.
- Junk food is a waste of money anyway.

Present you vs. Future you

In addition, when we make decisions about how we spend our time, we only think about our present selves. We don't consider what it means for the not-too-distant future.

What are the consequences for future you of not working on your assignment now?



Present you: enjoying social media and coffee, not working on your assignment.



Future you: Stressed and panicking the night before your assignment is due,

Everyday we make choices about how we spend our time. Below are some scenarios and some alternative actions.

1. Social media

- It's tempting to quickly check social media while you're working on your assignment...but try to focus on the current task and avoid switching between tasks.
- Or try a blocking app to avoid temptation.

2. Browsing

- It's easy to get off track when you're searching for information to include in your assignment.
- Be clear about what you're looking for and save interesting articles to read later.

3. Phone

- Instant notifications cause us to lose focus and tempt us with instant rewards.
- Keep your phone off the desk and on silent.
- Check your phone as a reward for completing your task and put a time limit on use.

4. Your friends

- It's hard to say 'no' when your friends are going to have fun and you're stuck doing your assignment.
- However, saying 'yes' now will reduce the time you have to complete your assignment and you might miss out on something better closer to the deadline.

What strategies could you use next time you encounter a boring task?

- Increase the value of the task you're avoiding (e.g. working on assignment, studying) and decrease the value of the procrastination activity (e.g. browsing, social media).
- Consider the implications for future you of not working on the task now.
- Develop strategies for managing your distractions.
- Remember: don't be too hard on yourself — everyone struggles with procrastination at some point!