

Tips for Preventing Procrastination

Reality Check: There's no magic solution to procrastination. Try some of these strategies, see what works for you, expect mistakes along the way, and plan to try again!

Work that doesn't feel like work:

- Break down papers, assignments, exams, etc. into small, specific pieces.
- Make a list of what you need to accomplish and how long you'll need to spend on each.
- Set mini-deadlines, but be realistic about how long it takes to complete a task. Add some wiggle room in case something comes up or goes wrong (it probably will!).
- Do the "pre-work." Print articles; request interlibrary loan books; gather your materials; create files; schedule study groups, meetings with faculty, or lab time.
- Read all the instructions, including relevant sections of the syllabus. If you're unsure about anything, ask for clarification.

Getting started:

- Jump in for 5 or 10 minutes—you might find that you actually want to keep going. If not, at least you've done something!
- Start with a break plan in mind. For example, work for 50 minutes and take a break for 10 minutes out of every hour.
- Check out mytomatoes.com, which features a simple timer that helps keep you on task and motivated for 25 minutes at a time.
- When you're "in the flow" and working productively, keep going as long as you can.
- When you're genuinely stuck, give yourself permission to step away and work on something else rather than increasing your stress level.
- Plan rewards for each major section you get through.
- For paper writing: Come up with a topic early in the process. Let your ideas incubate. Leave time for revision and editing.

In the middle:

- Let other people add to your momentum: visit faculty office hours, study with a friend whose habits you admire, find a tutor who will help keep you on track, get advice from your HA, keep classmates updated on your progress, or post your to-do list on your door. Making yourself accountable to others can also help. For example, tell your roommate you can't watch a movie or go to dinner until you've finished that chapter.
- Save your work—this might mean photocopying, using a bookmark, or jotting down some notes before you forget an idea.
- Check off your to-do list and reward yourself.
- If you need to rewrite your goals or adjust your deadline, that's ok. If you're feeling behind, give yourself a limit for how long you'll let yourself freak out or feel guilty, and then get back to work!
- Don't ask for an extension unless it will really make a difference. (And don't stop working just because you've been granted an extension.)

At the end:

- Review what you've done to regain momentum. This is especially helpful for writing assignments and studying for exams.
- Take a longer break (if time allows) or talk to someone else in order to get a fresh perspective.
- Plan a big reward for the finish line!