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Procrastination

The "Art" of Postponing Things



The term procrastination comes from the Latin word *procrastinatio* ("postponement") which is composed of the prefix *pro* ("for") and the noun *crastinum* ("tomorrow"). It is used to describe notorious and unnecessary postponement of starting to work or interruption of tasks so that completion is not possible or only under pressure. In academia this is a very common phenomenon.

Take some undisturbed time to reflect thoroughly on the following questions. Answer them being as honest with yourself as possible. The goal of this task is to make you aware of exactly what you put off and why. Of course, the answers are primarily for you. Whether you want to share your results with the group is entirely up to you.

How much do you estimate your delaying behavior hinders your productivity?

☐ very much ☐ much ☐ a bit ☐ hardly ☐ not at all

What kind of tasks do you put off?

- Household (cleaning, laundry, home or yard projects, calling a repairman, shopping, . . .)
- Research/PhD-related (experiments, learning new skills, making decisions, writing papers or dissertation chapters, attending classes, paper reading, studying for exams . . .)
- Administrative and financial tasks (writing reports or grant proposals, tax declaration, vacation requests, funding or reimbursement of costs, paying bills, opening mail . . .)
- General work-related tasks (being on time for work or for meetings, making decisions, . . .)
- Interpersonal tasks / social relationships (staying in touch with friends or relatives, confronting someone about a problem, complimenting someone, phone calls, answering emails, meeting your supervisor or colleagues, ending unsatisfying relationships . . .)
- Personal care (workouts, stopping smoking or abuse of alcohol, personal hygiene, pursuing hobbies, reading, taking breaks or vacations, . . .)
- . . .

How would you characterize these tasks?

E.g. Tasks ...

... where I get bored.
... that seem very extensive.
... where I don't know what the first step is.
... where I am compared with others.
... where I'm afraid of not doing exceptionally well.
... where I'm afraid to fail.
...

Understanding what happens in your mind when you procrastinate.

For the following questions, it might be helpful if you imagine the situation in which you procrastinate. Picture where you are, how you feel, what you experience physically, etc. The more convincingly you can put yourself in the situation, the easier the answers will be.

What mood or state of mind leads to particularly strong procrastination?

What feelings do you have toward the tasks that you procrastinate?

What happens cognitively during your procrastination?

- What do you focus your attention on when you procrastinate?
- What thoughts do you have?
- What inner processes of interpretation and evaluation take place?
- What explanations or excuses do you use to justify to yourself postponing the task?

What activities do you do instead of the task you put off?

- Is it always the same or something similar?
- Are they different activities? If so, what do they have in common?
- How do those activities make you feel?