

## Increasing Motivation & Limiting Procrastination

### Do You:

- wait until you *feel* like working?
- need pressure to get started?
- think the longer you delay, the better the work must be?
- keep polishing one work (and maybe even miss the deadline), which prevents you from starting another project?

Do you feel stressed and dissatisfied with your end results? You are not alone!

**Avoiding and procrastinating are just habits...and YOU can change it.**

## How can I start to ACT and stop *avoiding*?

### I. Increase your Self-Awareness

#### 1. What is Contributing to the Problem?

- don't understand what's expected
- can't commit to a topic or decision
- under estimate time needed to do it
- don't feel like working on it...can't start
- spend too much time on one project
- doubt the result is good enough, so you keep working
- list your own reasons...

#### 2. Consider: Why do You Want to Change?

Make a list of reasons to change your attitude or your behaviour. Write down your top 3 reasons, for future reference or to re-motivate yourself. Ask yourself:

How important is it to change?

How confident am I that I can change?

How ready am I to change?

*"And the day came when the pain of remaining the same  
was greater than the pain of risking a change" Anais Nin*

### II. Analyze your Road Blocks

Are they related to:

- the specific task you must accomplish

- your attitude or mind set
- your work habits

### **1. Strategies Related to “Task” Road Blocks**

- Clarify what is to be done, in what form, by when, for what mark or purpose
- Ask your prof. or supervisor if you are unsure
- Use resources such as Research Librarians to help choose topics for papers, or find reference material
- Use the free on-line Assignment Calculator at <http://www.queensu.ca/qic/calculator.html> or Thesis Manager at <http://www.queensu.ca/qic/graduate.html>
- to develop a plan, with small steps, dates and specific writing resources

### **2. Strategies Related to Unhelpful Mind Set**

- Examine your standards:
  - is *perfect* your goal? Is “perfect” possible? realistic? enabling you to avoid actually completing and handing in the assignment?
  - is *good enough* acceptable for others and yourself?
  - your “best” is not absolute: it will depend on the circumstances
- Recognize your choices: give yourself permission to choose procrastination when the cost isn't too high.
- Question your assumptions: motivation doesn't magically appear by itself, it grows through involvement and activity requiring effort
- Keep perspective: is this work the ultimate judgment of your knowledge or skill OR is it a hurdle to be jumped?

### **3. Strategies Related to Work Habit Road Blocks**

- Set priorities in courses, projects, personal life.  
How important is it? How urgent is it? Will you: Do it? Defer it? Dump it? or Delegate it?
- Consider school your job: 30-50 hours per week still leaves lots of personal time
- Develop a routine that works for YOU. Go to [www.bewell-dowell.org/schedule](http://www.bewell-dowell.org/schedule)
- Be realistic: Learn to estimate time for different tasks
- Begin the day with a difficult (readily avoided) task, and the rest of the day will feel easy
- Avoid temptation: Reduce distractions of friends, busy spaces, iPhones, Facebook, on-line shows.
- Practice the “5 More Rule” to get started, or keep working:
  - i) Commit to 5 more minutes, or pages, or sentences, or push-ups, or plates to wash
  - ii) Do it
  - iii) Make a choice: 5 More? or Stop?
- Work with a motivated friend
- If you over-work a paper, limit the time or number of edits you will allow yourself

- If you have lost your desire or spark for school, look at your school vs life balance--do you permit yourself time for recreation?
- If you think you only work under pressure: create a crisis! Shorten the deadline, or add an activity

### III. Strategies to Manufacture Motivation

- Identify your "internal motivators" such as pride in accomplishment, satisfaction in attaining a goal, pleasure in creativity, excitement in learning. Work for these personal rewards.
- Make a promise to yourself, or someone else...and keep your word. Be accountable
- Accept that discomfort is part of developing a new habit or attitude. Do it anyway, and the discomfort will have less power over you.
- Think of a hero, or someone whom you admire, and do what they would be doing right now
- Build interest in learning by *acting* interested: prepare for class, contribute, keep up with work.
- Discuss an interesting idea from class.
- Watch for the downward spiral and get help now
- Reduce optional responsibilities, to focus on priorities and reduce pressure
- Hang out with motivated friends, and study together
- Forgive yourself as you would pardon others who get off track. Then keep going :-)

### IV. Procrastination is Just a Habit: Tips on Developing New Habits

- ✓ commit to a specific change: visualize the NEW YOU with desired behaviours or attitudes
- ✓ start small: set a series of clear, small steps or goals
- ✓ start now: daily practice requires self-discipline
- ✓ keep trying: new habits can replace old ones in 3-4 weeks of daily practice
- ✓ link your new habit with an existing one e.g. write for 30 min. (new habit), then check email (existing habit)
- ✓ track your accomplishments daily
- ✓ look for rewarding aspects of your effort and accomplishments (e.g. reaffirm your creativity or intelligence, reduce your stress, hand paper in)
- ✓ check your attitude: setbacks happen to anyone- it's how you deal with them that matters
- ✓ remind yourself of your original reasons for wanting to change

For more tools and strategies, go to

<http://www.queensu.ca/learningstrategies/grad/motivation/module.html>