Parkland College

A with Honors Projects   Honors Program

2012

Cures for Procrastination in College Students

Ashley-Tate Hollis
Parkland College

Recommended Citation

Tate Hollis

Honors Project

Michelle Sweet

14 December 2012

Cures for Procrastination in College Students

Procrastination, as defined by thefreedictionary.com, is "To put off doing something,

especially out of habitual carelessness or laziness. To postpone or delay needlessly."

Procrastination is the most common attribute found in students across America. By putting off

work that needs to be done for another task that could be done at a later time or is not

important at all, the student is procrastinating. According to Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie and Qun

G. Jiao, "Approximately 95 percent of college students procrastinate on academic tasks such as

writing term papers, studying for examinations, and keeping up with weekly reading

assignments." This number only decreases by 35% at the graduate level, with 60% of students

still procrastinating on daily work and assignments. Procrastination is also defined by Cal Poly

website as: "a complex psychological behavior that affects everyone to some degree or another.

With some it can be a minor problem; with others it is a source of considerable stress and

anxiety. Procrastination is only remotely related to time management, (procrastinators often

know exactly what they should be doing, even if they cannot do it), which is why very detailed

schedules usually are no help" (Cal Poly). These researchers explain that procrastination is not only a device used to not finish work, but is also a psychological behavior problem.

Laura J. Solomon and Esther D. Rothblum found that 27 to 46 percent of undergraduate students reported that they always or almost always procrastinated on writing term papers, studying for examinations, and keeping up with weekly readings. The authors also discovered that nearly one-quarter of these students reported that procrastination was always or almost always a problem for them when trying to find ways to make time to complete these tasks. Similarly, Jeffrey L. Clark and Oliver W. Hill found that between 30 and 45 percent of African-American undergraduate students reported problems with procrastination on writing term papers, studying for examinations, and keeping up with weekly reading assignments. Likewise, between 55 and 60 percent of the students wanted to decrease their procrastination on these tasks (Onwuegbuzie). Procrastination affects everyone, and these statistics prove that race or gender does not have an effect on the rate of procrastination. It was also found that more than half of the students that knew they struggled with procrastination wanted to fix their problem or at least try to find a way to bridge the gap between laziness and achievement.
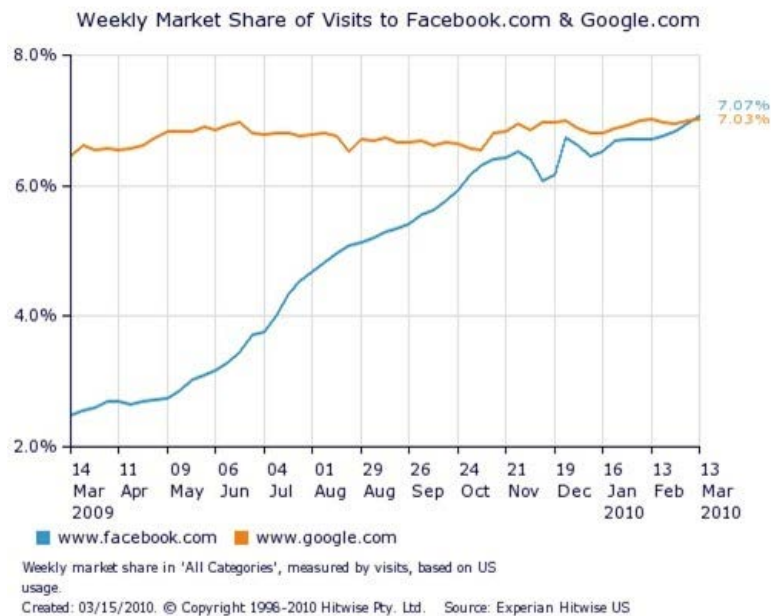
The main form of procrastination is saying "I will start tomorrow" or "I will start my assignment as soon as this show is over". This makes the assignment less important in the student's mind because they have placed it under a less important task. Procrastination is prominent in students for many reasons, but the five most common are: being too tired, being too busy, looking too far into the future, not wanting to do something unpleasant, and fear. There are certainly more reasons why student procrastinate, but these five categories cover

most reasons. All five of these reasons have cures that can be easily applied to every student as long as they take the time and effort to try to change.

The first reason, being too tired, can be applied at almost any day and time in a student's career. Working into the latest hours of the night and then getting small amounts of sleep begins to take its effect on students. The real cure to this problem is to get more rest, but sometimes there is just not enough time to sleep and still attain good grades. The second option for fixing this problem would be to start working on the assignment and write whatever comes to mind. By letting the brain start thinking about the task placed in front of it, the brain will slowly warm up to the task and begin to function at a better rate. Giving the brain permission to start off slow will help it accomplish more work throughout the allotted time.

The second reason for procrastination, having too many things to do, is often a legitimate reason for not completing all assignments and work. Often, the workload is so large, that the brain does not know how to process the amount of work to be done and boggles at the idea of finding the correct place to start. The most common response to this problem is to avoid it completely. Websites like Facebook and Pinterest are visited most when students have work that needs to be accomplished. Sites like Google are also highly populated throughout the year, but begin to increase slightly during November and December, the two most common months

for finals and exams as well as large projects.

Weekly Market Share of Visits to Facebook.com & Google.com

8.0%

7.07%
7.03%

6.0%

4.0%

2.0%

14 Mar 2009 — 11 Apr — 09 May — 06 Jun — 04 Jul — 01 Aug — 29 Aug — 26 Sep — 24 Oct — 21 Nov — 19 Dec — 16 Jan 2010 — 13 Feb — 13 Mar 2010

■ www.facebook.com   ■ www.google.com

Weekly market share in 'All Categories', measured by visits, based on US usage.
Created: 03/15/2010. © Copyright 1996-2010 Hitwise Pty. Ltd.   Source: Experian Hitwise US

This graph shows the peak in visits to Facebook starts around November and stays strong

except for a slight dip in December. The dip is most likely the attempt of many students to stay

away from social networking sites while they are studying, and according to the graph, they

seem to succeed fairly well. The way to fix this problem is to focus on one project at a time. The

natural way to get tasks done is to write out a to-do list. This helps order the chaos that needs

to be finished, but still throws the brain into overdrive. By throwing that list away and focusing

on only one task, the brain has more time and space to devote to the one task chosen for the

day. By giving the brain one thing to focus on, the task will be more easily accomplished and,

after finishing the first task, the brain will be ready to move on to task number two.

The third reason for procrastination is looking at the big picture instead of the actual

task. By focusing on the rewards of being done with the project and having more free time,

students have worked themselves into a corner. Anticipating the feeling after the

accomplishment makes the assignment hard to focus on and makes the deadline seem even farther than it is. Many students anticipate the idea of having more free time and less work so much that they forget the project that is still not finished. By looking so far into the future, the task at hand seems long and impossible to finish. A way to fix this problem is incremental rewards. Most people look forward to the idea of a reward at the end of an accomplishment, even if it is a small one. By placing a large incentive that can be broken up into smaller rewards, students will be able to pace themselves and accomplish the goal more easily. For every paragraph of a paper that is written, the student rewards himself with five minutes of Facebook or other free time. After five minutes, the student returns to his paper and writes another paragraph. This cycle repeats until the paper is finished and the student feels accomplished. By rewarding himself throughout the process, the student does not feel overworked, and the level of writing in the paper increases. Another way to prevent procrastination, especially while reading, is to place a reward at the end of each paragraph to be read. By placing a gummy bear at the end of each paragraph, the student has more incentive to finish the paragraph.
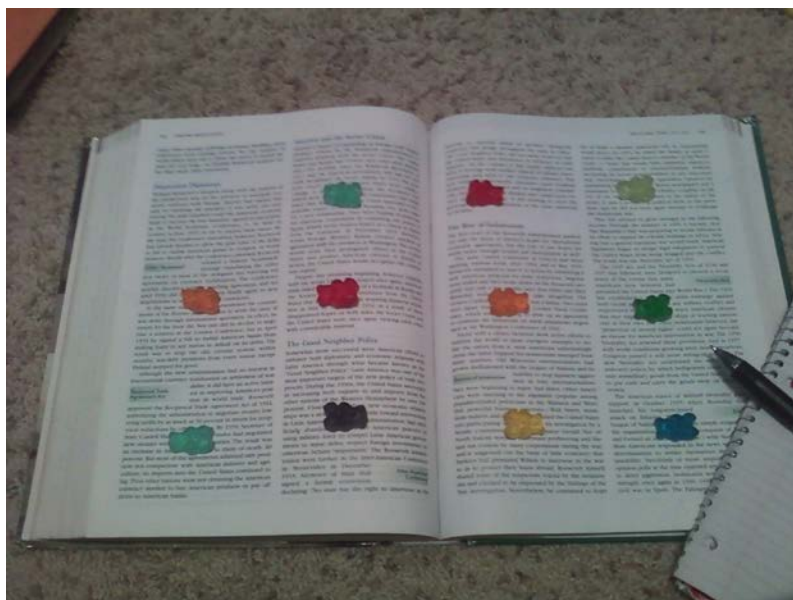
Odds are, after rewarding himself after small accomplishments, the student will begin to find a

rhythm in his writing process and will be able to accomplish more during his allotted time.

Incentives are a powerful way to accomplish any goal, especially one that does not seem as

appealing as another task.

The fourth reason for procrastination is the idea of an unpleasant task. Very few

students look forward to the idea of an eight page paper, and therefore procrastinate in the

process of writing and turning in the paper. Many times, an unpleasant task is ignored for as

long as possible, making the student work twice as hard to finish and twice as stressed until he

is finished. Many unpleasant tasks are divided into three categories: some tasks are mind-

numbingly tedious, some are bafflingly complex, and maybe worst of all, some are amorphous: the

student knows he needs to finish this project, but he does not fully understand the concept of the

project. With projects like the ones listed above, many students have no idea where to start and are lost

from the very beginning. This makes the task even harder to accomplish because the brain does not

have time to think the assignment through and the student does not have time to let the brain think it

through. When the assignment is so complex that the student does not know when to start, the easiest

option is to ignore the entire project and come back to it at a later date. This is the easiest form of

procrastination because the student can justify the reason for not doing the assignment. The cure for

this form of procrastination is to distract the brain from what it is trying to process. By listening to music

or a podcast and opening up a document and writing the title and date, the brain will be stimulated by

the auditory entertainment, and will slowly start to work. While it might still be tough, step by step, the

paper will be accomplished and the brain will not suffer through the process. The drawback on this cure

is the lengthy time that needs to be allotted for the brain to work while receiving another form of

stimulation. This cure may take a long time, but it may end up being shorter than the student sitting in

silence waiting for an idea to come along. Another complication of this cure is the process. Many students cannot write a paper while listening to music or a podcast. The extra distraction does not help them focus, but draws their attention away from the task at hand to another task that is not as important.

The fifth and final reason that students procrastinate is fear. Many students do not let themselves begin an assignment because they are afraid of what will happen once they start. What if the student fails? What if the student makes a mistake that could easily be fixed but is forgotten about? What if the student does not produce the single greatest result of all time? These questions and more like these float through a student's head when he begins an assignment. Fear is a big issue for students, especially if the student lacks ability in writing or problem solving. The demeanor of the teacher might help the student relax more, but the idea of a large project with a large grade is enough to scare any student. The cure for this fear is to step away from the project and stop taking the grade so seriously. Many students will not be able to come to terms with this idea until they have worked on it for many years, and may even need therapy to overcome their fear. For a quick fix though, the student can ease some of their fear by finding a way to put himself in a good mood. Finding the book or music that keeps the mood light or finding what makes the student smile will help put him in a good mood. Once the student is in a good mood, the assignment will seem more approachable and less fear inducing. By starting the assignment in a good mood and writing without fear of messing up and with no regard for the results the student makes the assignment easier without realizing it. "The truth is that sometimes the most successful people are not the most brilliant or capable, they are just those of us who get down to business without feeling like it is the end of the world, and of course, they Don't Forget 2 Work" (Woodruff).

Procrastination is a very real distraction for college students. As listed above, there are five main reasons a student procrastinates: being too tired, being too busy, looking too far into the future, not wanting to do something unpleasant, and fear. All five of these reasons are legitimate reasons at some point in the student's career. When they become the sole reason for the lack of finished assignments and lower grades, then the student needs to find a way to fix the problem that procrastination has become. By using any of these cures for procrastination, the student can become more accomplished and have more time to focus on other activities. Each student needs to determine whether he is procrastinating because of the reasons listed above of if he is deliberately trying to find something else to do other than the assignment. Once the student has determined the cause of his procrastination, any of these five cures can help him accomplish his goals and ultimately, become a better student.

Works Cited

Burka, Jane B., and Yuen, Lenora M. *Procrastination*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1983.

California Polytechnic State University, Academic Skills Center.

http://sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl/procrastination.html. Web. Accessed 12 Dec. 2012.

Ellis, Albert, and Knaus, William J. *Overcoming Procrastination*. New York: Signet Books, 1977.

Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J., and Qun G. Jiao. "I'll Go To The Library Later: The Relationship

Between Academic Procrastination And Library Anxiety." *College & Research Libraries*

61.1 (2000): 45-54. *ERIC*. Web. 12 Dec. 2012.

Woodruff, Columbus. "Five Forms of Procrastination and How to Beat Them."

http://www.dontforget2work.com/2010/05/five-forms-of-procrastination-and-how-to-beat-them/ Accessed 12 Dec. 2012.