Smart Student Secrets

The 7 Reasons You Procrastinate

(And What To Do About Them)

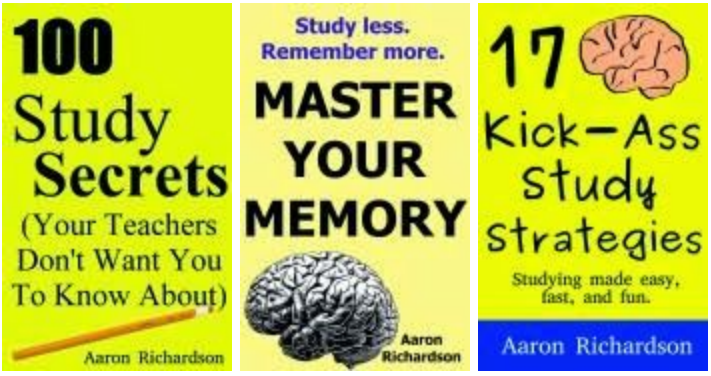
Written By: Aaron and Kay

www.SmartStudentSecrets.com
DailyMemoryTips.tumblr.com
twitter.com/studytipsdaily

Who Are We?

Aaron

Engineering major- Hates Math
3.6 GPA - Studying Only 15 Minutes A Day
Nerd Cred - But His Mum Likes Him Anyway
Author of:



Check Him Out On Amazon

Kay

Dual major - Science & Arts
3.7 GPA - Despite Her Terrible Habits
Limited Nerd Cred - Sucker For Bad Jokes

Introduction

Procrastination is a major problem for most students.

They put off the things they know they need to do.

Most students understand that they do better work when they aren't desperate to finish. Despite that, they put off the work until they're absolutely desperate to complete it.

In our article The Ultimate Guide To Crushing Procrastination, we go over solving procrastination more thoroughly but in this guide, I want to provide a more detailed examination of why you're procrastinating and what to do to stop it in the future.

There are seven main reasons people procrastinate. Some of them make more sense than others but keep this in mind:

These are all natural and good processes. In the right context, all of these behaviors can help you in life. The only problem is that you're applying them in a way that limits you in school.

What Are The Seven Reasons You Procrastinate?

1. Fear
    - What You Can Do About It
2. Rebellion
    - What You Can Do About It
3. Motivation
    - What You Can Do About It
4. Thrill-Seeking
    - What You Can Do About It
5. Confusion
    - What You Can Do About It
6. Distractions

What You Can Do About It

7. Management
    - What You Can Do About It

1. Fear

Fear is a completely natural human emotion.

Your body is built to survive in a much different environment than it lives in today. These days people aren't running from tigers too often. **Fear was useful for that. It increases your ability to complete physical tasks.** It also shuts down a good chunk of your intellectual capacity. That's not so good for you today.

If you're scared of completing (or not being able to complete) something then you're going to want to put off the suffering.

- Fear of failure
- Fear of success
- Fear of incompetence

Any of these fears can shut your brain down and prepare you better for going on a run than completing anything intellectual.

What You Can Do About It

- Go On A Run

One of the easiest ways to manage fear is to use up the physical energy it gives you. In some ways, this is another form of procrastination but you might notice, after you work off some of that energy, you have the intellectual energy to finish what you're trying to do.

- Get confident

Confident people aren't scared of failing.

Whether you like it or not, a big chunk of your competence comes from your confidence. If you're not confident in your ability then you'll never be able to prove your competence. (If you're incompetent, you'll never learn it if you don't have the confidence to try.)

Confidence is a complicated subject but there are two quick ways to achieve it.

1. Which part are you confident about?

You may not know how to do everything. Your brain is going to want to focus on all the stuff you don't know. That can be helpful for learning but it's not so helpful for getting confident.

Focus on what you do know about what you need to do.

2. Faking it makes it.

Confidence often comes from the way you move your body.

If you're hunched over and keeping your head down, you're not going to feel very confident. If you're standing tall with your head up and a massive smile on your face, it's going to be hard not to be confident.

- Fail Fast

If you can't get confident then at least accept that a fast failure is better than a slow and painful incomplete.

It's better to produce subpar work right now than to have nothing. (You will be improving your quality because **nothing is always lower quality than something.**)

2. Rebellion

When someone tells you to do something, there is a good chance you're going to have the urge to skip doing it. Some personalities hate doing what they're told. (Yes… this is particularly true for young people.)

This has a ton of value in life. Humans aren't lemmings. We don't all need to walk off the same cliffs. We can learn to make our own decisions. That requires a certain desire to break from the crowd.

All day you're being told to do things by parents, teachers, and virtually every other person in your life. **The more they tell you to do it, the more this urge to rebel is going to urge you to do the opposite.**

Procrastinating is one way of saying "I have control. This is my choice."

It's usually not the best way.

What You Can Do About It

- Prove that it's your decision

Make the decision to go to school and learn.

No… don't do what you're told.

Think about it and decide to go to school based on your own decisions. If you're in college, you choose to be there. You can leave at any time. If you are there, you must have some reason. What is that reason?

If you're in high school (and reading this,) you're probably old enough to drop out. If you aren't old enough, will you drop out when you're old enough?

This is all a choice. If you're in school, you're probably making the right choice but that's not my decision to make. It's up to you.

Completing your work for school isn't conforming to what you're told. It's doing what you've made a decision to do. Make that decision consciously.

- Make completing it a rebellion

If you don't want to complete an assignment then try completing a rebellious version of the assignment.

Is the teacher asking you to do something you think is stupid? Instead of doing the stupid thing, do something that obviously skirts the edges of the assignment's criteria. Follow the rules but follow them in a way that makes you happy instead of worrying about pleasing the teacher.

Some of my highest grades have come from taking something the teacher asked for and giving them something (that technically follows the rules) but is completely unexpected by the teacher.

- Imaginary Rebellion

Imagine your teacher telling you, "you can't do this. You're too stupid."

If you imagine that vividly enough (and have a rebellious spirit,) it's going to motivate you.

If completing your assignment isn't a rebellion then you can always fool your brain into thinking it is. Your brain can't tell the difference between something you vividly imagine and something you see.

Take advantage of that and find a way to make completing your work the rebellious thing to do.

3. Motivation

I don't like talking about motivation.

I've read loads of books on motivation (and written some crazy long papers on it through college.) Despite that, I feel like it's a bit of a muddy concept that means something different to everyone that hears it.

Let me define motivation for sake of discussion:

Motivation is the emotion caused by a purpose.

It makes you get up and move to get what you need done.

If you have a good purpose then you won't need to get motivated.

People focus on developing an artificial moment of motivational energy when they're usually better off focusing on the fuel behind it: a purpose.

If a tiger started chasing you, you wouldn't need to get motivated. You would run as fast as you could. You would do it because you have a seriously immediate and intense purpose.

If you don't have motivation then you're probably lacking a good purpose.

What You Can Do About It

Have a seriously immediate and intense purpose!

It's that simple.

If you're completing your work to just get it done then, of course, you're not going to be too motivated. If you're preparing for your (near) future or learning what you love or having fun then you'll be motivated to do it.

You can make a good purpose with intensity.

- Intensity is how important it is for your future.

For school, this is absolutely huge. **One hour of work now can be worth well more for your future hourly wage.** In the members only area of Smart Student Secrets, I have an article that expands on this. Is An "A" Worth The Effort?

- Immediacy is how soon you'll see the result.

For school, this can be the real tough one to prove. If you're in high school, you could have over a decade before the grades you're getting now will pay off in your future. Most students only motivate themselves with immediacy through deadlines.

If you have a typical deadline then you do have a very mundane immediacy.

One way to improve these deadlines is to **create early deadlines and reward yourself for meeting the early ones.** If you complete what you're supposed to early then give yourself some time off.

For a more powerful effect:

Find a way to make what you're learning immediately useful.

- Write a blog about it.
- Tutor other students
- Learn to have fun while learning it.
- Create artistic works about it.

If you find a good immediate reward for learning something then you're going to learn it a whole lot faster.

4. Thrill-Seeking

Some students use deadlines as their own personal amusement parks.

When you have one day left to write a 5-page essay, it can be nerve-wracking. It can also be exciting. It can give you a rush. This rush is your body producing all its desperation hormones to save your procrastinating butt from the consequences.

It can feel really good to finish a ton of work in a short period of time.

This excitement is lowering the quality of the work you produce. Study after study has shown that students that complete work farther from the deadline produce better work. They have time to actually review their work with a fresh mind. That allows them to produce better work.

What You Can Do About It

This may surprise you:

- You can get a similar thrill from doing your work early.

I regularly produced massive papers for class in one long desperate sitting. After I completed it I would feel amazing. I did this weeks before the assignment was due. Eventually, I would check my work and still feel good about it. Until the day that assignment is handed in, **I would get a little boost of happiness from doing it so early.**

You know how procrastinating slowly bites away at your happiness. Your brain always interrupts you saying “I need to do this. I need to do this.” Doing stuff early does the opposite. Your brain politely nudges you and asks, “Did I do that?” and you get to say “Oh yeah. I did.” It provides the opposite of the punishment of procrastination. It provides a reward.

- How To Thrill Seek

If you are going to procrastinate until the last minute then at least have the courtesy to plan for it in advance.

Planning to do something the last day is not the same as procrastinating and doing something the last day.

When you’re procrastinating you end up repeatedly reminding yourself about the assignment.

Planning to do an assignment later can be a smart decision.

Putting it off when you planned on doing it is usually a bad one.

5. Confusion

If you don't know how to start then it makes sense not to start.

Any level of ambiguity in what you need to do will increase your chances of procrastinating.

If you don't know the next physical action you need to take then you won't be able to do it. Notice the word physical. You need to know what your body needs to do. The more precisely the better.

For example, if you need to write an essay the first thing you need to do isn't just writing. Depending on your own preferences your physical actions are going to look more like this:

1. Get out your computer.
2. Open a document
3. Write up an outline
4. Write it!
5. Put it away for a while
6. Check your work
7. Print it out.

Even the small difference between writing your essay and getting your computer ready for you to write the essay can be enough of an excuse to not start.

Tiny bits of confusion can throw your productivity for a loop.

Now imagine the kind of confusion most students are dealing with on a daily basis:

- What exactly does the teacher want?
- What do they mean by this?
- Is this really what I need to be working on?
- Am I properly prepared?
- Do I understand this right?

School can get complicated.

If you don't find yourself a little confused then you're probably just missing something.

What You Can Do About It

Answer your questions!

If you need input from someone else then ask them about it.

This is the most powerful way to solve this problem. If you can answer your questions then you won't be too confused to start.

Sometimes it won't be that simple. You may not be able to find the right answer to some of your questions.

If you can't get the right answer to your questions then come up with a tentative answer to your question. Come up with the best answer you can and work as-if that is the correct answer.

Eliminate the ambiguity by making stuff up if you have to.

Again, just remind yourself, anything is better than nothing.

6. Distractions

Some students call a distraction problem a procrastination problem.

Do you find yourself playing videogames for hours straight before realizing that you still need to do something for class?

Do you search the web mindlessly for hours before actually starting to do the work you meant to do?

Many of these problems aren't really procrastination. They're just plain old distractions.

Sure.. your first decision to not study now may have been procrastination but one hour later when you're in the middle of whatever you're doing, that's not procrastination anymore. That's just your brain being intensely focused on something else.

This intense focus is awesome. The fundamental problem is your first decision to put stuff off.

What You Can Do About It

- Have a basic plan

I'm not a big fan of making a schedule in any precise sense but I'm a huge fan of quick and dirty planing.

Set a time that you plan on doing what you need to do but don't "want" to do. Give yourself plenty of time to complete it. When that time comes, do it. Accept absolutely no excuses. If you're doing it wrong then plan better next time.

- Get into habits

Don't be disciplined. Be habitual.

Discipline is difficult. Habits are easy.

I never struggle to start the necessities in life because they're so habitual that I do them without even thinking about it. They just happen. This is much easier than constantly having to motivate yourself to do them.

- Make Starting A Distraction

Most procrastination takes place when you make a plan to study without a clear trigger to start studying.

Studying is easy when you do it at the same time daily (habitually.) It's not so easy when you want to stop doing other stuff to start doing it.

For example, if you're playing video games, stopping to study can be almost impossible. It's a major pain in the ass to convince yourself to stop. It takes some serious motivation to break your trance. It's almost like you're sleeping and require an alarm to stop it…

And, yes, that is exactly what you can do to make studying a distraction.

If you plan on stopping something fun to start doing something boring, get in the habit of starting an alarm and stopping when it goes off. (No… not twenty minutes later.)

The alarm is your reminder to think about the other priorities in your life. Once you think of those priorities you're much less likely to fall back into a distracted state.

7. Management

Management is the logical form of procrastination.

There are times when you'd want to procrastinate:

- You're not prepared
- You can do it better later
- You have more important priorities
- You might not have to do it
- You might do it with less stress later

Here's the problem:

There are almost always good reasons to procrastinate. Sure… you can do better if you think about it longer. Sure… maybe you'll be more prepared later. Yea… there are always more productive things you can be doing.

How are you supposed to manage these logical reasons?

You could think them all through.

That's not a quick process. It's long and difficult. It requires a certain amount of intellectual fatigue. This process usually takes more than the value it provides.

What You Can Do About It

- There are no excuses.

My first solution is to stop accepting any excuses when you have a plan.

You can plan to do something a week from now. **When that time comes, you no longer can use any logical excuse to put it off longer.**

At times, this will cost you a little in quality but it will eliminate any concerns about when you should do something.

- They are all good excuses.

This is mostly the acceptance of constant procrastination until the last minute.

Some people prefer this. Studies have shown the habit of procrastination tends to produce lower grades for students but if this is your preference then at least you'll be consistent. It's better than constantly torturing yourself about when you should do something.

- Coin Flip Strategies

If you don't feel comfortable with either of these two strategies then at the very least, force yourself to flip a coin before you decide to procrastinate. If you pick heads or tails right then you can procrastinate.

Here's the thing: It doesn't matter what you pick. **The most important thing is to realize the questions are irrelevant beyond your planning process.** By flipping a coin you remind yourself how unimportant the questions really are.

Procrastination is a complicated process.

There are a lot of problems that could be leading to your own situation but hopefully, this guide has helped put it the solutions in perspective.

That is what most of this guide is really about.

Procrastination is almost always a perspective problem.

You're doing what you're doing for a logical reason. If you're doing work then you're doing it because you think it's the right decision. If you're not then, somewhere in your brain, you think doing it is the wrong decision.

Look into your own thoughts. **Why are you doing what you're doing?**

That is the fundamental key to consistency with your actions.

You need to create a consistent connection between your logic and your emotions.

You need everything inside of you pushing in the same direction.

Are you interested in learning some of the most powerful study strategies science has found today? Do you want to know how to study in less than 15 minutes a night? That's what **Smart Student Secrets** is all about. Be sure to visit us at www.SmartStudentSecrets.com to learn more.

Smart Student Secrets

www.SmartStudentSecrets.com