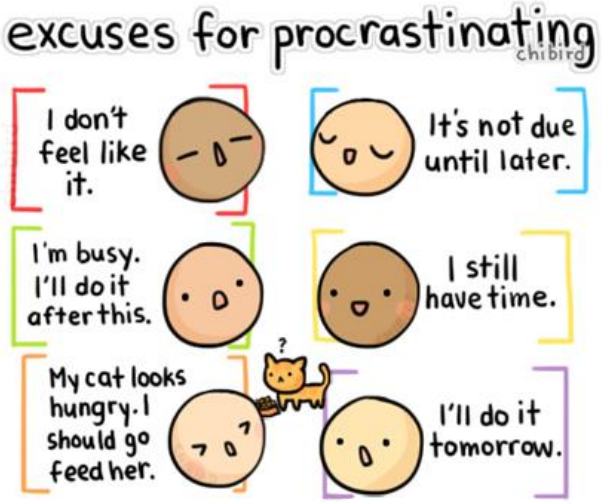
Minimise Study Time
Maximise Scores

VCE Exam/ Study Tip 20: Procrastination

It can be very difficult to maintain motivation across the year and commit to the expected 16 – 24 hour personal study regime, particularly during school holidays. These periods, are, however, the **ideal time** to get ahead and make a significant difference to stress levels and study loads later in the year.



Students often make up **clever excuses** to justify why they should put off their studies, resulting in feelings of **guilt and regret** when they don't get the results they need. By taking control of procrastination, not only will your marks improve:

- You'll **complete tasks faster**. The longer you put off your studies, the more information you'll forget, and therefore, the longer it will take you to complete a task.
- You'll create **more free time** to do the things you enjoy.
- You'll feel better about the quality of your work as well as your overall abilities.
- You'll feel **more confident** about forthcoming tests and exams.

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Beating Procrastination

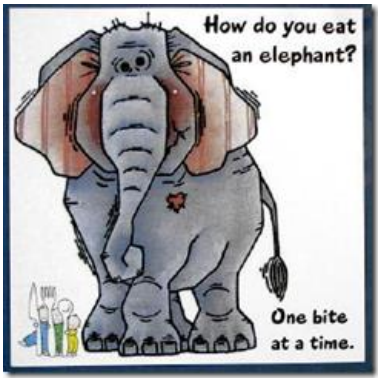
Combating procrastination requires a little “reverse psychology” as well as a technique called "Nike".

Step 1: Ask yourself the following questions:

Why am I procrastinating?
What are the benefits of putting this task off until later?
What are the consequences of putting this task off until later?

These questions are usually enough to stop most students from procrastinating, however, if you do need a little more encouragement, proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Divide large tasks into smaller, more achievable milestones. Start with a small simple task or the most enjoyable task and get some momentum happening. Once you get into the swing of study, it won’t seem as bad as you made it out to be, and it won’t take as much effort to continue your study session. The beginning is always the hardest!



One of the most important neurotransmitters (chemicals that transmit impulses from one nerve cell to another) involved in motivation and the ability to complete tasks is called **dopamine**.

Dopamine also plays a **key role** in concentration, learning speed, memory formation and regulating reward and pleasure. When we complete a task, no matter how small, dopamine is released, improving motivation and brain function! Therefore, divide large tasks into smaller more achievable milestones and always start your study sessions with the smallest or most pleasant task.

Step 3: Employ the relevant strategies from the suggestions below.

Trick your brain. Rather than telling yourself that you need to work for three hours straight (which might put you off starting) tell yourself that you will only study for 5 minutes. Pick something relatively easy and you’ll quickly discover that studying isn’t that bad once you get into the flow of things.

Think about what you want to achieve before you sit down to study and **write** these study goals down. This will help prepare your unconscious mind for the tasks ahead, reducing the chances of procrastination.

Don’t wait for inspiration to hit or for the perfect time, just start working on anything study related.

Try using **rewards** to motivate you to study. This could be a break or relaxing activity for every hour of study or for every task completed. Use things that are typically classified as distractions as rewards (such as TV or Facebook), rather than punishing yourself when you use technology to procrastinate.

Tell yourself how **great you will feel** once you have completed each task.

Find purpose in the tasks you need to complete. It’s always easier to commit to tasks when they mean something to you.

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Step 3: Continued.

Turn tasks into **challenges** or games. For example: "I bet I can't get this done in 30 minutes."

Visualise failure and how you would feel knowing things could have been different if you didn't procrastinate. Now pick up something easy and get on with the task at hand.

After a productive study session, **record a message** to yourself. Explain how you didn't want to study and looked for any opportunity to procrastinate. No matter how difficult it was, you then decided to spend a short time studying, only to find out that it wasn't as bad as you thought. Describe how good you felt after completing your studies and why you shouldn't procrastinate next time. Play this message when you're struggling to get started – there's nothing more powerful than a personalised message that directly targets your logic and thought processes.

If you're struggling to get into your studies, go for a quick jog or power walk around the block. Catch your breath and then start studying – even if you have to tell yourself that it will be for only 5 minutes. Exercise increases the levels of a hormone called dopamine, which increases motivation. So that 5-minute study session may just turn into a 3-hour marathon!

Ask yourself why you're procrastinating and how much procrastination will add to the length of a task. Then ask yourself whether it's really worth procrastinating. **Note:** The longer we leave a study task, the less information we remember, which means that it will take you longer to complete. **So unless you love to study, and are looking for ways to increase the time you spend studying – DON'T PROCRASTINATE!**

Write down every task that needs to be completed, in order of importance. Assign a time limit to each task, and then see whether you can complete each one in the given time. If you need more time for a task, trim the time allocation off the next one. The challenge of beating the clock will reduce the desire to procrastinate, as well as the number of tasks on your list!

Remove as many barriers to starting your studies by leaving your desk clean, tidy and uncluttered each evening. Then spend 10 to 15 minutes on the hardest task that needs to be completed on the next day. It's amazing how the thought that you've already started can reduce the feelings of being overwhelmed, not to mention procrastination levels!

Eat some chocolate. You'll get a rush of dopamine, as well as chemicals that promote calm and stimulate your brain – perfect for buckling down and getting things done.

Make a study pact with your friends. Download a distraction blocker app and block all social media sites for an agreed period of time. Then you'll know that you're not missing out on anything on Facebook, making it much easier to get into your studies!

Track how you're spending your time by keeping a time diary. You'll quickly see how much time you're wasting when procrastinating, and how much time could be gained for leisure activities if you completed tasks without delays.

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Step 3: Continued.

Find an 'accountability partner' – a friend or parent that you have to report your progress to.

If you have a very bad case of procrastination, do short bursts of focused work. Spend 1 to 2 minutes on a task and see how much you can complete. Go back to procrastinating and repeat the burst of work as often as you can. You may even decide not to set a timer to sound at the 2-minute mark and just power through a question or section of work. To keep you challenged and interested, guess how long each burst of work lasted, and compare your efforts with your friends.

Compile all tasks that need to be completed into a list. Then ask yourself:

"*What is the best use of my time right now?*"

Set **realistic and manageable goals** so that you know what you want to achieve and you can see clear evidence of your progress towards your final goals. It may help to visualise what you want to achieve and put up posters around your house that remind you of your goals.

Set early deadlines for tasks. Rather than leaving things to the last minute, 'fake' deadlines will compel you to complete tasks earlier than required, leaving you with sufficient time to go over your work before you hand it in.

Find a place to work that is quiet and free of distractions. Your surroundings can affect productivity as well as the quality of your work.

Use **reminders and prompts** around your room and home. These will serve as a great source of motivation when you're distracted or avoiding your studies. Examples include:

"Procrastination wastes time. Do it now and get it over and done with."

"Procrastination adds time to tasks".

"Don't like studying? Don't procrastinate and save huge amounts of time!"

"Procrastination makes easy things hard, hard things harder."

"How will I feel when I get my results and I haven't achieved the ATAR I need?
Don't risk it. Get studying".

Keep specific to-do lists or calendars with your tasks and goals clearly documented. This will help you track your success and recognise your achievements.

Engage in a regular study timetable.

Study every day – **NO EXCEPTIONS**. This will ensure that you develop a regular study habit and render you less susceptible to procrastination! Established routines will:

- Minimise effectiveness of procrastination attempts.
- Ensure that work is completed on time and that it does not accumulate.
- Create time to do other things.
- Reduce stress and workloads before tests and examinations.

Do not over commit yourself to any one activity including study. Set aside time to do the things that you enjoy.

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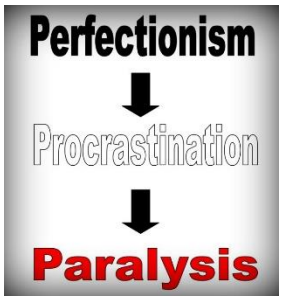
Step 3: Continued.

As hard as it may be, **make every effort to manage procrastination** on a daily basis. You'll be very glad you did in the weeks leading up to the exams!

If all the given suggestions fail – just accept the fact that you must complete the task and get on with it.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism often leads to many students avoiding their studies.



If you're a perfectionist, it may be beneficial to learn about the "The Pareto Principle". This principle states that for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes and that about 20% of the time expended on a task is responsible for 80% of the results.

Many natural phenomena have been shown to exhibit the 80 – 20 rule, including spending, distribution of wealth, customer complaints, land ownership, company profits, staff productivity and even essay marks!

So rather than spending significant amounts of time trying to perfect essays and assignments, aim for a slightly lower standard, saving considerable time as well as reducing the chances of future procrastination.

Regards,
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