

Dealing with procrastination

Overwhelmed by information? Break it down into manageable chunks. Plan and prioritise the most important and relevant bits. Just do this and walk away for a few hours if you can.

Bored by the topic? If you have time to distance yourself from it then do. Walk away for a few days. Come back to it, hopefully with a fresh perspective. Still bored? Explain it to a friend who knows nothing about the topic. Get them to ask you questions to prompt their wider understanding, and perhaps a fresh perspective for you. Still bored? Accept it. Wider reading may help, but it is just one part of your course. It may well be an important part of your career, and you may come to love it in time.

Don't know where to start! That's OK. It might help to just get your initial thoughts down on paper – you can organise and add to them later. Have a look at your course notes and material on NILE – look out for key ideas and names. This can then prompt you at a later date.

Always need to read more There will be some reading around the topic to do of course. However, there comes a point where you need to take stock of what you have read and organise your notes. If you find you are reading the same ideas and authors again and again, you have probably exhausted the sources.

What I write is rubbish Nobody ever writes a perfect first draft. Having a plan is likely to help you to structure your thinking, and stop you staring at a blank page which can be frustrating!

A need for perfection If you don't want to start because you think you won't get it right – don't expect to! Organising your thoughts into a plan is a good first step. Developing your plan into drafts will take time and multiple refinements.

Can't concentrate Look around for any distractions. Can you remove them or move away from them? It's difficult to stay focused for much longer than [20 minutes](#) so short bursts are better than trying to study for several hours.

Do anything but study! This probably encompasses bits from all the sections above. Do any of them sound familiar? If there is a clear reason why you are not engaging with the work, acknowledge and face it. If you have a fear or stress about getting started, even just looking at what you must do can help, with no commitment to producing anything.

Getting organised

Find out:

- When your deadlines / exams are. Plan around your existing commitments realistically from 6-8 weeks beforehand. Allocate time between now and then – perhaps a weekly schedule / Post it notes / Paper diary / online planner
- What the main topics are you need to read around. Make a list on separate pages
- When and where you do work best. Consider background noise, distractions, morning person?
- If an online tool/app will help to focus or distract you
- What can motivate you successfully. If you do get distracted or lose interest, identify what can bring you back to focus. Examples could include: a reminder why you're studying in the first place, career aspirations, ice cream etc.

Procrastination often comes from an emotional place, not a logical one. You may need to address the emotion (stress? fear?) before being particularly productive. (Sirois and Pychyl, 2016, p. 168)

Sirois, F.M. and Pychyl, T.A. (eds) (2016) Procrastination, emotion regulation, and well-being. In: *Procrastination, health, and well-being*. London: Elsevier, pp. 163-168

If you have read to the end of this guide you have avoided procrastination!