Decrease Procrastination and Increase Persistence

Decrease Procrastination

1. For long-term goals that don’t have set deadlines or are further away, create your own deadlines and establish smaller goals that act as steps towards the larger goal. For example, say your professor gives a writing assignment that’s due in three weeks. The only deadline is the date the final draft is due. Method #1 outlines a strategy that promotes procrastination because there is no planning, whereas Method #2 outlines a strategy that breaks out the effort and tasks needed to accomplish the goal.

Method #1

Made aware of deadline

Begin working on paper

Think about working on paper...remember when paper is due...watch TV...think about working on paper...hang out with friends...go out to eat...work on other homework you find more enjoyable...remember paper is due...start to stress about what you should write about...check social media...message friend on social media and complain about paper...pull out syllabi to check deadline...

Stay up all night completing the paper

Method #2

Made aware of deadline

Outline complete

Rough draft

2nd draft

Deadline

Create mini-deadlines

Brainstorm/Research

Visit writing center

Final revisions

2. Avoiding procrastination and increasing self-control is more than just time management. Establish and stick to realistic deadlines. Here are some methods to increase self-control:

- Think about future “you” and what putting off assignments or deadlines will do to your stress level and quality of work, and how it will affect other goals/deadlines you have set.
- Be honest and ask yourself questions that help you plan:
  - Do I need to adjust my timeline?
  - Do I need to ask for help?
  - Can I focus if I study with friends?
  - Where am I most effective when studying (dorm room, library, etc.)?
  - Do I need music or background noise/silence to concentrate?
  - Will a rewards/punishment system work? What “if”-“then”-rewards motivate you?
Decrease Procrastination and Increase Persistence

Increase Persistence

1. **Understand and increase “grit”**. Think of grit as a combination of resilience, courage, conscientiousness, follow-through, and excellence. It’s something that takes effort and practice. Grit is following through with homework that’s been assigned, setting aside time for studying and actually studying, and telling yourself that you finish what you begin. Grit is not giving up when you face struggle, which can mean changing your perspective of “failure.” The student with grit doesn’t ask “how many points do I need to get on this test to get the grade I want?” Instead, they focus on learning the information to understand it and achieve excellence.

2. **Find something you are passionate about and motivated by**. Once you’ve identified your passion, create a small visual reminder that will motivate you and keep it in a location that you will see on a daily basis (e.g., your wallet, purse, or bedside). The visual can be an image or words that describe your long-term goal. Each day, deliberately look at the visual to remind yourself of your goal. Also use the visual in times of stress or when you feel overwhelmed.

   For example, say you want to be a neurosurgeon, but hate math. You are currently enrolled in Calculus II, but struggling. You’ve worked on your problem sets for hours and start to think you’ll never understand. Pull the visual out and remind yourself that this class is one step in reaching your long-term goal.

   **Don’t stop until you’re called doc.**

   In this example, it might also help to work with peers on problems sets. You might also benefit from academic mentoring or other services. Asking for help is not giving up—it’s identifying a gap in knowledge and leveraging resources to develop that knowledge. A person who persists does what it takes to reach their goal, including asking for help when it’s needed.

3. **Control “grass is always greener” thinking to persevere through difficulty**. Persistent students persevere through difficulty by focusing on reality. They don’t waste time thinking about how their life could be easier if their reality was different or if they had more resources to accomplish their goals. They find ways to accomplish their goals with what they have, which can mean being innovative and putting forth more effort.
Decrease Procrastination and Increase Persistence

For example, say you are taking a full course load while working to help pay for expenses/save. If you’re struggling with your courses, you might think about how other students don’t have to work, and how unfair it is that they have more free time. You exert valuable time and energy on an uncontrollable aspect of your life. The persistent student looks at all resources available (office hours, Cornerstone, peers, etc.) and takes advantage of those that fit in their schedule. The persistent student proactively uses resources to prevent future problems, while focusing on their long-term goal to persevere through this class, their degree, medical school, and become a neurosurgeon. The persistent student focuses on solutions to their problems, not the problems themselves.

4. **Adopt a growth mindset, rather than a fixed mindset.** Promoting a growth mindset involves all areas that outline grit: courage, conscientiousness, follow-through, resilience, and excellence. For example, you’re struggling with Calculus II and you “don’t think you’ll ever understand” because you have a fixed mindset. It’s not that you won’t be able to ever understand, it’s that Calculus II concepts haven’t “clicked” yet. By telling yourself that you will eventually learn the concept, your mindset switches from fixed to growth.

5. **Reward yourself for deliberately practicing a new concept even if you aren’t successful.** It’s all about growing your abilities, not rewarding yourself for what’s easy. If it’s easy, then you’ve already learned the concept, which means no new learning is occurring.

   For example, say you spend a certain amount of time on a Calculus problem with repeated attempts to solve it with little progress. Reward yourself for learning different ways that don’t work. Also, keep in mind that it’s important to identify time benchmarks that are appropriate for you in identifying when assistance—e.g., working one-on-one with a TA, academic mentoring, attending a WUSA workshop—would be beneficial.

   Remember, it’s okay to ask for assistance when repeated attempts to learn a concept prove unsuccessful. Trying to solve a problem and finding ways to *not* solve it can be as insightful as finding the correct way. This also increases your resilience and reinforces a growth mindset.