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Procrastination

Contributors: Cecilia A. Essau & Bilge Uzun

Edited by: Amy Wenzel

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Procrastination in general is a tendency to put off an intended action or decision; however, it has been defined and conceptualized in multiple ways. Thus, there does not seem to be a consensus on a single definition, but all definitions include a component of “delay.” For example, one definition of procrastination includes the failure to spend most of one’s time on important tasks. This entry introduces the various forms and causes of procrastination and discusses the factors that contribute to procrastination.

Forms of Procrastination

Angela Hsin Chun Chu and Jin Nam Choi argued that there are two types of procrastination: (1) active procrastination and (2) passive procrastination. *Active procrastination* is when one makes a conscious decision to procrastinate. Active procrastinators plan and organize task activities, although they may not stick to a rigid time schedule. They are able to estimate the minimum amount of time necessary to finish a task and push themselves to meet their goal, even when completing the task at the last minute under intense pressure. They have more task-oriented coping strategies when under stress.

Passive procrastination refers to traditional procrastinating. It includes postponing a task until the last minute due to being unable to make the decision to complete the task in a timely fashion. It also includes the situation in which a person starts a task but never finishes it. Passive procrastinators generally tend to prioritize a more pleasant activity over a less pleasant one, without organizing their time or undertaking much planning. They often fail to complete the task on time, probably because they tend to underestimate the time required to complete it. They generally fail to control their ability to focus on the task and tend to gravitate toward doing more pleasant activities, rather than carrying on with the task at hand.

Passive procrastination has been classified into four main types. *Academic procrastination* is when academic tasks are postponed until the last moment. Approximately 90% of university students have been reported to procrastinate on an academic task at least occasionally, and 50% have been reported to engage in procrastination at least half the time. Other research results similarly revealed that almost all students procrastinate to some degree. Researchers have also examined *work-related procrastination* in work settings. In contrast to academic tasks, which are solitary endeavors, tasks in the workplace require teamwork. It has been found that many individuals in the workplace feel that they procrastinate, and the degree of difficulty they report in this regard depends on their personal standards. *Everyday procrastination* is when an individual experiences problems in making time for routine tasks and completing them on time. The final form of procrastination is a *decisional* form of procrastination. This is when one is not able to make a decision within a suitable amount of time or when one delays major life decisions on a recurring basis. Accordingly, procrastination is a means of dealing with conflict and indecision. By deferring tasks, individuals are able to avoid testing their abilities and allow others to make decisions on their behalf. This means that they can attribute any failures to someone else’s poor planning or decision making.

Causes of Procrastination

Researchers have also shown an interest in investigating the causes of procrastination, resulting in the development of several models aimed at understanding the nature of procrastination. These theories have guided the researchers in assessing the reasons for academic procrastination, with a prime focus being the different features of procrastination.

Some scholars have focused on the *affective aspects* of procrastination, concentrating on the subjective discomfort associated with task delay, whereas others contend that *cognition* is important in understanding delaying phenomena. Cognitive variables such as self-esteem and self-efficacy have been frequently associated with procrastination.

In contrast, behavior-oriented researchers have focused on the different variables contributing to procrastination, such as the study habits of students and the degree of task delay they engage in. Studies have also been undertaken in which individuals' actual procrastination behavior has been examined, such as research considering the date on which various pieces of work are submitted and the time within which they are completed. Moreover, some researchers contend that self-regulation is a key predictor of procrastination.

Contributing Factors

Research regarding procrastination has been conducted primarily with students and thus has focused mainly on the influence of three possible demographic moderators: (1) gender, (2) age, and (3) grades. According to Piers Steel, the influence of gender on procrastination is difficult to predict. Although some studies have found significant gender differences (e.g., females procrastinate more than males) in the incidence of procrastination, others have not.

With regard to the influence of grades on procrastination, the limited number of studies that have been conducted on this issue have revealed that university grade is positively correlated to procrastination (i.e., the higher the grade, the higher the procrastination scores). Furthermore, Bilge Uzun Özer and colleagues (2009) found that freshmen procrastinate the least, seniors the most. In contrast to the findings with regard to grades, with regard to age, Steel argued that people procrastinate less when they are older. This contention is consistent with other forms of self-regulatory failure (e.g., obesity, gambling, excessive debt).

Procrastination in academic settings has been investigated in samples from different cultures and countries, such as the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, and Turkey. The findings revealed that cultural difference is not an influence on the frequency of procrastination but it is an influence on why people procrastinate. The findings of cross-cultural studies support the view that procrastination is encountered in almost every society and so does not seem to be culturally bound.

When the sources of procrastination are considered, many causal factors contributing to academic procrastination have been found. Research has revealed that a number of factors are related to procrastination, such as evaluation anxiety, difficulty in making decisions, rebellion against control, lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, low self-regulation, external locus of control, self-oriented perfectionism, lack of assertion, fear of the consequences of success, perceived aversiveness of tasks, and overly perfectionistic standards about competency.

See also [Perfectionism](#); [Self-Regulation](#)

Cecilia A. Essau Bilge Uzun

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Further Readings

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