

THESIS ASSIGNMENT: "Procrastination" (opened Jan. 21 / due Jan. 25.)

Due Friday by 11:59pm **Points** 5 **Available** Jan 21 at 12am - May 3 at 11:59pm 3 months

ENG 105 – Thesis Assignment

DIRECTIONS: In order to understand argumentative writing, you must understand the importance of the 3-Part Thesis Statement. READ both articles on procrastination.

Procrastination #1 [_ \(https://www.verywellmind.com/the-psychology-of-procrastination-2795944\)](https://www.verywellmind.com/the-psychology-of-procrastination-2795944)

[AND]

Procrastination #2 [_ \(https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/a-procrastination-gene\)](https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/a-procrastination-gene)

THEN:

- For Procrastination #1, WRITE
- 1 Thesis Statement in favor of or FOR procrastination
- 1 Thesis Statement out of favor or AGAINST procrastination
- For Procrastination #2, WRITE
- 1 Thesis Statement in favor of or FOR procrastination
- 1 Thesis Statement out of favor or AGAINST procrastination

That means (4) FOUR 3-Part Thesis Statements all together.

Please SUBMIT your Assignment in a WORD Document.

*Procrastination (2)*THE
NEW YORKER

GETTING OVER PROCRASTINATION

By Maria Konnikova July 22, 2014

Want to hear my favorite procrastination joke?

I'll tell you later. Piers Steel, a psychologist at the University of Calgary, has saved up countless such lines while researching the nature of procrastination. Formerly a terrible procrastinator himself, he figures a dose of humor can't hurt. It's certainly better than continually building up anxiety about work you should do now but put off until later and later, as your chances of completing it grow ever slimmer, and the consequences loom ever larger.

The tendency to procrastinate dates back to the very beginnings of civilization. As early as 1400 B.C., Steel told me, ancient Egyptians were struggling with basic time management. "Friend, stop putting off work and allow us to go home in good time," read some hieroglyphs, translated by the University of Toronto Egyptologist Ronald Leprohon. Six hundred years later, in 800 B.C., the early Greek poet Hesiod voiced a similar feeling, warning us not to "put your work off till tomorrow and the day after, for a sluggish worker does not fill his barn, nor one who puts off his work." In 44 B.C., Cicero deemed "slowness and procrastination" always "hateful." (James Surowiecki wrote about philosophers' interest in procrastination in the magazine, in 2010.)

The sentiment survived intact through more recent times. In 1751, Samuel Johnson remarked, "The folly of allowing ourselves to delay what we know cannot be finally escaped is one of the general weaknesses which, in spite of the instruction of moralists, and the remonstrances of reason, prevail to a greater or lesser degree in every mind; even they who most steadily withstand

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it find it, if not the most violent, the most pertinacious of their passions, always renewing its attacks, and, though often vanquished, never destroyed.” He concluded that it was “natural,” if not praiseworthy or desirable, “to have particular regard to the time present.”

The twenty-first century seems no different. Students procrastinate instead of doing their schoolwork. In one study, thirty-two per cent of surveyed university students were found to be severe procrastinators—meaning that their procrastination had gone from being an annoyance to an actual problem—while only one per cent claimed that they never procrastinated at all. Employees procrastinate instead of taking care of their office tasks. The average employee, one survey found, spends about an hour and twenty minutes each day putting off work; that time, in turn, translates to a loss of about nine thousand dollars per worker per year. In a study conducted in 2007, about a quarter of surveyed adults reported that procrastination was one of their defining personality traits. In addition to Americans, the sample included Europeans, South Americans, and Australians.

“It’s a common pulse of humanity,” Steel told me. We’ve all likely experienced the feeling. There’s that project we have to finish, that email we have to send, that phone call we need to make. But somehow, despite our best intentions, we never seem to get any closer to doing it. “One thing that defines procrastination isn’t a lack of intention to work,” Steel said. It’s the difficulty of following through on that intention. For most of us, procrastination isn’t a pleasant experience. It’s not like blowing off a meeting or a class and feeling the freedom of rebellion; it’s a feeling of growing pressure—of knowing we’ll have to deal eventually with whatever it is we’re putting off. About ninety-five per cent of people who procrastinate wish they could reduce that tendency; and, as Steel writes in his book, “The Procrastination Equation,” procrastination leads to lower over-all well-being, worse health, and lower salaries. Why, then, is procrastination such a common phenomenon? If we don’t particularly want to procrastinate, and it causes us discomfort to do so, why do we persist in doing it?

This was the question that preoccupied Steel as he began his research into procrastination in the nineties. One of his first studies, as a doctoral student under Thomas Brother, at the University of Minnesota, involved observing students as they worked through online course materials. “It was basically an early MOOC, a computerized class where everyone could do the work at their own pace,” he said. “And so we had this great time-pace data: how much work they’re doing, and how quickly.” The researchers could, in other words, take an observable behavior—how long students took to finish certain assignments, for example, or how well they stayed on task—and match it against a host of self-reported measures, among them the tendency to procrastinate.

When Steel completed his analysis, one finding in particular jumped out: excessive procrastinators were worse at self-regulating. In fact, self-regulation—the ability to exercise self-control and delay immediate rewards for future benefits—explained seventy per cent of the observed procrastination behaviors. From that connection came Steel’s main insight: What if procrastination was simply the flip side of impulsivity? Just as impulsivity is a failure of our self-control mechanisms—we should wait, but instead we act now—so, too, is procrastination: we should act now, but instead we wait.

In 2007, Steel finally published his dissertation research—“I joke that it took me ten years to write up a three-year project,” he said—but in the intervening years he continued to pursue the link between procrastination and impulsivity. In study after study he found the same correlation: individuals who were prone to impulsiveness also tended to be excessive procrastinators. Steel summarized his conclusions in a meta-analysis of the literature, drawing from over two hundred studies. When he examined the data, he posited that the two traits may share the same genetic foundation. “All of these basic constructs, self-discipline, self-control, and on the other side, procrastination, are pretty much the same phenomenon,” he told me.

This April, the behavioral geneticist Naomi Friedman, with her graduate student Daniel Gustavson and two colleagues at the University of Colorado at

Boulder, decided to test the notion directly, in a study of three hundred and forty-seven pairs of same-sex identical (monozygotic) and fraternal (dizygotic) twins from the Colorado Longitudinal Twin Study. The study had been ongoing since the twins' birth, in the nineteen eighties, and had already yielded vast amounts of data on impulsivity, such as whether or not subjects had trouble initiating difficult tasks. "That was basically a measure of procrastination already," Friedman told me. Prompted by Gustavson, she and her colleagues decided to look at the relationship between procrastination and impulsiveness more closely. They asked each twin to complete questionnaires measuring procrastination, impulsivity, and goal management, so that they could evaluate the extent to which those characteristics and behaviors are genetically, as opposed to environmentally, determined.

The logic of the analysis is relatively simple: all twins share their home environment, but the identical ones share all of the same genes, while the fraternal ones share only half. By looking at the difference in behavior variance between the two twin types, researchers can approximate the degree to which a certain characteristic is heritable. (Of course, the method isn't a hundred per cent accurate: even twins who share the same environment can be subject to different environmental influences.) Like Steel, Friedman's team found that procrastination and impulsivity went hand in hand. They were also able to go a step further and investigate whether the two tendencies share a genetic basis.

As it turns out, they do. The researchers found that each trait was moderately heritable: about forty-six per cent of the tendency to procrastinate, and forty-nine per cent of the tendency toward impulsiveness, was attributable to genes. But the estimated genetic correlation between the two traits was one—that is, perfect—or at least as close to perfect as you can get. What's more, Friedman's team found that both traits could, in turn, be linked to goal-management ability: the same shared genetic variation overlapped substantially (at sixty-eight per cent) with a tendency toward goal failure. "Maybe what's actually linking these traits is that people are failing to keep track of their long-term goals," Friedman said.

If we think of procrastination as the flip side of impulsivity—as a failure of self-control rather than a failure of ambition—then the way we approach it shifts. To Steel, that means foregoing approaches based on the assumption that we simply need to be told not to procrastinate. “Practically, we seem to still be stuck with the 1982 SMART goals approach,” he said. “But we actually know how to alleviate the problems of procrastination much more effectively.” When it comes to self-control, one trick that tends to work well is to reframe broad, ambitious goals in concrete, manageable, immediate chunks, and the same goes for procrastination. “We know there is a lot of naturally occurring motivation as deadlines approach,” Steel pointed out. “Can you create artificial deadlines to mimic the same thing?”

Steel’s recommendation borrows from the approach of the NYU psychologists Gabrielle Oettingen and Peter Gollwitzer, who study self-control and goal-setting: make your targets as small, immediate, and specific as possible. For instance, Steel uses timed ten-minute sessions to get started on tasks that he doesn’t quite want to do. “The problem with a goal we’re avoiding is that we’ve already built into our minds how awful it’s going to be,” he said. “So it’s like diving into a cold pool: the first few seconds are terrible, but soon it feels great.” So, set the goal of working on a task for a short time, and then reassess. Often, you’ll be able to stay on task once you’ve overcome that initial jump. “You don’t say, ‘I am going to write.’ You say, ‘I will complete four hundred words by two o’clock,’” Steel says. “The more specific, the more powerful. That’s what gets us going.”

The other part of Oettingen and Gollwitzer’s approach involves eliminating the roadblocks you may encounter on the way to achieving your goal. Identify the “hot” conditions for impulse control—those moments when you’re most prone to give in to distraction—and find ways to deal with them directly. “One of the easiest things to do is to realize that maybe it’s your distractions, not your goals, that are the problem,” said Steel. “So you make the distractions harder to get to. Make them less obvious.” He points to an Android app that makes it more difficult for people to access the games on their phones. Steel’s

own team has designed a phone and desktop app that adds a simple delay mechanism to distracting programs; when you click on, say, Candy Crush, your phone gives you a countdown that asks if you really want to go to the game, instead of taking you there directly. That little delay is often enough, Steel has found, to make us reconsider a favorite procrastination tactic.

Of course, if you are an excessive procrastinator you may be unlikely to install such a program. “The ironic thing is that procrastinators put off dealing with their procrastination,” Steel said. So I have an idea: instead of doing whatever you’re supposed to be doing right now, take a look at Steel’s online procrastination test. There are few things we like more than online personality assessments—and this one might even help you beat your procrastination. Just you wait and see.



Maria Konnikova is the author of “The Confidence Game” and “Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes.” Read more »

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