

## WORKPLACE WRITING PROMPT #15

**TOPIC:** Managing time at Work

**QUESTION:** Write an informational essay defining procrastination and give examples of it. Why do some employees procrastinate? What are some ways to overcome it?

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Read the following text:
  - Overcoming Procrastination
2. As you read the texts, think about details from the texts you might want to use in your essay. You may highlight key points and ideas.
3. After reading the texts, create a plan for your essay. Decide on each argument you will support. Think about ideas, facts, definitions, details, and other information or examples you want to use to support your claim.
4. Write a 5 paragraph essay with an introduction, 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Each paragraph should contain 3-6 sentences. Follow this outline:
  - **Introduction paragraph #1-** Introduce the topic clearly and provide a focus. Explain what the essay will be about. Turn the topic question into a statement.
  - **Paragraph #2 –** Describe what procrastination is and give examples of it. How does it adversely affect work?
  - **Paragraph #3 –** Discuss a strategy to overcome procrastination and give examples.
  - **Paragraph #4 –** Discuss another strategy to combat procrastination and give examples.
  - **Conclusion Paragraph #5 –** Provide a summary of the information just given.
5. Be sure to use correct sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Use clear language and vocabulary. Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion. Be sure to use information and details from the texts. Be sure to use your own words.

# **Overcoming Procrastination**

**Manage Your Time. Get It All Done.**

Stop procrastinating, with James Manktelow and Amy Carlson.

If you've found yourself putting off important tasks over and over again, you're not alone. In fact, many people procrastinate to some degree – but some are so chronically affected by procrastination that it stops them fulfilling their potential and disrupts their careers.

The key to controlling this destructive habit is to recognize when you start procrastinating, understand why it happens (even to the best of us), and take active steps to manage your time and outcomes better.

## **What is Procrastination?**

In a nutshell, you procrastinate when you put off things that you should be focusing on right now, usually in favor of doing something that is more enjoyable or that you're more comfortable doing.

According to psychologist Professor Clarry Lay, a prominent writer on the subject, procrastination occurs when there's "a temporal gap between intended behavior and enacted behavior." That is, when there's a significant time period between when people intend to do a job, and when they actually do it.

## **How to Overcome Procrastination**

Follow these steps to deal with and control procrastination:

**Step 1: Recognize That You're Procrastinating**

If you're honest with yourself, you probably know when you're procrastinating. Here are some useful indicators that will help you know when you're procrastinating:

- Filling your day with low priority tasks from your To Do List.
- Reading e-mails several times without starting work on them or deciding what you're going to do with them.
- Sitting down to start a high-priority task, and almost immediately going off to make a cup of coffee.
- Leaving an item on your To Do list for a long time, even though you know it's important.
- Regularly saying "Yes" to unimportant tasks that others ask you to do, and filling your time with these instead of getting on with the important tasks already on your list.
- Waiting for the "right mood" or the "right time" to tackle the important task at hand.

## Step 2: Work Out WHY You're Procrastinating

This can depend on both you and the task. But it's important to understand which of the two is relevant in a given situation, so that you can select the best approach for overcoming your reluctance to get going.

One reason is that people find a particular job unpleasant, and try to avoid it because of that. Most jobs have unpleasant or boring aspects to them, and often the best way of dealing with these is to get them over and done with quickly, so that you can focus on the more enjoyable aspects of the job. Another cause is that people are disorganized. Organized people manage to fend off the temptation, because they will have things like prioritized to-do lists and schedules which emphasize how important the piece work is, and identify precisely when it's due. They'll also have planned how long a task will take to do, and will have worked back from that point to identify when they need to get started in order to avoid it being late. Organized people are also better placed to avoid procrastination, because they know how to break the work down into manageable "next steps".

Even if you're organized, you can feel overwhelmed by the task. You may doubt that you have the skills or resources you think you need, so you seek comfort in doing tasks you know you're capable of completing. Unfortunately, the big task isn't going to go away – truly important tasks rarely do. You may also fear success as much as failure. For example, you may think that success will lead to you being swamped with more requests to do this type of task, or that you'll be pushed to take on things that you feel are beyond you.

One final major cause is having underdeveloped decision-making skills. If you simply can't decide what to do, you're likely to put off taking action in case you do the wrong thing.

### Step 3: Adopt Anti-Procrastination Strategies

Procrastination is a habit – a deeply ingrained pattern of behavior. That means that you won't just break it overnight. Habits only stop being habits when you have persistently stopped practicing them, so use as many approaches as possible to maximize your chances of beating them. Some tips will work better for some people than for others, and for some tasks than others. And, sometimes, you may simply need to try a fresh approach to beat the "procrastination peril"!

#### These general tips will help motivate you to get moving:

- Make up your own rewards. For example, promise yourself a piece of tasty flapjack at lunchtime if you've completed a certain task. And make sure you notice how good it feels to finish things!
- Ask someone else to check up on you. Peer pressure works! This is the principle behind slimming and other self-help groups, and it is widely recognized as a highly effective approach.
- Identify the unpleasant consequences of NOT doing the task.
- Work out the cost of your time to your employer. As your employers are paying you to do the things that they think are important, you're not delivering value for money if you're not doing those things. Shame yourself into getting going!
- Aim to "eat an elephant beetle" first thing, every day!

If you're procrastinating because you're disorganized, here's how to get organized!

- Keep a To-Do list Ⓢ so that you can't "conveniently" forget about unpleasant or overwhelming tasks.
- Use Eisenhower's Urgent/Important Principle Ⓢ to help prioritize your To-Do List so that you cannot try to kid yourself that it would be acceptable to put off doing something on the grounds that it is unimportant, or that you have many urgent things which ought to be done first when, in reality, you're procrastinating.
- Become a master of scheduling Ⓢ and project planning, so that you know when to start those all-important projects.
- Set yourself time-bound goals Ⓢ: that way, you'll have no time for procrastination!
- Focus on one task at a time.

If you're putting off starting a project because you find it overwhelming, you need to take a different approach. Here are some tips:

- Break the project into a set of smaller, more manageable tasks. You may find it helpful to create an action plan .
- Start with some quick, small tasks if you can, even if these aren't the logical first actions. You'll feel that you're achieving things, and so perhaps the whole project won't be so overwhelming after all.

If you're doing it because you find the task unpleasant:

- Many procrastinators overestimate the unpleasantness of a task. So give it a try! You may find that it's not as bad as you thought!
- Hold the unpleasant consequences of not doing the work at the front of your mind.
- Reward yourself for doing the task.

Finally, if your problem is that you can't decide what action to take, and are putting off making a decision because you're nervous about making the wrong choice, see our decision-making section. This teaches a range of powerful and effective decision-making techniques.

Remember: the longer you can spend without procrastinating, the greater your chances of breaking this destructive habit for good!