

# Procrastination

Session #2 within "Mental Well-being" Unit



VETERANS



**ONWARD**

## Training Materials:

- Whiteboard and pens or flipchart and pens.
- Paper and pen for all participants.
- Access to video clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdXP5weIC4w> and the means to show to participants.
- Print outs or links emailed to Assessment Tool resources:
  - Lay procrastination scale which can be accessed at: <http://www.yorku.ca/rokada/psycstest/prcrasts.pdf>
  - Irrational Procrastination Scale which can be accessed at: <https://surveyyourself.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/irrational-procrastination-scale.pdf>
  - Motivational Diagnostic Test which can be accessed at: <https://surveyyourself.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/motivational-diagnostic-test.pdf>
- Printouts of Figure 2 for all participants.

## Learning Objectives:

1. Define and describe procrastination.
2. Identify and describe personal, situational and motivational factors that increase tendency towards procrastination.
3. Complete a self-assessment and reflect upon own procrastination tendencies and motivational mechanisms.
4. Identify and describe strategies for managing and reducing procrastination.
5. Formulate personalised strategy for increased productivity and motivation and reduced procrastination

## Training Script:

Hello everyone, how are you today? My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am going to be your tutor today for this training module on Overcoming Procrastination. It is the second session within the unit called “Mental Wellbeing”. This module will take between 90 and 120 minutes to complete. Before we look at today’s objectives, I’d like us to have 5 minutes to discuss or comment on anything of note in relation to our previous session on Sleep Health. For example, how has your sleep been? Have you been able to implement any of the action points from last session? Do you have any questions about what we learnt?

[Allow 5 minutes to discuss as a group any points relevant to last session].

So, today’s learning objectives. By the end of this module, my aim is that you will be able to:

1. Define and describe procrastination.
2. Identify and describe personal, situational and motivational factors that increase tendency towards procrastination.
3. Complete a self-assessment and reflect upon own procrastination tendencies and motivational mechanisms.
4. Identify and describe strategies for managing and reducing procrastination.
5. Formulate personalised strategy for increased productivity and motivation and reduced procrastination.

Let’s make a start on learning objective **1: Define and describe procrastination.**

Procrastination is the avoidance, or putting off of doing a task that needs to be accomplished by a certain deadline. Procrastination can involve avoiding getting started, or avoiding finishing a particular task. Procrastination is a common human experience, and people often report procrastination in relation to things they'd rather avoid. For example:

- Completing chores
- Attending medical appointments
- Submitting a job or academic assignment

- Having a difficult conversation with a friend, colleague or romantic partner.

Procrastination is not the same as being lazy. Procrastination is an active process – you choose to do something else instead of the task that you know you should be doing. In contrast, laziness suggests apathy, inactivity and an unwillingness to act.

It is possible to think of procrastination as a negative trait, in that it prevents us from being productive and can lead to feelings of failure, inadequacy and guilt<sup>1</sup>. However, procrastination can be a useful short-term strategy if we consider what our desire towards procrastination might be revealing to us. Procrastination can also be considered a wise response to certain demands that could present risky or negative outcomes or require waiting for new information to arrive. To illustrate this, let's see what we can learn about procrastination from Bart Simpson! In episode 7 of Season 4 of the Simpsons (Marge gets a Job), Bart demonstrates developed procrastination skills. Let's watch this short clip:

[Show <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdXP5weIC4w> from beginning till 1:00]

### **Task:**

Let's consider and discuss each of the following questions as a group:

1. How did Bart procrastinate?
2. Why did Bart procrastinate?
3. How might procrastination be useful to Bart as a short-term strategy? [*if answers do not include the response that Bart could have used the time he gained through faking illness to revise for his test, please add this to the discussion*].
4. How might Bart's procrastination lead to negative results for him in the long-term?
5. Do you procrastinate for similar or different reasons to Bart in this clip? Can you describe scenarios in which you are more likely to procrastinate?

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<sup>1</sup> Duru, Erdinç; Balkis, Murat (June 2017) [31 May 2017]. "[Procrastination, Self-Esteem, Academic Performance, and Well-Being: A Moderated Mediation Model](#)". *International Journal of Educational Psychology*. 6 (2): 97–119.

[Encourage participants to share their ideas and facilitate a group discussion of the questions, which should take between 5 - 10 minutes].

Having defined procrastination, we are ready to progress onto learning objective 2:

## **2. Identify and describe personal, situational and motivational factors that increase tendency towards procrastination.**

This objective asks us to unpack what causes or leads to procrastination. That is a complex thing to study. You will probably recognise that, in yourself, there are some times and situations when you are more likely to procrastinate than other times or situations. It is far more complex than simply asking are we someone who procrastinates or not? For this reason, psychologists have been studying procrastination. An important piece of research, published in 2007, looked at almost 700 research studies to combine the ideas and findings in order to ascertain the factors that increase tendency towards procrastination.<sup>2</sup> This study identified 4 main factors that increase tendency towards procrastination. Let's take a look at these:

1. **Low Self-Efficacy:** Self-efficacy relates to how effective a person believes they are. It is their beliefs and expectation about how capable they are of completing a task. When we have low-self efficacy, that is, we don't have much confidence in our ability to complete a task or to complete it well, our likelihood of procrastinating increases. As a result we can be reluctant to start a task. Subconsciously we recognise if we don't start then we delay or even avoid any sense of failure. Low self-efficacy can be a symptom of depression. Low self-efficacy can be a vicious circle. When we procrastinate because of low-self-efficacy, we can then feel less productive and less capable, resulting in reduced self-efficacy. Being a perfectionist can also mean we feel a low sense of self-efficacy that results in procrastination. Whilst we want to do something perfectly, we recognise that is rarely, if ever, possible. Therefore we can avoid starting something because we fear we cannot do it perfectly.

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<sup>2</sup> Steel P. (2007). The nature of procrastination: a meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure. *Psychological bulletin*, 133(1), 65–94.

2. **Low Value:** When we assess a task as being of little importance, without much enjoyment to be gained, or alternatively, with pain involved, then we are more likely to procrastinate. In general, the more enjoyable a task, the less we procrastinate on it. Although, it seems that mildly painful and boring tasks are actually more likely to lead to procrastination than extremely difficult tasks.
3. **Impulsiveness:** When we are in an environment with lots of distractions, and /or we are especially vulnerable to distraction and resisting temptation, then we're much more likely to procrastinate. This factor, in particular, might mean some people have a greater tendency towards procrastination than others. If they are easily distracted, then they are more likely to procrastinate. Some medical conditions, e.g. ADHD and OCD means that a person is more susceptible to distraction and therefore procrastination.
4. **Delay:** Our sense and evaluation of how long we have to complete a task impacts our tendency to procrastinate. The longer we believe we have to complete a task increases the likelihood that we will wait to get started on it.

**Task:**

Begin by thinking of a time in your life when you experienced high levels of procrastination. Either you found it very hard to start a project, or even complete a task or project.

Make a note of that time on your paper.

Now call to mind a time when you felt very motivated, purposeful and experienced very low levels of procrastination.

Make a note of that time on your paper.

Now, using the 4 main factors that increase tendency towards procrastination (low self-efficacy, low value, impulsiveness and delay) consider WHY you did or did not experience high levels of procrastination in the two examples you have written down. Try to build in the 4 factors as you explain the difference. Consider writing down your ideas.

[Allow participants 5 minutes to reflect on their own ideas. Then invite participants to pair up and share their responses with another person. Finally invite all participants to contribute what they have learnt about themselves from this task. Allow 15 minutes in total for this task].

We are ready to move onto learning objective 3:

### **3. Complete a self-assessment and reflect upon own procrastination tendencies and motivational mechanisms.**

We have already noted that psychologists have been studying procrastination. In order to study any aspect of psychological behaviour, psychologists need measuring tools. I have a selection of 3 such tools that have been developed to help people ascertain and identify the ways and situations in which they procrastinate. Completing such measurement tools or questionnaires is a helpful way to develop increased self-awareness about our procrastination patterns. So, I am going to invite you to complete at least 2 of the 3 questionnaires I have for you.

#### **Task:**

[Offer participants a choice of Lay procrastination scale, Irrational Procrastination Scale and Motivational Diagnostic Test.

Allow participants 10 - 15 minutes to complete before facilitating a 5 - 10 minute group discussion about what participants learnt about themselves from the questionnaires].

We are ready to make progress with learning objective 4:

#### **4. Identify and describe strategies for managing and reducing procrastination.**

There are a number of strategies for managing and reducing procrastination so that we are not impacted adversely by the negative long-term consequences of procrastination.

Let's look at 5 of these here:

##### **1. Identify procrastination when it occurs.**

If you can identify when you begin to procrastinate, you then have a choice about how to respond. Signs that you may be procrastinating include:

- Keeping busy with lots of low-priority tasks.
- Leave an item on your To-Do list for a long time, even though it's important.
- Read emails several times over without making a decision on what to do with them.
- Start a high-priority task and then go off to make a coffee.
- Wait to be in the "right mood," or wait for the "right time" to tackle a task.

##### **2. Consider the 4 main factors that can increase tendency towards procrastination.**

Consider which factors might be impacting you when you notice you are procrastinating. For example, are you easily distracted? Do you feel a desire to do things perfectly that is hampering your ability to start or complete a project? Developing self-awareness about the factors

supporting your procrastination in a given situation again gives you data and information that enable you to make informed choices. For example, if you recognise that much of your procrastination results from having too many low value tasks as part of your job, you then have information that can motivate you towards choice and action. You could look for another job, or speak to your manager, or enrol in additional training to increase the challenge and interest you face in other aspects of your life. You could also seek medical advice if you think that depression, OCD or ADHD may be a factor in your procrastination.

### **3. Match the task to the time.**

It can be helpful to get the “low value” tasks out of the way - the ones you find boring. Or to match the time you allocate to these to when you are at your most energetic in a day. Think about the timing of your schedule to help you best tackle the low value to-dos.

### **4. Keep distractions to a minimum.**

Having recognised the situations and scenarios where you can get distracted, take action to manage and reduce those distractions. Turn off notifications and mute tech, for example. Wear noise cancelling headphones if that helps.

### **5. Use tools to help with managing and prioritise your workload.**

Being organized can help to manage the feeling of overwhelm that can make procrastination more likely. If we feel overwhelmed, we feel less able to cope and experience lower levels of self-efficacy. Being organized

can also help us make decisions about the priority of tasks which can help us to manage the “delay” factor involved in procrastination.

One of these tools was developed from something the former US President, Eisenhower, said in 1954: "I have two kinds of problems: the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent." This quote has been developed into a matrix of 4 quadrants, asking us to identify what is and isn't important and what is and isn't urgent. See Figure 1 for a graphic illustrating this:

*Figure 1: The Eisenhower Matrix<sup>3</sup>.*



 eisedo

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.teahub.io/viewwp/JwTmmw\\_eisenhower-matrix-eisedo-eisenhower-matrix-for-work/](https://www.teahub.io/viewwp/JwTmmw_eisenhower-matrix-eisedo-eisenhower-matrix-for-work/)

### **Task:**

To practice using the Eisenhower Matrix, write a list of all the things you have thought about doing, or would like to do, or know you need to do over the next 2 weeks. Write them in list format.

From this list, then try allocating each item on the list to one of the 4 matrix quadrants, depending on how urgent and important the task is. This will help you to develop the skill of prioritizing and organizing which can be an important strategy to manage procrastination.

[Allow participants 10 minutes for this task, then lead a 5 minute facilitated discussion on how participants felt about using the matrix].

Our final learning objective allows us to apply what we have learnt today and create our own action plan. Learning objective 5 is:

### **5. Formulate personalised strategy for increased productivity and motivation and reduced procrastination.**

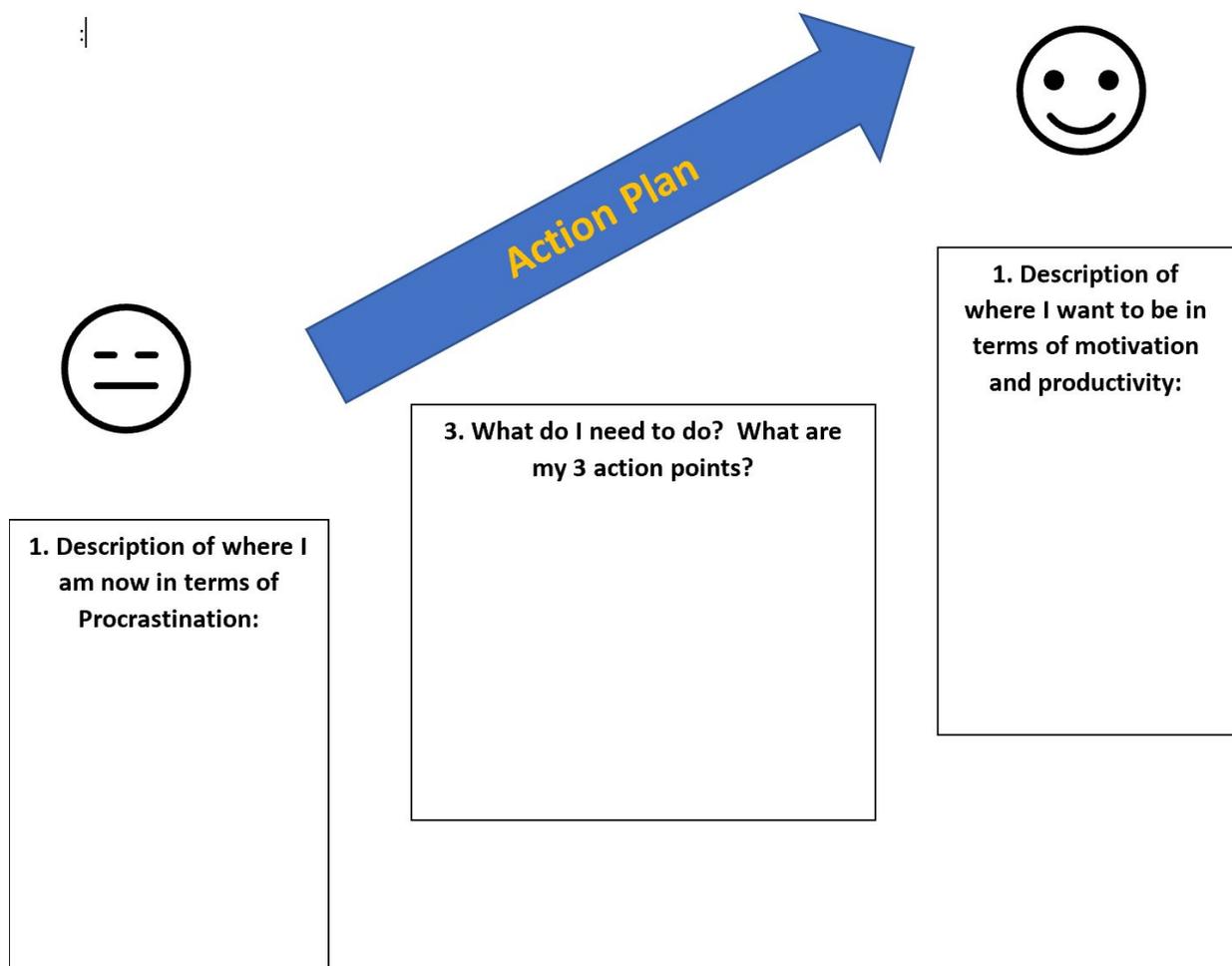
For this, we are going to use a tool often used in business and management called a “gap analysis”. We used this before in the module on Sleep Health. This tool, in itself, is a good way to tackle and manage procrastination in that it asks us to simply identify the relevant next steps that can help us move towards our personal goal. This can avoid the feeling of overwhelm that we have previously discussed. If you recall, a gap analysis is, very simply, a way of working out where you currently are, where you want to get to, and what you need to do to get there. We are going to be comparing where we are in terms of procrastination habits and tendencies, where we’d like to be and what steps and actions we can put in place to achieve that. Our gap analysis will be different for each of us. However, we can all use the basic template to create our personalised sleep health gap analysis. This is shown in figure 2. We have 5 -10

minutes to complete this, with a further 5 minutes to discuss following the task.

**Task:**

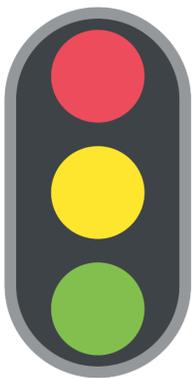
Reflect upon your procrastination habits, tendencies and patterns. Write a description of your current patterns in box 1 of figure 2. Now repeat for what you'd like your motivation and efficiency and productivity to be. Write your description in box 2. Finally, consider what are the best action steps you can take to achieve your goal(s) and write these down in box 3. These are your action plans towards increased productivity and motivation and reduced procrastination.

Figure 2: Template for procrastination gap analysis.



[Provide resources and allow participants sufficient time to complete before facilitating a group discussion focussed on action points that have emerged from the task].

We have now covered all the learning outcomes for this session. We are going to take time to evaluate your own learning today, using a simple traffic light system. For each objective, you are going to decide whether you feel you are:



<b>RED / STOP</b>	You have made no progress in learning this and are still at a “standstill.”
<b>AMBER</b>	You have some understanding but aren’t quite ready to apply it yet.
<b>GREEN / GO</b>	You have a good grasp of this objective and are ready to go and apply this learning in the real world.

1. Define and describe procrastination.

**RED**    **AMBER**    **GREEN**

2. Identify and describe personal, situational and motivational factors that increase tendency towards procrastination.

**RED**    **AMBER**    **GREEN**

3. Complete a self-assessment and reflect upon own procrastination tendencies and motivational mechanisms.

**RED** **AMBER** **GREEN**

4. Identify and describe strategies for managing and reducing procrastination.

**RED** **AMBER** **GREEN**

5. Formulate personalised strategy for increased productivity and motivation and reduced procrastination.

**RED** **AMBER** **GREEN**

What do you want to do as a result of your learning today?

Thank you to everyone for your engagement and participation in the session. I hope you have learnt some useful ideas that can be applied in your daily life.