

# How to Stop Procrastinating

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If you're a chronic procrastinator, you're familiar with the pain and stress that goes hand in hand with leaving things to the last minute. Even if you want to accomplish or finish a task, you're likely having trouble getting started in the first place! There are several strategies that can help you stop procrastinating right now (so read fast!), as well as lifestyle changes you can make to avoid future procrastination.

## Method 1

### Method 1 of 3: Changing Your Outlook



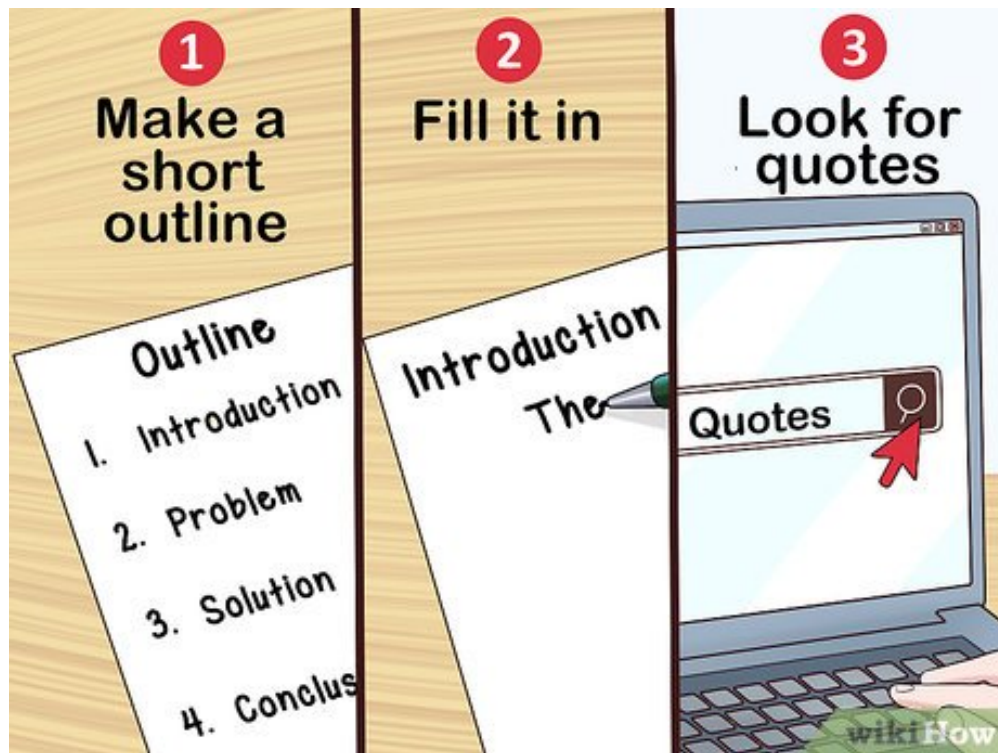
**1 Stop punishing yourself for procrastinating.** The more stressed out you are, the harder it'll be to get your work done. Don't be angry with yourself. Move on and focus on what you've got to do instead.<sup>[1]</sup>

- Guilt and regret are draining emotions. Wasting time yelling at yourself for not starting that 2,000-word essay two weeks ago will only make you extra tired and frustrated. It will also stress you out, likely making it impossible for you to finish your assignment at that time.



**2 Tackle your most important task for 15 minutes.** Instead of thinking about the total number of hours you're about to work for, just start. Tell yourself you've only got to do it for 15 minutes. This will deal with the intimidation factor, and you'll likely spend much longer than 15 minutes on your task before you stop working again.<sup>[2]</sup>

- If 15 minutes still sounds too intimidating, do something for just 3 minutes.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Once you come up for air, take a two-minute break. Then start up on another set of 15 minutes of work.



**3 Break tasks down into small chunks.** It can be overwhelming to think about finishing a whole essay or getting through an entire week's worth of tasks. Instead of thinking about everything you have to do like one big obstacle, break it all down into tiny pieces.<sup>[4]</sup> You'll be able to get started on the smallest crumb and go forward from there.<sup>[5]</sup>

- For example, instead of thinking, "I need to finish this essay before 10 PM tonight," tell yourself, "I'm going to make a short outline, fill that in, and then look for quotes."
- Consider trying a specific technique like [pomodoro](#), where breaks happen at planned intervals.<sup>[6]</sup>
- Avoid making a long, disorganized to-do list. This is just setting yourself up for failure. Instead, create subcategories like "Home," "Work," "Family," and "Fun" and just try to cross off a few entries from each list every day.



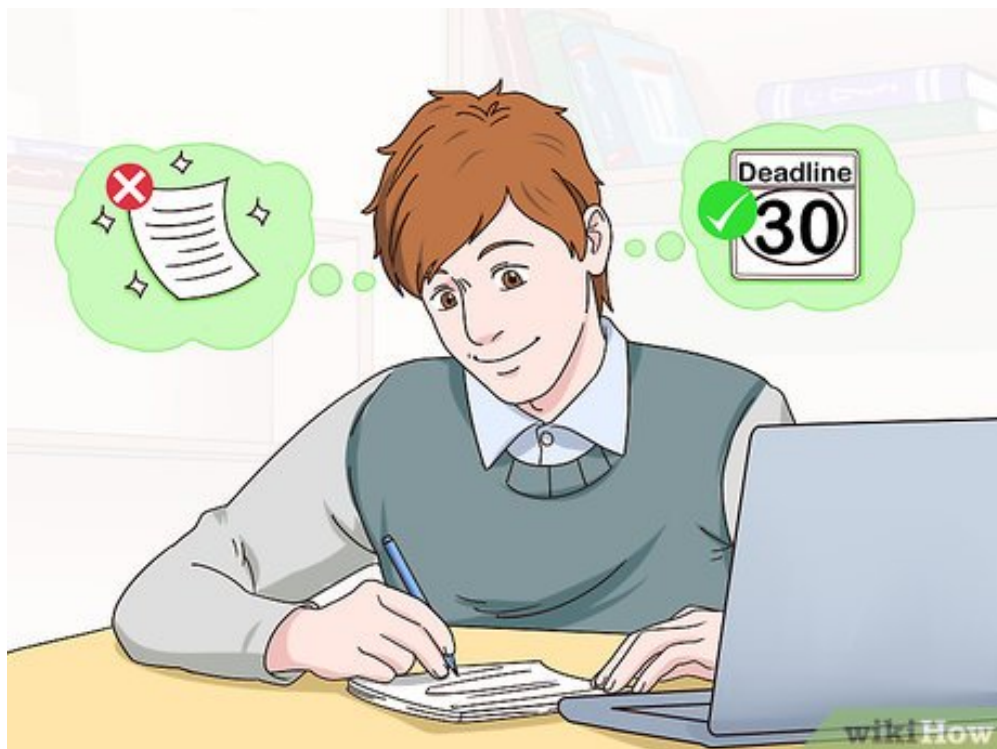
**4 Start your day with the hardest tasks.** Make yourself a plan in the morning and pick the hardest task first. You'll be most energized in the morning once you've eaten breakfast and woken up fully. Tackle the hardest thing on your docket right then. You'll feel better once it's done, and then you can move on to a few easier tasks for the rest of the day.

- Figure out when you are most motivated and alert and plan out your day so you use this time best. For example, if you're a morning person, do your toughest work right after you wake up. On the other hand, if you tend to be groggy in the morning, you risk making careless errors or frustration by going headfirst into a difficult task.



**5 Give yourself a pep talk for motivation.** "Self-talking" is a great way to calm yourself down, get focused, and meet your goals. Talk to yourself, using your name. Tell yourself that you can (and will) do this.<sup>[7]</sup>

- Self-talk by saying something like, "Jenny, I know this week has been hard and you're tired. You've written a million essays before, and you're going to rock this."<sup>[8]</sup>
- You can also ask yourself questions: "Jenny, why are you nervous about this? You know you can handle it."
- Self-talk out loud if you can. It'll also work in your head if you're in a public place.



**6 Aim for done over perfect.** Imagining the perfect essay, assignment, or project could be what's holding you back. It's nothing at all if it's not finished, so abandon your vision (or fears) of the perfect product. You also can't fix what doesn't exist yet.<sup>[9]</sup>





**7** **Promise yourself you'll get a reward when it's done.** You're probably dreading the next however many hours you need to finish this task. Just tell yourself that when it's over, you get to celebrate with one of your favorite things. Use that anticipation to push yourself through the pain.[10]

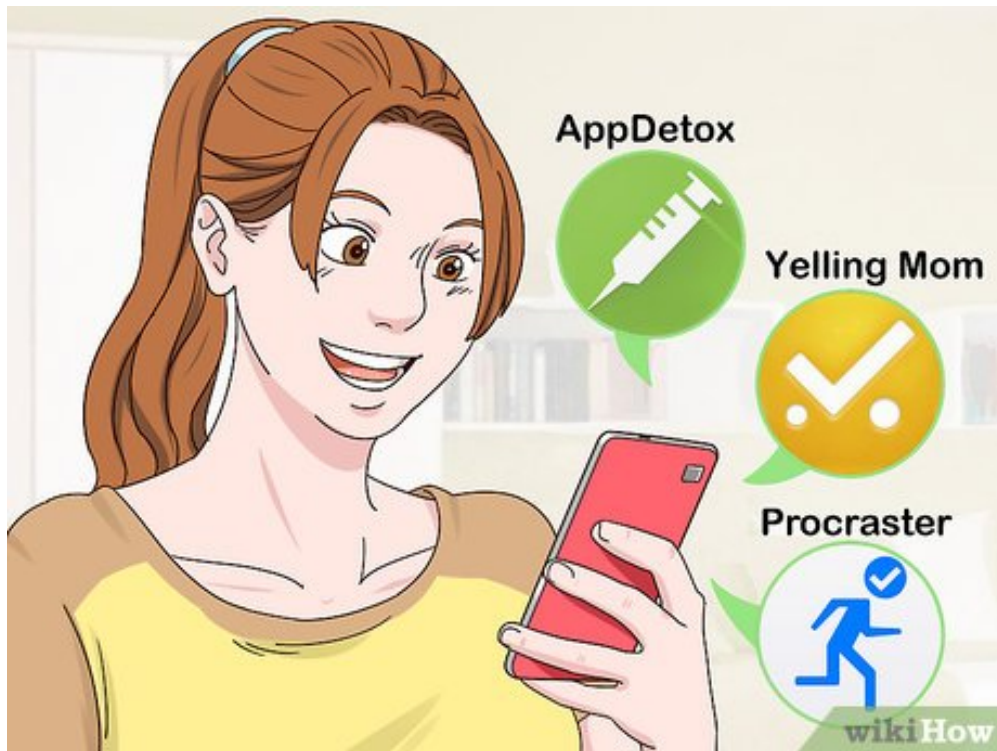
Method  
2

### Method 2 of 3: Removing Distractions from Your Environment



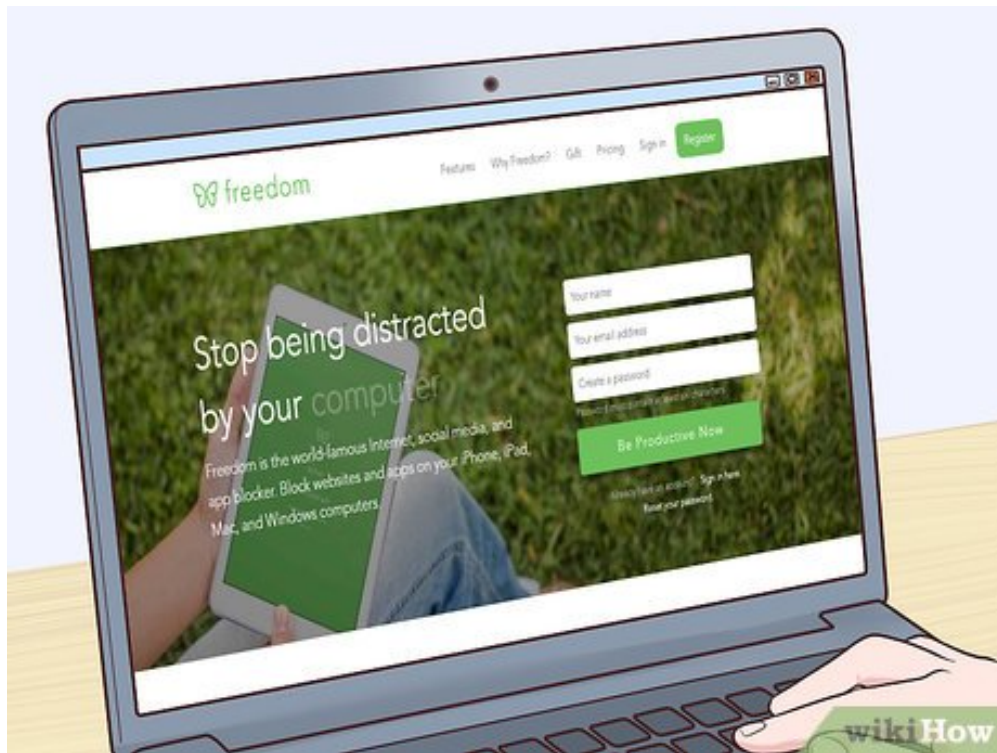
**1** **Pick a workspace that works for you.** Figure out where you'll be doing most of your work, and **make it the best environment** for limited distraction. It's especially important to have a dedicated space for work that's different from the one where you relax.

- This may be the library, a coffee shop, your local bookstore, or a home office.



**2 Download an app to avoid phone distraction.** Smartphones are usually the black holes that suck up all of our time and attention. Of course, there's an app for that! Quickly download whichever app sounds like it will best address your particular procrastination problem.<sup>[11]</sup>

- AppDetox is the best choice for quick fixes.
- Yelling Mom allows you to set a time for the app to start nagging you to start something.
- Procraster prompts you to identify the source of your procrastination and then gives you advice about the problem.
- A simple timer app can also be used to designate how long you intend to work and then how long your break will be. When the timer goes off, switch tasks quickly and stick to your plan.



**3 Use a program or browser add-on to avoid internet distraction.** [12] If constant browsing is your biggest issue, download an application to address your internet addiction. There are a variety of programs available for both Windows and Mac operating systems.[13] If you have more self-control, set a timer before you go on time-wasting websites and get back to work when it rings.

- For all devices and operating systems, try Freedom.
- For Mac, Self-Control allows you to block a list of websites during times you're supposed to be working. And it's free!
- For Windows, go with Cold Turkey. It's free, but to get the best features, it costs a one time fee of about \$20.
- For free options, choose StayFocused for Chrome browsers or LeechBlock for Firefox.





**4 Remove your phone from the space if you need to.** If you can't handle being in the same space as something that's going to tempt you, address that problem by keeping it in another room or turning it off. This also goes for other devices, including iPads, Kindles, or even computers.<sup>[14]</sup>

- If you need to keep your phone on for family or work-related reasons, turn off all your notifications except for texts and/or calls.



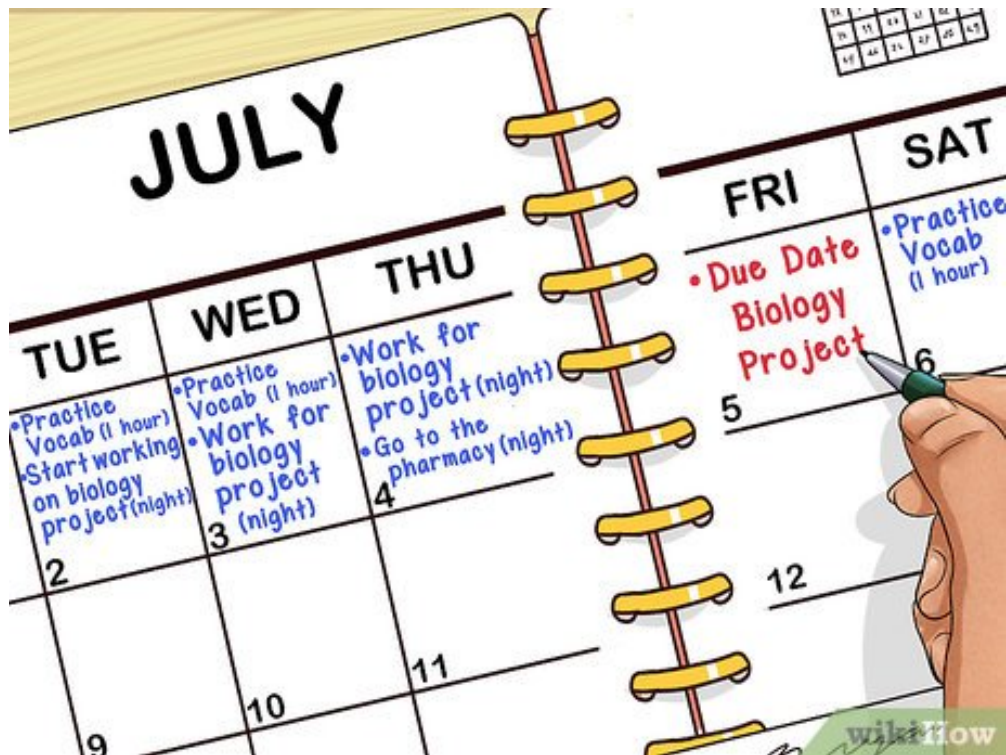
**5 Listen to music without lyrics.** Many people struggle to work and stay focused in a completely silent room. But if you are listening to music with lyrics, you'll almost certainly get distracted by the words. Switch to a white-noise machine or instrumental music.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Method 3 of 3: Avoiding Procrastination in the Long Term



**1 Write a to-do list to set goals.** <sup>[16]</sup> Make a record of all the tasks you need to accomplish. The list should include both short-term tasks you need to finish daily and weekly, as well as long-term goals that may take months or even years to accomplish. Seeing it written down will help you plan out the various actions needed to meet all your goals.<sup>[17]</sup>

- Put this list on paper. Even if you use your phone for all of your other lists, from groceries to birthday wishes, don't put this list on there. The act of writing out your tasks is key to thinking through how to finish them.



## 2 Prioritize different goals with set deadlines. Use a planner to schedule your time.

Write short-term tasks in daily or weekly lists that include deadlines for each item. Set deadlines for long-term goals by listing them in monthly entries.

- Include everything you need to get done in your planner. Say that on Friday your final biology project is due. Set aside at least three nights to finish it. You've also got to go to the pharmacy and pick up a new toothbrush and vitamins before you leave for vacation. Do this on Thursday night. You're also taking the SAT in a month, so spend at least three hours this week practicing vocab.
- Try using a strategy like the Eisenhower Box for prioritizing your tasks in an efficient way. Basically, you categorize all you have to do into four categories: tasks that must be done immediately, tasks that can be done later (or rescheduled), tasks that can be delegated to someone else and tasks that aren't important and can be eliminated. The strength of this strategy is that it works well with the tasks you must complete in a given day, but also on longer timescales, like weeks or months. [18]



**3 Avoid multitasking to focus on one goal at a time.** Multitasking makes you feel like you're accomplishing a lot, but it actually prevents you from finishing tasks quickly and effectively. Keep your attention on one goal at a time, and give it your all. This will also help you avoid getting overwhelmed by your busy schedule.



**4 Get a buddy to keep you honest.** It's hard to stay away from distractions and do your work on time when you're doing it alone. Luckily (or unluckily), everyone struggles with procrastination. Ask a friend or family member if they'd be willing to partner up with you to check in on each other's work habits and accomplishments.

- You can plan fun outings with your buddy to reward both of you when you meet your goals. If you keep procrastinating, cancel these events as a little bit of punishment.



**Expert Q&A**



#### Question

What is the main cause of procrastination?



**Sharon Lee**  
Success Strategist  
Expert Answer

Procrastination comes out of the obstacles that you fear. If your pain for going through a certain process is greater than the ultimate pleasure you'll get out of it, you won't end up doing it.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 0

#### Question

How can I stop procrastinating if I have trouble with distractions?



**Trudi Griffin, LPC, MS**  
Professional Counselor  
Expert Answer

Some of the techniques above will help, such as doing your work in environments without distractions and using timers to hyperfocus for 20 minutes at a time.

Helpful 134 Not Helpful 52

#### Question

How can I stop procrastinating when I am always stressed and tired?



**Trudi Griffin, LPC, MS**  
Professional Counselor  
Expert Answer

Identifying and fixing the source of stress may be the first thing you need to do to help the procrastination.

Helpful 148 Not Helpful 52

#### Question

I'm behind on my assignments because I procrastinate and watch YouTube videos instead. I need help, but I'm afraid to ask my parents. What can I do?



Community Answer

I have been in this same situation before. Make a list of everything you need to get done. Do an assignment, then watch ONE video as a break, and repeat. Or, plow through everything at once and then watch YouTube. As for asking your parents for help, they will probably be more than happy to help you as long as you haven't dug yourself in a deep, deep hole. Just be honest with them, the longer you put it off, the worse it will be for everyone.

Helpful 590 Not Helpful 52

#### Question

How can I stop procrastinating on large school projects?



Community Answer

Try breaking your big projects into smaller sections, and completing each section daily or weekly. This will make the project seem less overwhelming and more manageable.

Helpful 424 Not Helpful 53

#### Question

**Can I listen to music while doing a task?**



Community Answer

Yes! Many people find that music helps them work more efficiently. Consider soft, classical music or white noise, as songs with lyrics tend to distract the mind.

Helpful 271 Not Helpful 33

#### Question

**I usually take about 5 to 10 minute breaks between homework, but when I return from doing that, it ends up being an hour! How can I stop this habit?**



Community Answer

You could try to set yourself a timer for the break. You could also do something during the break that will not distract you, such as taking a walk. Reading exciting books, listening to music, and watching TV can easily turn a 5 minute break into a 50 minute break.

Helpful 286 Not Helpful 37

#### Question

**My school uses the internet for a lot of my homework. This is a problem because the source of distractions is right in front of me! What can I do?**



Community Answer

Try using one of a parental control apps that regulates internet usage. Some apps help prevent you from going to certain websites. Use that to your advantage and block the websites that would normally distract you, like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Helpful 180 Not Helpful 38

#### Question

**How can I improve concentration and stop being discouraged when I can't figure something out?**



Community Answer

To improve concentration, make your space one of pure of distraction. Remove all distractions such as games, devices and the like. As for the figuring out, think outside the box. In fact, to figure something out, ask somebody who is actually outside the box. Your mom comes in a good use in that time -- explain to her your problem, which is out of her field, and most of the time you will find the solution before you even finish explaining. If you don't, your mother or the other person may come up with an idea that you did not think to explore.

Helpful 180 Not Helpful 34

### Question

I'm 11 and I can't finish my homework! I get done around 10:00 at night and I'm getting really stressed. What should I do to finish earlier?



Community Answer

This is too late for someone of your age. Try to get started on it earlier. Ask your parents for help with shifting any after-school activities that might be preventing you from getting it done. Create a homework schedule that gives you set working times and stop when each block of time is completed; this will teach you to wrap up the work and not let it drag on. Remove all distractions that might be lengthening the homework time.

Helpful 408 Not Helpful 94

[See more answers](#)

## Video

<https://www.wikihow.com/video/5/52/Stop+Procrastinating+Step+0.360p.mp4>



### Tips

- If it is homework that's the problem, get the majority done at school if you can. If not, try to do most right after school since it will be easier on your brain to do more work since you just got home. This is better than putting it off until the night, when you might end up not doing it or making mistakes which can cause you a bad grade.
- Combining an app like Forest with an app like Yelling Mom will not allow you to move your phone or shut off the Yelling Mom app until the time you designated ends.
- If you're suffering from anxiety or depression associated with your procrastination, talk to your friends and family. It's okay to ask for help, and you should also consider talking to your doctor or a therapist.



### Warnings

- Avoid over-rewarding yourself. If you put too many blocks of "reward time" into your daily schedule, you're not going to get things done. Stick with small end-of-the-day rewards, and save the big celebrations for your free days.

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## About This Article



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This article was co-authored by **Sharon Lee**. Sharon Lee is a Success Strategist and the Owner of Fearless Pursuits. With over seven years of experience, she specializes in helping others gain clarity on their goals, build confidence, and remain accountable towards their goals. Sharon offers advice to others through life coaching, career coaching, and small business coaching. Sharon holds a Strategic Intervention Coach Certification from Robbins-Madanes Training and has additional training from Erickson Coaching International. This article has been viewed 1,901,780 times.



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