

Florida Tech  
Counseling and Psychological Services  
Mylan Kaltman, M.S. BCBA

## Overcoming Procrastination

- Start at the beginning. Do you really like what you're studying? Does the material hold your interest; do the concepts excite you; can you picture spending your working life in this field? If not, then perhaps you should consider speaking with your academic advisor or getting some career counseling at CAPS. Changing majors is much easier than changing careers.
- Buy and use a schedule book that breaks each day into half-hours. Keeping good track of time is the best way to make sure it doesn't slip away.
- Break your tasks into small chunks, then schedule them. Writing "paper due" in your schedule book is fine, but it won't help you to organize the time between now and when the paper is due. Be specific. Try writing "Copy 3 articles for paper" in the time slot between two classes. It's been said that the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.
- Create meaningful short-term goals and post them in conspicuous places; something like "I will finish writing my paper by Friday 5:00 so I can have the weekend free to pay attention to my significant other" on a post-it note on the refrigerator or the TV. Keep the meaningful long-term goals in mind too-one of my roommates kept a framed poster of a Lamborghini above his desk, explaining that every page he turned got him a little closer to the driver's seat. Whenever he felt like quitting, he looked up at his motivation.
- Write all your commitments in your schedule book and take a look at, as Dave Matthews puts it, the space between. Learn to take advantage of the small pieces of time: the 15 minutes before class is enough time to review your notes, the 30 minutes between class is enough time to do some studying.
- Stay ahead. Getting an early start on projects, papers and reading is the best way to make sure you don't get overwhelmed. Wouldn't it be nice to be one of those students who actually gets a decent night's sleep before arriving on time to turn in a paper, as opposed to the one who is screaming at the printer not to run out of ink, already ten minutes late for class?
- Build a "time cushion" during the first week of school. Before the semester really gets rolling, get ahead on the reading. Three weeks into the semester, you'll feel on top of things, and you'll be able to stay there.

- Once you get ahead, stay ahead. Professors assume, or at least hope, that you've done the assigned readings before you get to class. If you have, the lectures are much easier to follow and your notes will make much more sense when you sit down to study. Also, being a little ahead in the reading will alert you to chapters or concepts that might give you more difficulty-and it'll give you some extra time to study them or seek help.
- Always do a little work, even if you sit down saying "I really don't feel like doing this now." Those little time snatches add up.
- Begin assignments immediately. The worst part of any project is when you haven't started. Skim the chapter, pick a topic for the paper, do some research on-line, scribble a rough draft-whatever you have to do, get started. Imagine being able to say "I've been procrastinating on the paper-I'll probably need some more references and my draft needs serious help" instead of "I haven't started yet."
- Some people find it helpful to think of college as a 9-5 job. There's some logic to the idea-if you get to school at 9 and work until 5, you'll probably have your evenings and weekends entirely free. Also, you'll be doing your studying during daytime hours, when most people learn better.
- Make sleep a priority. Most students suffer chronic fatigue, making it difficult to be motivated and even more difficult to learn new things. I hate to shatter the orthodoxy of academic life, but coffee is not a substitute for sleep. (Neither is tea, espresso, ephedrine, No-Doze, Vivarin...)
- Stay away from drugs and alcohol. They kill your whole evening and leave you groggy the next day. Alcohol abuse is the number one reason for student failure and academic dismissal-don't let it happen to you.
- Learn which study breaks you don't come back from such as on-line chats, Dexter's Lab marathons, Ever Quest, etc, and avoid them until you're done for the evening. Find mildly amusing distractions that don't hold your interest for more than 5-10 minutes, and use them as study breaks instead.
- Don't put yourself in a position of vulnerability by waiting until the last minute to get serious about a project. In the real world, your employer won't want to hear about how you didn't start a six-week project until the weekend before it was due, whereupon you promptly got the flu and your hard drive exploded. Your professors won't want to hear it either; the chance to use those excuses ends in high school. By taking responsibility for the things you can control, you reduce your chances of being blind-sided by life's unpredictability.

- Estimate and budget reasonable amounts of time for phases of a project, and for your studying. If you've kept up, there should be no reason to stay up all night preparing for a test. (If you haven't, it's likely to be only marginally helpful anyway). Some people fall behind because they work too hard-amassing hundreds of references for a paper or endlessly reviewing notes for one class while falling behind in another. Do your best work, but learn to be satisfied and know when you have to move on to another responsibility-even or especially if it's yourself, your family, or your significant other.
- Avoid distractions that make you quit early. For a helpful list of suggestions on how to do that, click [here](#).
- If you're falling behind, admit it immediately and go to the Academic Support Center or CAPS. You can receive tutoring and/or improve study habits, including time management, managing test anxiety, etc. Furthermore, if necessary, we can help you approach your professors and request some extra help. Remember that your professors are human, and care about students that want to learn. On the other hand, they are not likely to be sympathetic problems they're only learning about on the day before the final.
- Remember that most of the pressure we feel as students comes from assignments hanging over our heads. We can spend a whole day putting off a paper; never feeling relaxed, and then be up all night wishing we'd started earlier. If instead we do the paper during the day, we will truly be able to relax that night. One of my favorite "Peanuts" cartoons shows Linus holding 'Moby Dick' and complaining that he has to read the whole book and write a report by tomorrow. Sally asks, "The teacher gave you one night to read 'Moby Dick' and write a report on it?" He replies, "No, she gave us the whole semester. But it's due tomorrow."

Access the CAPS website at [www.fit.edu/caps](http://www.fit.edu/caps) for additional academic success resources or contact CAPS at 674-8050.