

Overcoming Procrastination



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The word "occupation" refers to how individuals *occupy their time*, which largely consists of *habits and routines*.



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So what are the habits and routines we can modify, to be conducive to overcome procrastination?

Objectives



- What is procrastination?
- Why do we procrastinate?
- How do we begin and complete projects with less stress?



Procrastination

What is it?

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To voluntarily delay an
intended course of action
despite expecting to be
worse off for the delay

(Steel, 2007)

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- Sabini & Silver argued that postponement and irrationality are the two key features of procrastination. Putting a task off is not procrastination, they argue, if there are rational reasons for doing so.



A mechanism for
*cop**ing with the anxiety*
associated with
*start**ing or complet**ing*
any task or decision

(Fiore, 2007, p. 5)

Something
we all do
sometimes



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When does waiting work? Know your work style.



Marathoner

- Dislikes deadlines
- Chips away at projects over time
- A lot of time available for reflection and revision
- Plans for unexpected interruptions

Sprinter

- Finds deadlines useful
- Completes majority of work at one time
- Aware of how long tasks take and plans accordingly
- Uses lead up time to generate ideas

Procrastinator

- Dislikes deadlines
- Feels as if they should be working
- Finds the increasing pressure stressful
- Avoids planning
- Spends the lead up time worrying

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- Tortoise vs. hare - It was about the question of whether you'd prefer to work fewer hours over more days, or more hours over fewer days.
- This approach seems different from procrastination. With procrastination, people feel as though they should be working, and they wish they could work, but somehow they can't make themselves. They aren't choosing to hold back; they can't force themselves forward until the deadline is so urgent that they *must* act.
- Maybe naturally, the first step is towards accepting a natural sprinter mentality -

So, why do we procrastinate?



- To feel in control
- To protect our self-worth
- To avoid something we fear
- To experience temporary relief from stress

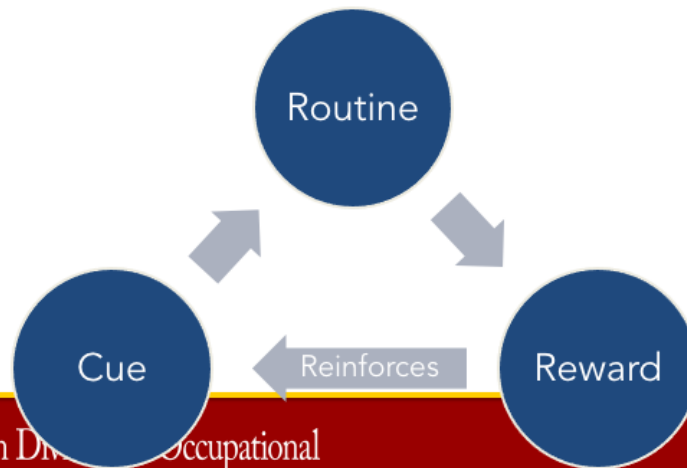


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- To protect our self-worth: We procrastinate when we fear a threat to our sense of worth and independence. When we believe that work is part of our identity, judgment of our work is judgment of ourselves. By procrastinating, we protect ourselves.
- Out of fear: fear of failure, fear of being imperfect (perfectionism), fear of impossible expectations, fear of being overwhelmed, fear of not finishing, or fear of success (if you succeed at a task, more may be required of you, etc.)
- Because procrastination is rewarding: The reward is temporary relief from stress
- Out of rebellion: If you feel powerless and a task is placed on you, you can rebel by delaying the task completion. Procrastination may be a way to have power and control in your life

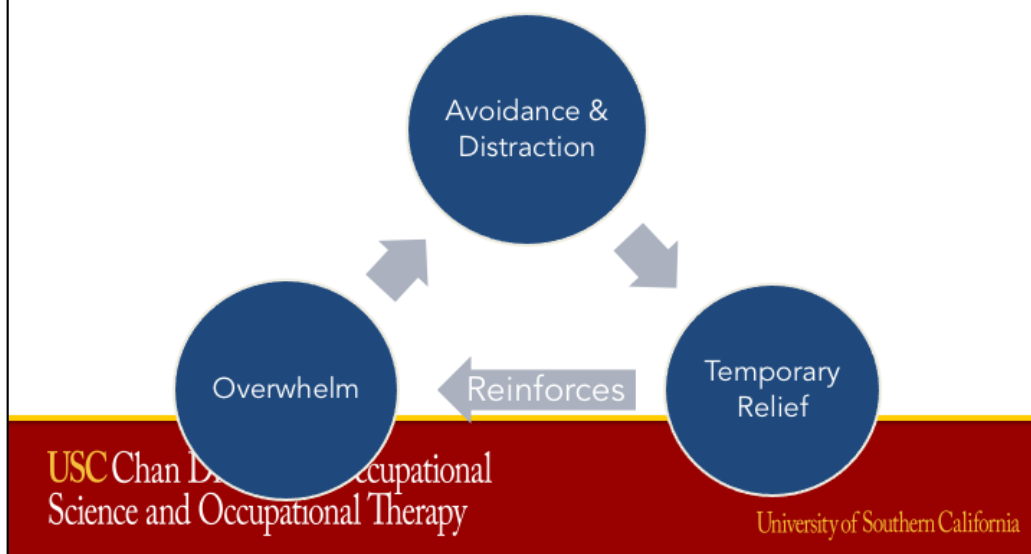
This Coping Strategy Can Also Become A Habit



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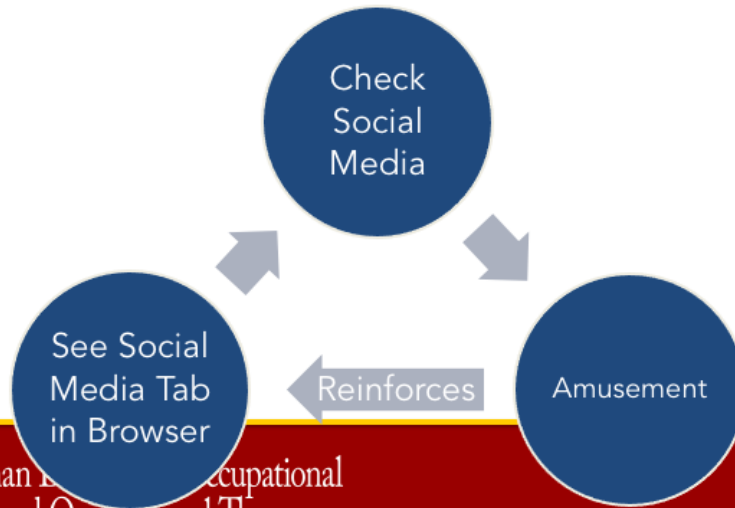
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Automatic Aversion: Avoiding Unpleasant



- Seeking emotional relief, a break, reprieve
- **In some cases just acknowledging that you're feeling overwhelmed may help**

Automatic Desire: Seeking Pleasant

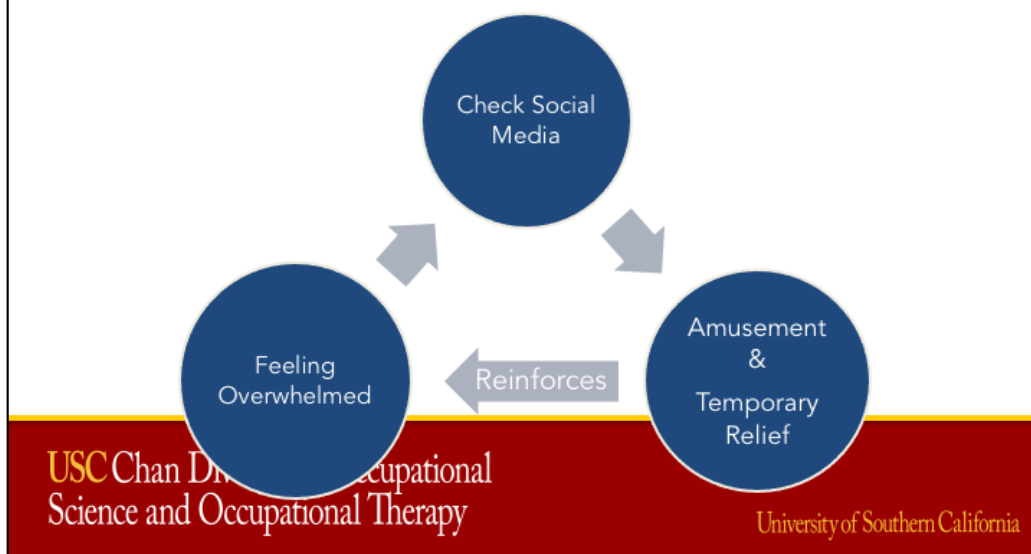


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- Cat video

Aversion + Desire = Recipe for Automatic Action



- Cue – school task that is anxiety provoking or boring
- Routine – scroll through social media
- Reward – temporary relief

- Cue – any school task
- Same routine despite not needing the relief

How do we stop procrastinating?



1. Pay attention
2. Pick a strategy
3. Experiment
4. Evaluate

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1. Pay attention
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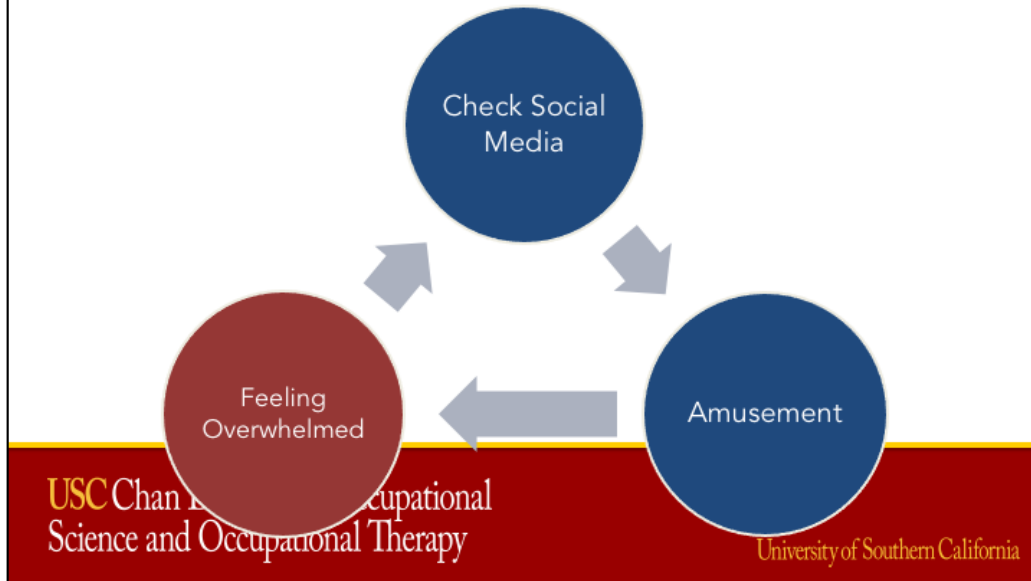
- Notice your reasons for procrastination
- Identify immediate cues
- Describe the procrastination routine

Notice Your Reasons for Procrastination



- ▶ Fear of feeling overwhelmed
- ▶ Fear of failure or success
- ▶ Fear of not finishing
- ▶ Fear of not meeting expectations
- ▶ Desire for control
- ▶ Desire for rest
- ▶ Desire for freedom
- ▶ Desire to optimize conditions
- ▶ Distractions
- ▶ Not interesting
- ▶ Too much effort
- ▶ Not a priority
- ▶ Other "productive" tasks available

Identify Immediate Cues



- Implement stress mgmt techniques
- Acknowledge the stress and fulfill your unmet needs in alternative ways
- Improve time mgmt



What are your cues?

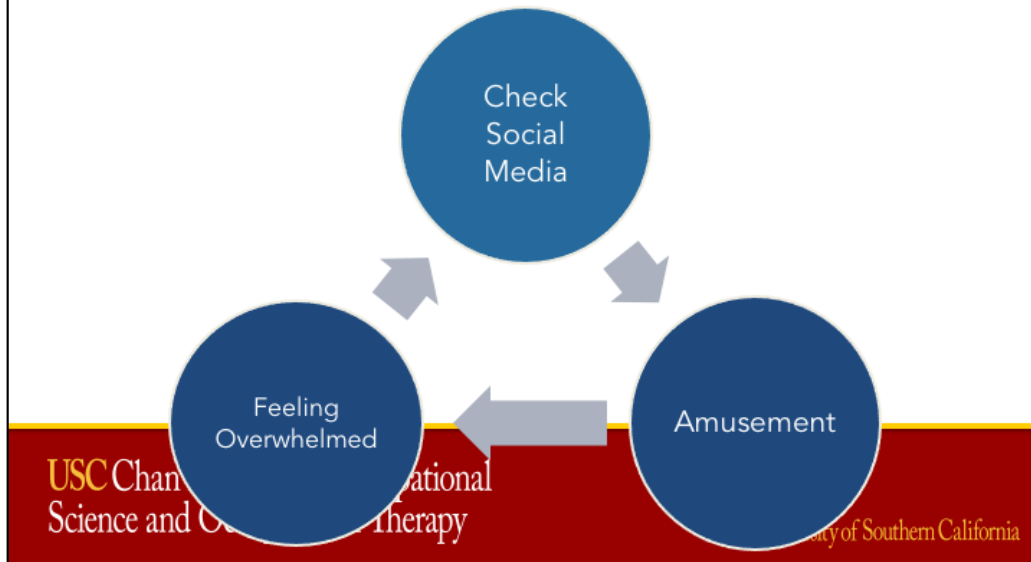
- Discomfort
- Anxiety
- Overwhelm
- Uncertainty
- Fatigue
- Frustration
- Hunger
- Boredom
- Loneliness
- Lack of a plan
- Lack of clarity
- New/creative thoughts
- Requests
- Interruptions
- Checking phone
- Checking social media
- Running into a friend
- Finding anything else that needs doing

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- Is it a time? Location? Person? Emotion? Or ritual?
- Doesn't even need to be the discomfort – can just be the anticipation of discomfort

Describe the Procrastination Routine



- Focus on the first step- try working on the first step for 5 minutes only
 - I.e. putting on your tennis shoes for the gym,
 - Opening up your note book to study
 - Making a grocery list
- Practice deep breathing

How do you procrastinate?



Enjoyable

TV

Web Browsing

Apps

Friends

Productive

Less Urgent
Tasks

Less Important
Tasks

Tasks for Other
People

Learning

Frustrating

Worrying

Perfecting
Needlessly

Laying About

How do we stop procrastinating?



1. Pay attention
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- So now that you've paid attention, next pick a strategy



Pick a Strategy

Address the reason

Avoid the cue

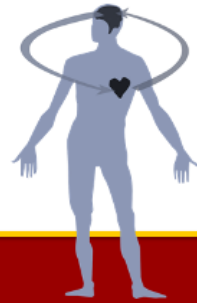
Change the routine

Address the reason



Notice Thought Errors that Increase Anxiety

- **Catastrophizing:** “If I don’t get an A, then I’ll keep not getting A’s, then I’ll never get a good match, and then I’ll never be happy with my work.”
- **Filtering:** Focusing on the negative, not seeing the positive
- **Polarizing:** Black-and-white, All-or-nothing, Success-or-failure
- **Overgeneralizing:** “That thing that happened today; that’s what always happens to me.”



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- Cognitive distortions

Address the reason



Notice Thought Errors that Increase Anxiety

- **Personalizing:** See a friend frown during a conversation, then think: “I shouldn’t have said that. Now they don’t like me.”
- **Magnifying:** Increasing the importance of something small
- **Minimizing:** Denying the importance of something that matters.
- **Emotional reasoning:** “I feel ashamed, therefore, I must have done something wrong.”
- **Magical thinking:** Expecting rewards and fairness



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- Cognitive distortions

Address the reason



Get Some Perspective



- » Question the thought error
- » Gather evidence
- » Check in with a friend or mentor
- » Rate from 1-100
- » Find the silver lining



Address the reason



Recognize Basic Human Needs

Self-actualization

morality,
creativity,
spontaneity,
problem solving,
lack of prejudice,
acceptance of facts

Esteem

self-esteem,
confidence, achievement,
respect of others, respect by others

Love/Belonging

friendship, family, sexual intimacy

Safety

security of body, of employment, of resources,
of morality, of the family, of health, of property

Physiological

breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion

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- It's not about denying yourself! It's about getting in touch with what you really want and need and being realistic with yourself!!



Address the reason

Be Realistic

- **Acknowledge the impossibility of perfection**
- **Focus on what works for you**
- **Avoid attempts to “Micro-optimize”**
- **Forgive yourself for past patterns**

and learn from them
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- It's not about denying yourself! It's about getting in touch with what you really want and need and being realistic with yourself!!

Address the reason



Be Mindful of Your Self-Talk

- Avoid "I should" → » Try "I will" or "I prefer"
- Avoid comparisons → » Focus on your own needs, strengths, preferences, and process

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- Who can you ask about it
- What you choose to do
- When you choose to do it
- Where you choose to start it
- How you choose to do it

Avoid the Cue



Schedule Guilt-Free Play

Many of us vacillate between working and feeling guilty about not working.

1. Brainstorm pleasurable activities and rewards
2. Estimate time required to engage in each
3. Put them on your calendar for urgency
(think prevention, regulation, and recovery)




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- So you do get those moments of relief -



Avoid the Cue

A blue shaded area representing an energy curve. It starts with a high peak on the left, gradually descends to a lower level in the middle, and then drops to a very low level on the right. The text is placed within the high and middle sections of the curve.

Plan to work on things you would avoid when your energy is best.

When is your energy best?

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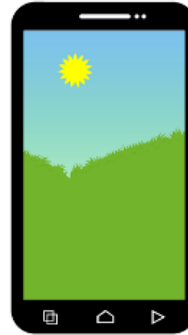
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Avoid the Cue

Avoiding digital distractions

- Put the phone away
- Close tabs
- Turn off notifications
- Uninstall apps
- Use the Forest app
- Use the Freedom tool



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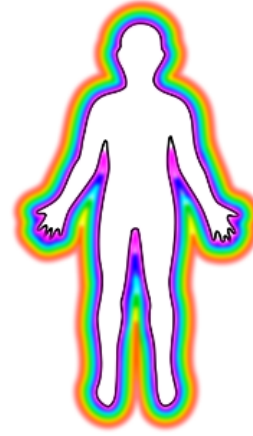
- Forest app - show
- Freedom tool - show



Avoid the Cue

Avoiding bodily distractions

- Start with a relaxation technique
- Have healthy snacks
- Bring a water bottle
- Get adequate rest
- Bring a sweater
- Take movement breaks
- Use ergonomic equipment
- Write down distracting thoughts





Change the Routine

Seek Clarification

- Send an email
- Set up a meeting
- Ask a professor
- Ask a classmate
- Read the syllabus





Change the Routine

Break it down

1. Describe the scope of the task
2. Identify the sub-tasks
3. See if the sub-tasks have sub-tasks
(it's called "chunking")





Change the Routine

Break it down

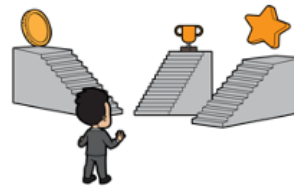
4. Estimate time required to complete each step
5. Multiply by 1.5
6. Assign deadlines for chunks
(work backwards from final deadline)

Change the Routine



Start Anywhere

- There is no perfect place to start.
- There are probably many goods one.
- Likely all of them will get you somewhere.





Change the Routine

When in Doubt, Pause on Purpose

- Practice deep breathing
- Analyze the barrier
- Recognize the need
- Try one of the strategies





Now Experiment & Assess

You can do it.

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OT Session Topics



Time Management

Healthy Eating Routines

Physical Activity

Lifestyle Balance

Stress Management

Relaxation

Meaningful Leisure

Ergonomics

Thank you!



Questions?

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