

# ***COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES***

***The Official Newsletter of CAPS at  
Duke Kunshan University***



## ***Stop procrastination!***

- **Procrastination can become a vicious cycle.** Trying to achieve something and failing to act on your intentions can feel frustrating and depressing, and this can then lead to even more procrastination.
- **Procrastination is a form of delay, but not every type of delay is procrastination.** Before working on ways to reduce your procrastination, it's useful to understand this distinction and recognize times when you're delaying a task but not actually procrastinating. For instance, you might need to delay some activities due to sudden changes in your situation or because you simply can't get everything done at the same time.
- **'Strategic delay' and procrastination** – the two are often confused. Strategic delay entails deliberately putting off a task to generate time pressure as a source of motivation. Many people defend this strategy. However, it's a risky strategy because you might run out of time. It also consumes a lot of energy and can lead to a dip after a deadline in which you feel exhausted. What's more, there isn't much evidence to suggest it works, compared with following a plan that is more balanced over time.

## **What to do?**

### **1) Use time-management techniques**

One obvious way to tackle procrastination is to start managing your time better – to create an overview of upcoming tasks, set yourself rules for prioritizing, and plan how to spend time productively. Although this won't address your emotional discomfort or your avoidance directly, it can serve a preventative role. By increasing your sense of control, you'll calm your emotional state and it's less likely you'll feel the need to procrastinate.

There is a risk with creating time-management schedules that the transparency of what you need to do creates panic and feelings of being more burdened. To avoid this, when you make a list of all the activities you need to complete, make sure you prioritize them and schedule them (of course, you can't do everything at once). Most important of all, make sure you execute your plan.

That last part is probably the most problematic. I advise starting on small tasks and working on them in a regimented way: set a short timeframe, take a break, then





Of course, at different times, some people might use both strategic delay and procrastination, depending on the activity. The key difference between them is the emotional connotations – that is, putting pressure on oneself purposefully versus irrational avoidance that runs counter to one’s intentions.

A common idea about procrastination is that it is triggered by fear of failure, but we know that it is not just fear that leads to procrastination. Anything aversive can trigger it: boredom, resentment, difficulty, disgust, practically anything that is negative in your mind. Almost everyone has experienced needing to do something they would rather avoid.

**Unfortunately, avoidance does not make the obligation or necessary action go away; procrastination is a way of coping that might help you feel better for a while, but it is no solution.** The activities that were done instead of the intended one mostly do not make you feel better in the long run. They were just temporary and easy distractions, often not a productive activity or something that makes you feel proud, accomplished, or at least worthwhile spending time on. The realization of not having completed a vital task might get worse over time and, at some point,

register how much you got done (or if you ended up doing something else instead). Let’s say you choose to work on an essay for 15 minutes. If you succeed in staying focused for that time, then you could consider doubling the session next time. The point of this approach is that it makes you realize what targets are actually doable, rather than setting yourself a burdensome load of work that discourages you from even starting on it.

## 2) Identify what you’re avoiding

Procrastination is avoidance due to emotional discomfort. The activities that prompt procrastination differ for everyone. Telling bad news might be difficult for everyone but, for some, it is also having to buy a present or call a friend. If you’re unsure what drives your procrastination, try keeping a daily journal for a week or more, to help you become more aware.

We are not always consciously aware of our emotions. You could use your journal to focus on when you feel bad exactly. Perhaps you’ll see a pattern in the types of tasks and obligations that are likely to make you procrastinate. There are many things that can create emotional discomfort, such as the fear of letting someone down, the thought that an activity might be so all-consuming that it leaves no freedom for any fun, or even resentment that you’re having to complete a task that was someone else’s obligation. So find out what it is for you in particular.

If you recognize a pattern, it might be possible to do something pragmatic about it. For example, it might be possible to delegate the obligation you inherited to someone else, organize activities differently, or have others step in to help you. Rather than avoiding,



the barriers to completing the task might seem unsurmountable (for instance, after a deadline has passed).

If you are prone to procrastination and you recognize yourself in these descriptions, the good news is there are practical, effective ways to start making a change, and this Guide will show you how.

Reference:

<https://psyche.co/guides/how-to-stop-procrastinating-by-confronting-your-avoidance>

perhaps you can find a practical solution for the execution of this activity.

### 3) Confront your avoidance

To beat procrastination, you need to go against your feelings. Perhaps you can tolerate more discomfort than you anticipate. Take things step by step: the thing you avoided might not be as frightening as you expected. Often, doing at least a small part helps. By making a small dent into the avoided activity, many people realize that their avoidance was driven by an exaggeration of how bad it really would be. If you manage to just get started, this is one small step in the right direction, and it helps to build confidence for the next step. Be happy when you avoid avoidance, and celebrate your achievement in getting going.

### 4) Manage your emotions

Having confronted your avoidance and begun the task, you can work on improving your mood while doing this activity that you dislike or have feared. In some circumstances, when not all concentration is needed but a boring or unpleasant task needs to be done, you might come up with ways to make it less aversive. For example, listen to music and dance while cleaning.

You can manage your emotions in different ways once you are aware of your feelings. This means not only down-regulating negative affect as in the example above, but also up-regulating positive affect, so trying to find ways to make the activity a more positive experience. One tip is to remind yourself that the activity is the journey to reach the goal. This goal might be worthwhile enough to endure a little suffering.

## Contact Us

Website: <http://dku.edu.cn/en/caps>

Email: [caps@dukekunshan.edu.cn](mailto:caps@dukekunshan.edu.cn)

Phone: +86-0512-3665-7829

Location: Conference Center 2nd Floor Room 2083 (main office)

Instagram: [dku\\_caps](#)



Content | Chenyi Zhu  
Design | Zhenru Zhou  
Editor | Zhenru Zhou

## Know about Peer For You!



Peer for You (PFY) is a student-run resource that promotes wellbeing by providing the space for DKU students to reach out to peers for support and referrals. Students can reach out to our Peer Responders, who are trained by CAPS, about anything from academic stress and homesickness to student life. Peer Responders are here to provide support, refer students to other resources when needed, and offer the point of view of a peer.

