DISCOVER PSYCHOLOGY
NEWS
EDITORIAL & OPINION

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PROCRASTINATION

HOW WE DELAY AND HOW WE OVERCAME IT

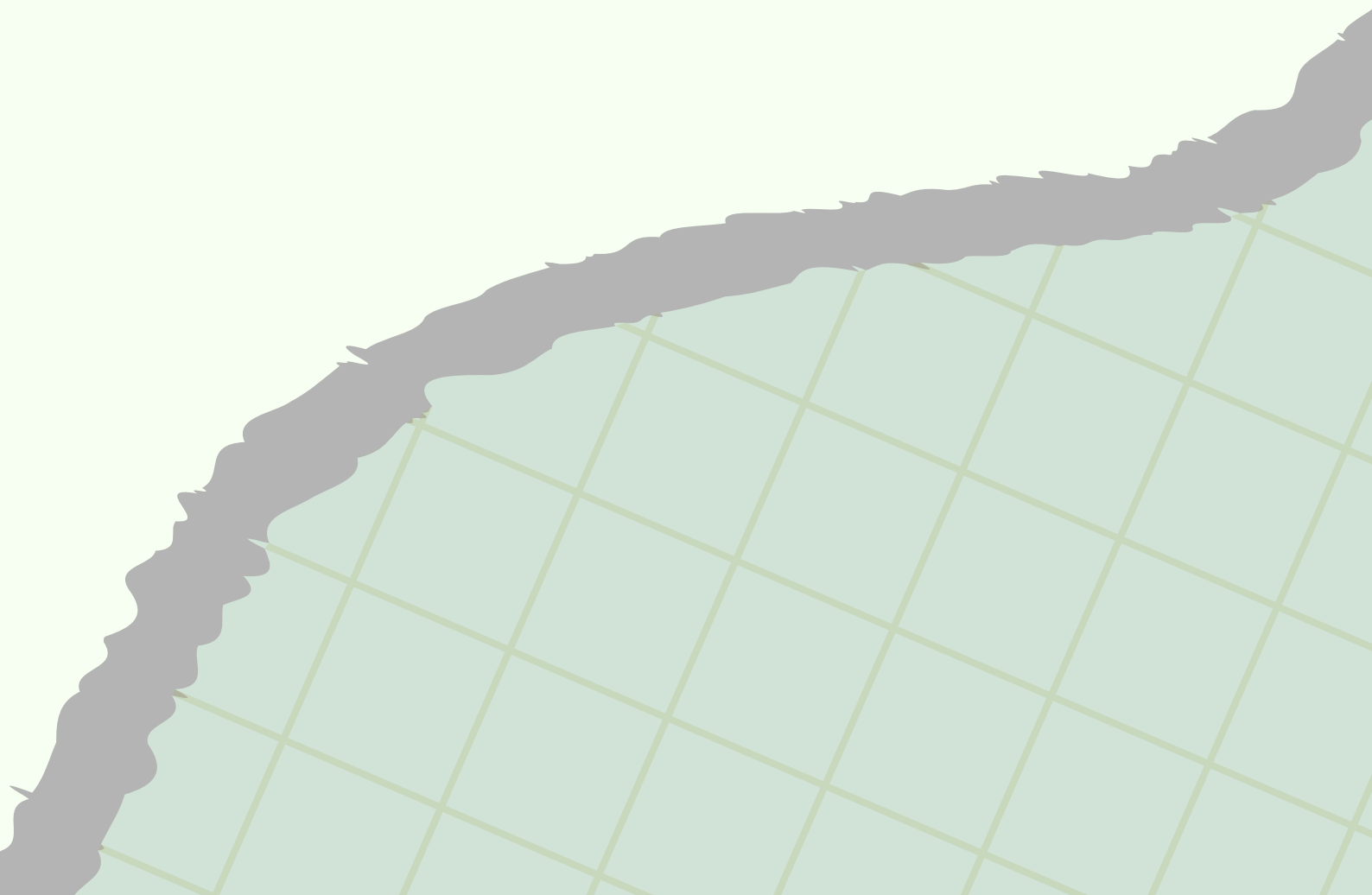


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WHAT IS PROCRASTINATION?

Procrastination is unnecessary and voluntary. delay of an intended or important task, even when a person knows that delaying it may lead to negative consequences. (klingsieck, 2013)

It is more than simply choosing to do something later; the delay often creates stress, discomfort, or problems in performance. (Wingsieck, 2013; Le Bouc & Pessigilone, 2022)



"It's not simply doing something later, it's delaying something you intended to do."

PROCRASTINATION IS NOT THE SAME AS LAZINESS

According to Klingsieck (2013), procrastination is the voluntary delay of an intended, necessary, or personally important activity, despite expecting negative consequences. Unlike strategic delay, the delay is unnecessary or irrational. (klingsieck, 2013).

PROCRASTINATION

"I intend to do it, but I keep delaying it."

STRATEGIC DELAY

"I'm delaying this because there is a functional reason."

So, not every delay is procrastination.
(Klingsieck, 2013)

WHY DO WE PROCRASTINATE?

"The Psychology Behind Delay"



1. Immediate rewards
2. Anxiety
3. Difficulty regulating emotions
4. Fear of failure
5. Perfectionistic concerns
6. Low confidence
7. Task difficulty or unpleasantness
8. Poor self-regulation
9. Difficulty managing time

Research describes procrastination as a complex phenomenon rather than something explained by one single cause. Different theoretical approaches have been proposed to understand why people postpone intended activities. In academic settings, procrastination is also associated with psychological, personal and educational factors. (Klingsieck, 2013; Salguero-Pazos & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2023)

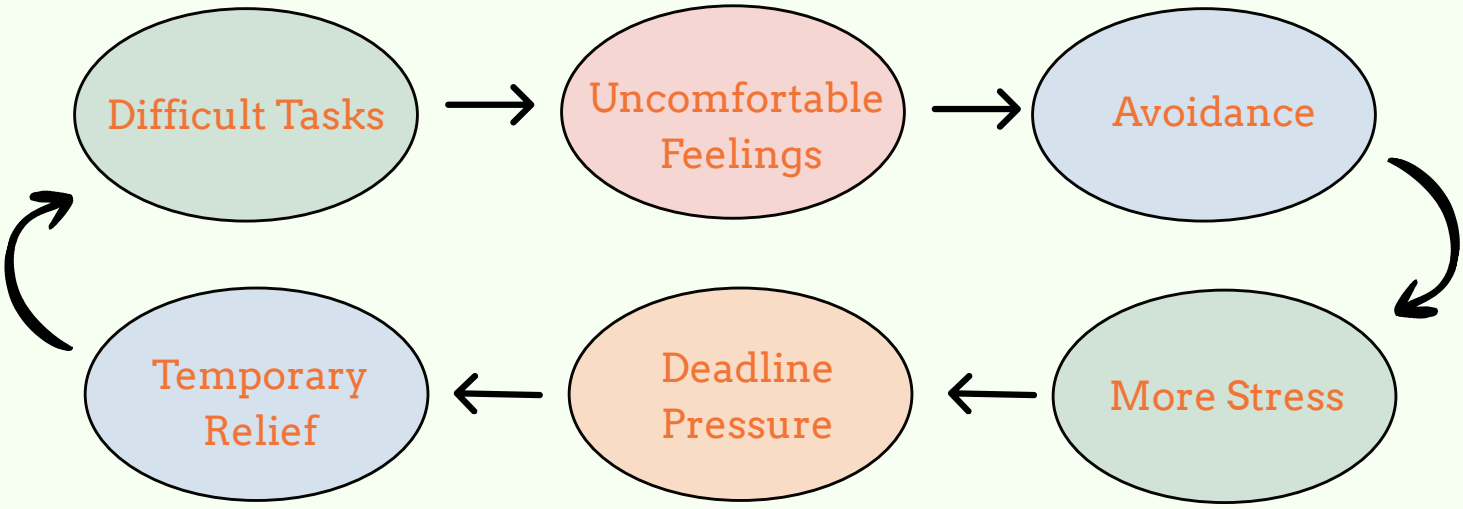
PROCRASTINATION & SELF-REGULATION

"Why Is Self-Regulation Important?"

Self-regulation means managing our thoughts, emotions, motivation, and actions so we can stay on track with our goals and do what we intend to do. According to Klingsieck (2013), procrastination can be seen as a failure of self-regulation, where we intend to do something but delay doing it. Salguero-Pazos and Reyes-de-Cózar (2023) highlight that difficulties in managing these thoughts, emotions, motivation, and actions can play an important role in academic procrastination. (Klingsieck, 2013; Salguero-Pazos & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2023)

When an important task feels difficult or uncomfortable, avoiding it can provide temporary relief from the unpleasant experience associated with starting it.
This can make avoidance feel rewarding in the short term, even though the task remains unfinished.

The Procrastination Cycle

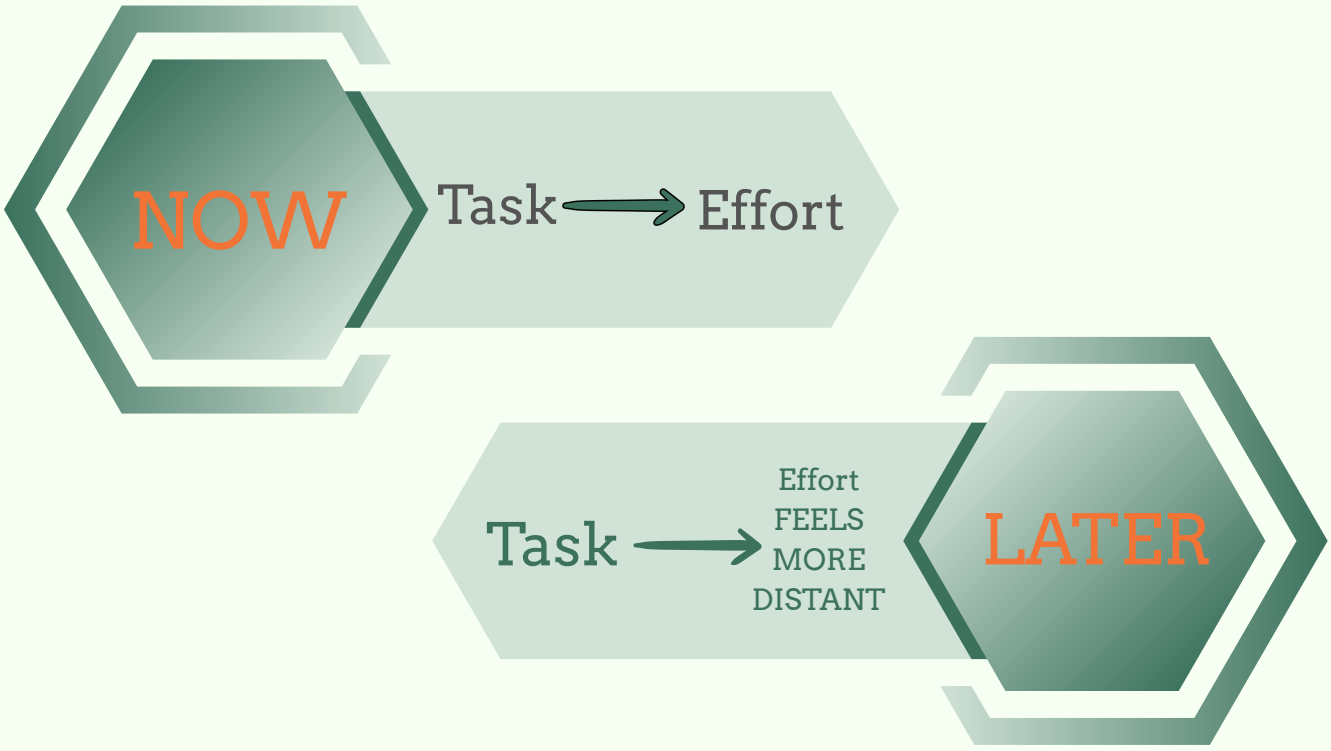


Understanding this cycle helps explain why knowing that a task is important does not always lead to immediate action. (Klingsieck, 2013; Salguero-Pazos & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2023)

WHY LATER CAN FEEL EASIER?

One explanation supported by neuro-computational research is that procrastination involves how people evaluate effort and reward across time.

When a task is delayed, its expected effort cost may feel less significant in the present moment.

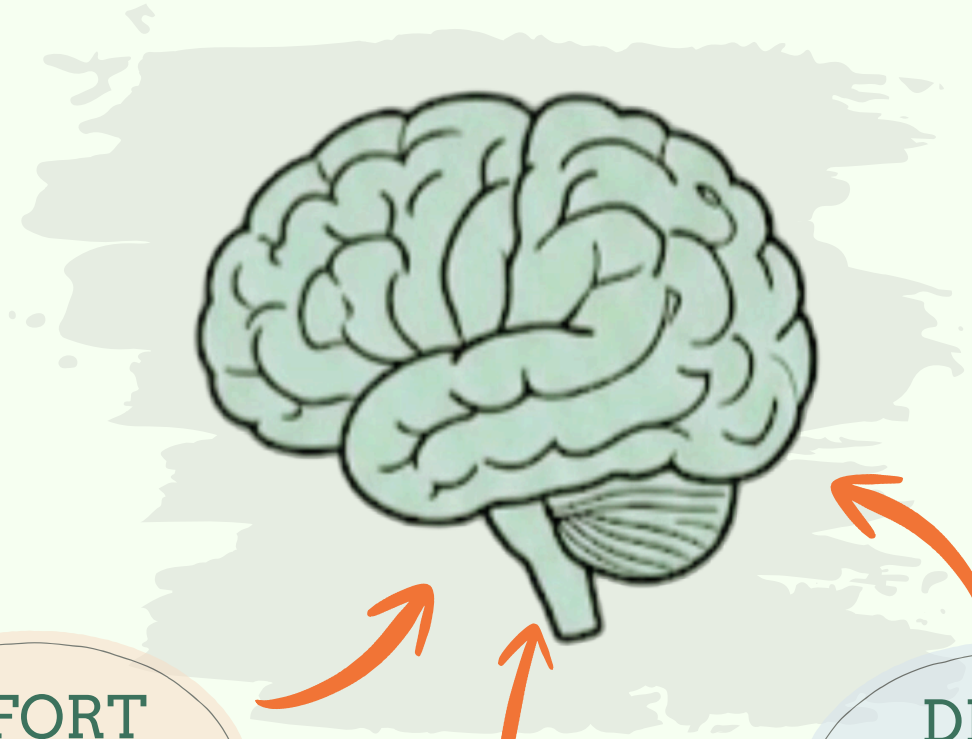


This can make postponing an effortful task seem more attractive right now.
(Le Bouc & Pessiglione, 2022)

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BRAIN?

"The Neuroscience of Procrastination"

Recent research suggests that procrastination is related to how the brain evaluates effort, reward, and delay. Procrastinators may perceive "doing it later as less effortful than "doing it now. (Le Bouc & Pessiglione, 2022)



EFFORT
How hard will it be?

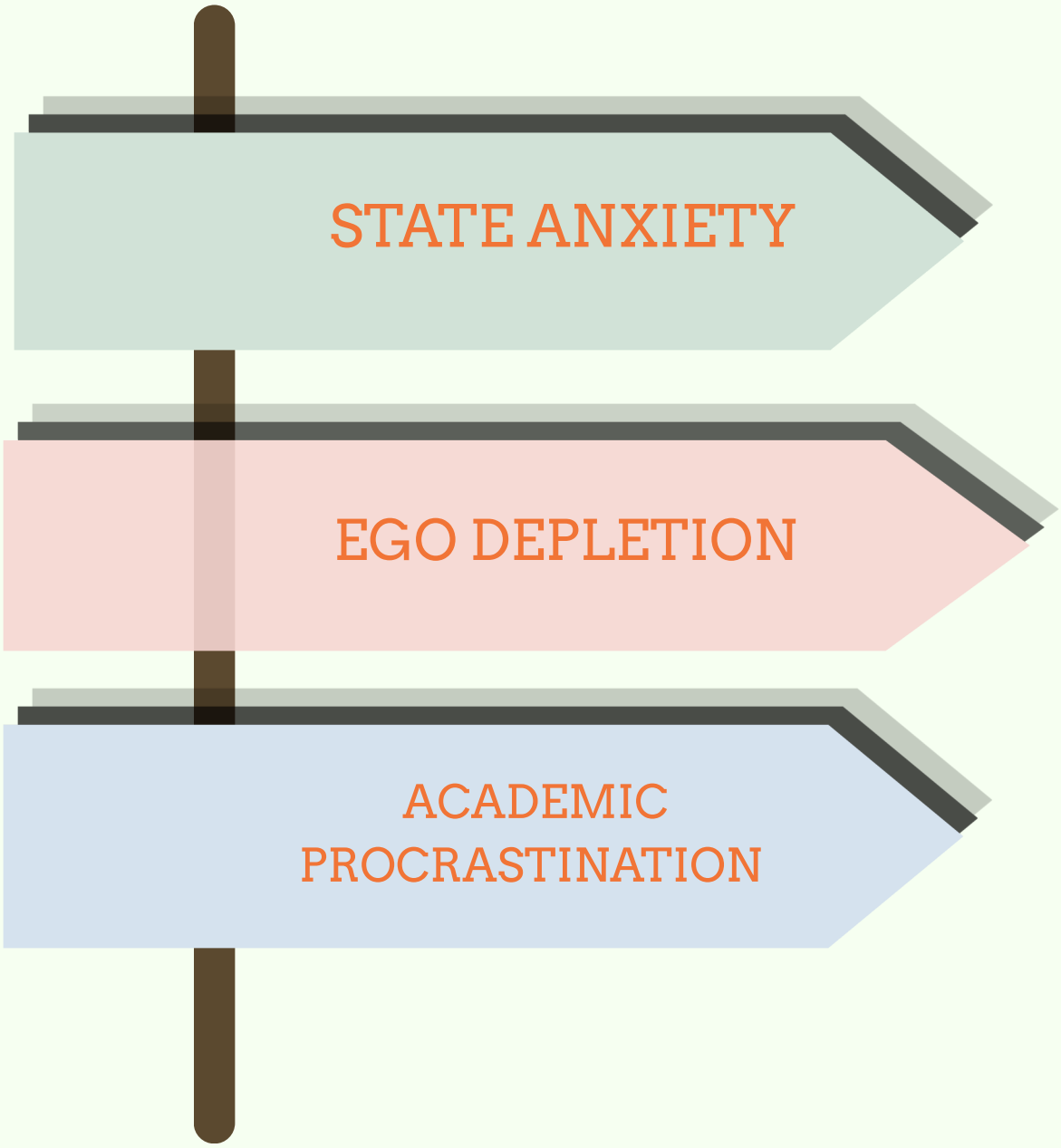
REWARD
What will I get?

DELAY
Can I do it later?

ANXIETY & PROCRASTINATION

"Anxiety Can Keep the Cycle Going"

When state anxiety (temporary anxiety felt in a particular situation) increases, students may find academic tasks harder to manage. This anxiety may also lead to ego depletion (a temporary feeling of having less mental energy for self control, making it harder to stay focused and control your actions), which can contribute to academic procrastination. (Fan et al., 2024).



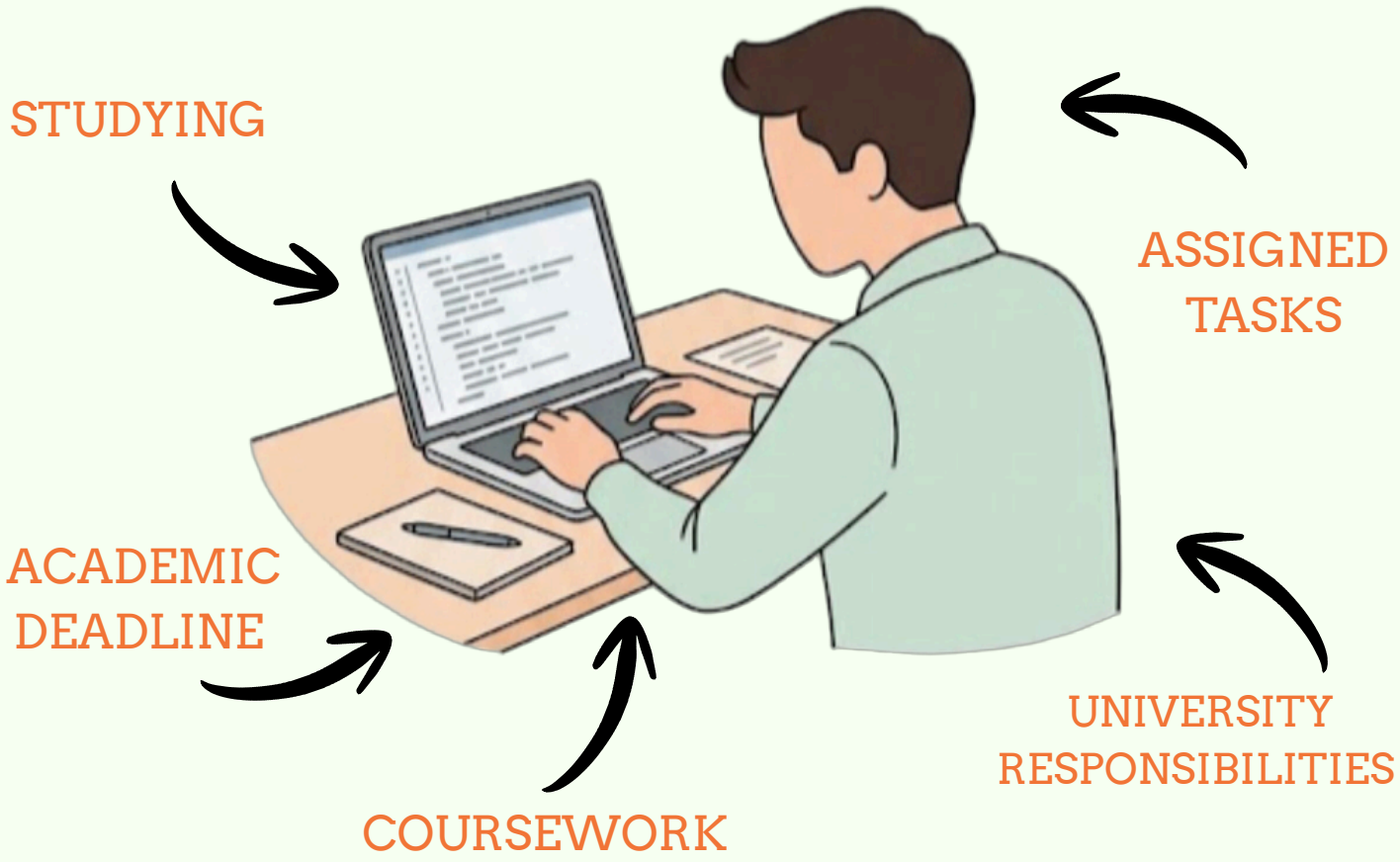
ACADEMIC PROCRASTINATION

"Why Is Academic Procrastination Important?"

Academic procrastination involves postponing academic activities and can interfere with students' academic functioning.

A systematic review of interventions found that academic procrastination is associated with students academic performance and self-regulation.

COMMON ACADEMIC CONTEXT



This suggests that improving self-regulation may help students manage academic procrastination more effectively.
(Salguero-Pazos & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2023)
especially when delaying academic tasks starts to affect their academic life.

THE COST OF PROCRASTINATION

“What Happens When We Keep Delaying?"

Procrastination is not simply about losing time. Research has associated it with negative outcomes involving performance and subjective well-being.

Academic procrastination can also affect the teaching-learning process and students' academic performance.



(Klingsieck, 2013; Salguero-Pazos & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2023)

MINDFULNESS & SELF-COMPASSION

"Be Aware, Not Harsh"

When you notice yourself delaying a task, self-criticism can make the situation feel even more difficult. Mindfulness encourages you to notice your thoughts, feelings, and difficulties without immediately judging yourself. Self-compassion means responding to those difficulties with understanding rather than harsh self-judgment.

Instead Of Thinking

"I'm so lazy. I'll never get anything done."



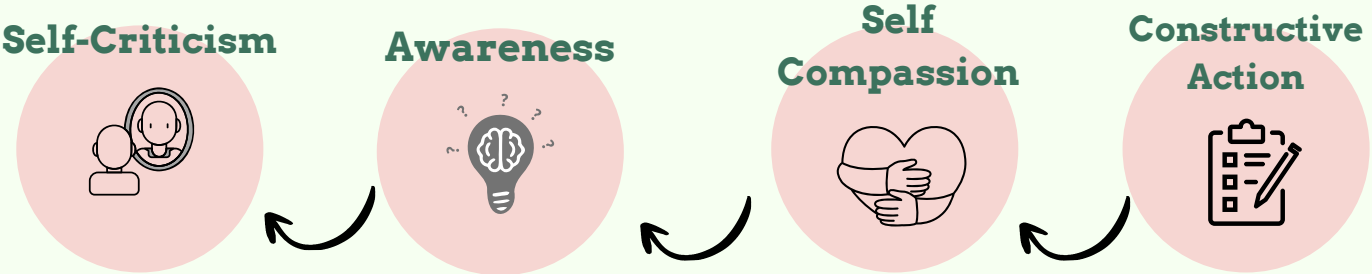
Try This

"I'm struggling to start this task. What am I feeling, and what is one small step I can take?"



The Shift

Self-Criticism → **Awareness** → **Self Compassion** → **Constructive Action**



Mindfulness and self-compassion may be useful psychological approaches for addressing procrastination-related difficulties. (Javaid & Mehr-un-Nisa, 2025)

TIME MANAGEMENT

"Turn Intention Into Action"

When you notice yourself delaying a task, self-criticism can make the situation feel even more difficult. Mindfulness encourages you to notice your thoughts, feelings, and difficulties without immediately judging yourself. Self-compassion means responding to those difficulties with understanding rather than harsh self-judgment.

Daily Plan Example

9:00 - 9:30	Research
9:30 - 9:40	Break
9:40 - 10:10	Write
10:10 - 10:20	Break
10:20 - 10:50	Read
10:50 - 11:00	Break
11:00 - 11:30	Plan

A structured plan can help turn intentions into action.
(Baykara Mat, 2026)

5 Ways To Manage Time

1. Prioritize

Identify what needs attention first?

2. Break tasks down

Turn big ideas into small actions.

3. Schedule

Decide when you will work?

4. Use time blocks

Give a specific period to one task.

5. Review Your Plan

Check what worked and adjust your schedule when needed.

POMODORO TECHNIQUE

"Work in Short, Focused Sessions"

The Pomodoro Technique divides study time into focused work periods followed by short breaks.

1

Choose One Task



What do you want to work on?

2

FOCUS



Work for 25 minutes.

3

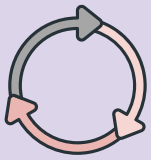
TAKE A BREAK



Rest for 5 minutes.

4

REPEAT



Start another focused session.

5

LONGER BREAK



Take a longer break after several cycles.

REMEMBER

The purpose is not to finish everything at once. The goal is to create a clear structure for starting and working.

Pomodoro is simply a research informed study strategy, not a psychological treatment. Research does not show that it is automatically more productive than other break taking approaches (different ways of planning when and how to take study breaks).
(Smits et al., 2025)

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

"Small Steps, Better Action"



01. PRIORITIZE

Choose the task that needs your attention first.
(Baykara Mat, 2026)



02. PLAN YOUR TIME

Decide when you will work instead of leaving it for "later."
(Baykara Mat, 2026)



03. USE TIME-BLOCKS

Give one task a specific period of focused time.
(Baykara Mat, 2026)



04. NOTICE YOUR STATE

If anxiety is making academic tasks harder to manage, pause and identify what you are experiencing.
(Fan et al., 2024)



05. BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Replace harsh self-judgment with a more mindful and self compassionate response.
(Javaid & Mehr-un-Nisa, 2025)



06. TRY A STRUCTURED BREAK

You can experiment with a structured approach such as Pomodoro: 25 min work - 5 min break.
(Smits et al., 2025)

Plan it. Prioritize it. Start it

MYTHS VS. FACTS

01

MYTH

"Every delay is procrastination."

FACT

Not every delay is procrastination. Strategic or functional delay (delaying a task for a useful reason or because waiting may lead to a better result) can be different from procrastination.
(Klingsieck, 2013)

02

MYTH

"Pomodoro guarantees better productivity."

FACT

Pomodoro may work well for some students, but it does not automatically mean that you will be more productive or finish more tasks than with other ways of taking breaks.
(Smits et al., 2025)

03

MYTH

"Procrastination only affects how quickly you finish a task."

FACT

Procrastination can affect both performance and well-being, not just task completion.
(Klingsieck, 2013)

MYTHS VS. FACTS

04

MYTH

"Anxiety and procrastination are unrelated."

FACT

Higher state anxiety was linked to more academic procrastination. Ego depletion (a temporary reduction in mental energy for self control, which can make it harder to stay focused and manage your actions) partly explained this link.
(Fan et al., 2024)

05

MYTH

"Being harsh on yourself will make you stop procrastinating."

FACT

Research found that university students who practiced mindfulness and self compassion tended to procrastinate less. In other words, being more understanding and kind toward yourself may be more helpful than being harsh on yourself.
(Javaid & Mehr-un-Nisa, 2025)

06

MYTH

"Time management completely eliminates procrastination."

FACT

Structured time-management training can reduce academic procrastination, but it does not necessarily change general procrastination tendencies.
(Baykara Mat, 2026)

REFLECTION & ACTION PLAN

Pause. Reflect. Start

REFLECTION

What am I currently procrastinating on?

What makes this task difficult for me?

What is ONE thing I can do first?

ACTION PLAN

- My Task:
- My First Step:
- I Will Start On:

Date: Time:

- My Strategy :

□ Time-blocking
□ Prioritizing
□ Pomodoro
□ Self-compassion
□ Other:

ONE PROMISE TO MYSELF

I don't have to finish everything today.
I just need to take the next step.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Procrastination is not laziness.



Emotions influence delay.



Small steps creates big changes.



Action doesn't need rectification to begin.

START SMALL , START IMPERFECTLY, START NOW



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