

The Science of Procrastination



You'll only benefit from this, if you're willing to **listen**, willing to **implement**, and willing to **change**.

(This links to the importance of goals, passion and identifying why you want to stop procrastination.)

What is it? 'Pro' – forward, 'crastinus' tomorrow

Not wanting to do a task.

Automatic, Irrational
delay of said task

It's the sacrificing of long term benefits for short term pleasure.

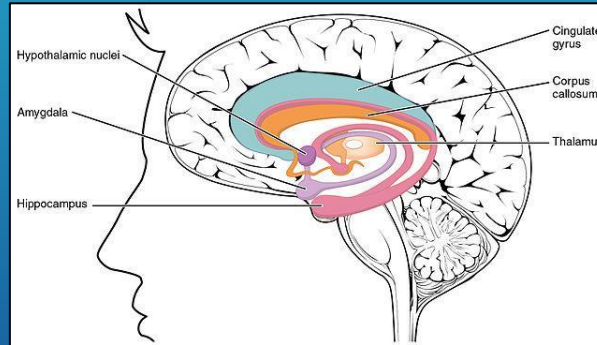
It is a self-defeating, shame causing **cycle**.

Why would we intentionally harm ourselves?

Procrastination is hard wired.

Procrastination is essentially a battle between the limbic system (E.g. amygdala and hypothalamus) and the prefrontal cortex (front of brain)

- In charge of behavioural and emotional – behaviour needed for survival e.g. fight or flight
- Houses pleasure centre – e.g. dopamine released by hypothalamus
- Oldest, largest, most dominant, **automatic**



- **Complex behaviours** e.g. making decisions (in comparison to limbic system)
- Intelligence, memory
- younger, **less dominant, weaker**

Summary: Your desires will almost always overpower rational decision.

Procrastination acts as protection.

- Procrastination is the brain's way of protecting itself from '**danger,**' including uncomfortable feelings that may come with doing a task, and even more deeply e.g. feeling like a failure)
- The brain perceives this as an actual **threat**.
- It is instinctive of us to avoid 'bad' (more modernly homework) and follow 'good'.
- Unfortunately, this backfires when the need to 'bad' is necessary.

(key is to reassure and rewire)



Negative thoughts = uncomfortable feelings.

'First thoughts'

"I can't do it" - A question may look to difficult


"What if I fail?"

"Too difficult" - e.g. English may be stressing you out, therefore you won't do it

"It's 17:07 " I'll have to start later - common to delay by 'starting at the hour'

"Don't want to do it" - may not like the subject

You may not even **realise** these thoughts, but secretly, they'll **manifest** into the discomfort that you **instinctively**, and **inevitably** want to avoid.



Chances are...



Your thoughts may link to these main themes.

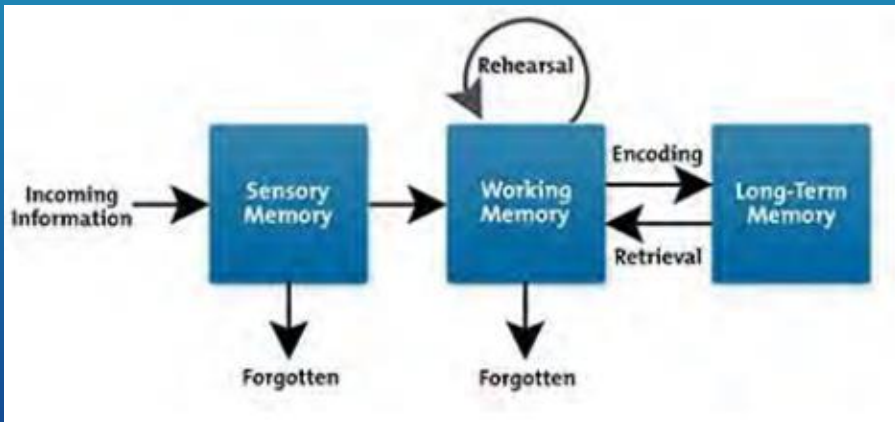
This is the start to getting to the root of your procrastination.

Understanding stress – Cognitive load theory

Sensory memory – passes selective information to working memory. The rest is forgotten.

working memory – ‘cognitive system’ with a limited capacity.

– **long term memory** – ‘only when working memory is processed sufficiently’ (and is deemed as relevant) info. stays.



Cognitive load is **how much information** the **working memory** can take at **once**.

Too much stimuli or information **leads** to e.g. stress,



Understanding stress – Cognitive load theory

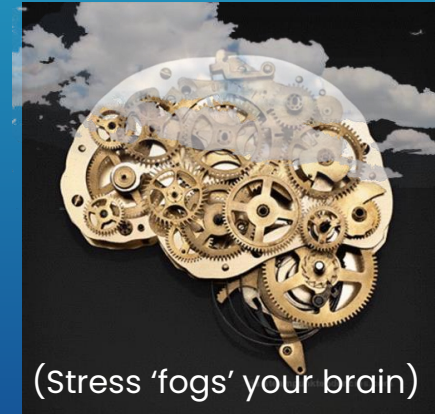
working memory –
'cognitive system'
with a limited
capacity

Cognitive load is how much information the **working memory** can take at **once**. (It's a limited space)

Things that **aren't** important can **also** take up the working memory such as:

- negative associations/thoughts surrounding work
- Anxiety
- Stress.

Your 'brain' can become overloaded with excessive stimuli.



(Stress 'fogs' your brain)

The effects of cognitive load

“The results demonstrate that **Cognitive Overload** is positively **related to Anxiety and Avoidance Behaviour.**”

“**anxiety consumes** the resources of **working memory**, leaving **less** capacity for cognitive activities, and impeding effectiveness.” -

- **Impairs cognitive function** – difficulty thinking things through. The response of **irrationally** delaying a task/procrastinating become more **automatic**.
- Other **effects**: ‘difficulty concentrating, decision making, forgetfulness, fatigue and decreased productivity.’

All are pathways to procrastination.



It's really an emotion management problem...

Procrastination usually continues with the **inability** to manage stress and negative thoughts surrounding e.g. work.

Trigger - e.g. math homework maybe due to difficulty.

'First thoughts' e.g. "I can't do this
'This is too hard'.

Negative feelings produce discomfort

Procrastination - battle between limbic system and amygdala.

Face in/external consequences

Your response e.g. task aversion - going on your phone to escape discomfort.

Beating yourself up for it - doubt yourself and your abilities.

Negative emotion associated with work.



(Anything that makes you feel a rapid, temporary burst of happiness)

Examples of forms of task as version/ escapism (you think you need this , but you don't.)



Excessive indulgence is unhealthy, and it links to:

- higher levels of stress
- depression
- anxiety
- fatigue
- and reduced satisfaction.

'The vicious cycle'



“Why do I always do this to myself?! I regret XYZ ”

Repeated shame

Procrastination is an **automatic cycle**.

Constantly procrastinating - constantly face consequences- may **shame** ourselves - **perceive ourselves negatively**

Constant shaming links to **higher levels** of stress, depression, anxiety, fatigue etc.

Self sabotage

Strong, negative associations are created with work, as the cycle continues.

When we try again, it becomes **harder**, as we also raise ourselves to a higher standard.

To **avoid** feeling guilty/like a failure, you may try to **gain ‘fake’ control** of the cycle, by e.g. Indulging.

Can lead to...

“Why do I always do this to myself?! I regret XYZ ”

I thought I would address this because there is a misconception on what ‘discipline’ is.

Discipline is NOT the ability to neglect your temptations and negative thoughts.

When you set this criteria, then fail it, you will constantly create a **cycle of shame**.

Instead, it just makes it easier to fall into forms of escapism.





Wanting to take action, but the gap between stopping escapism and doing work – acknowledging ‘fear’.



Acknowledge - that you are escaping, that it is unhealthy, and the way you're feeling

Reassure /ground yourself with 'tailored advice to you e.g. overwhelmed - 'slow down..' + breathing technique + challenge negative thoughts

Accommodate - things e.g. breaking up tasks to 'rewire' how you perceive the task

First action - take the first step e.g. promise yourself 5 minutes of work, and e.g. logging in

(Remind yourself 'why' you have to get of e.g. dropping a grade, wanting to go to Cambridge)

What discipline really is

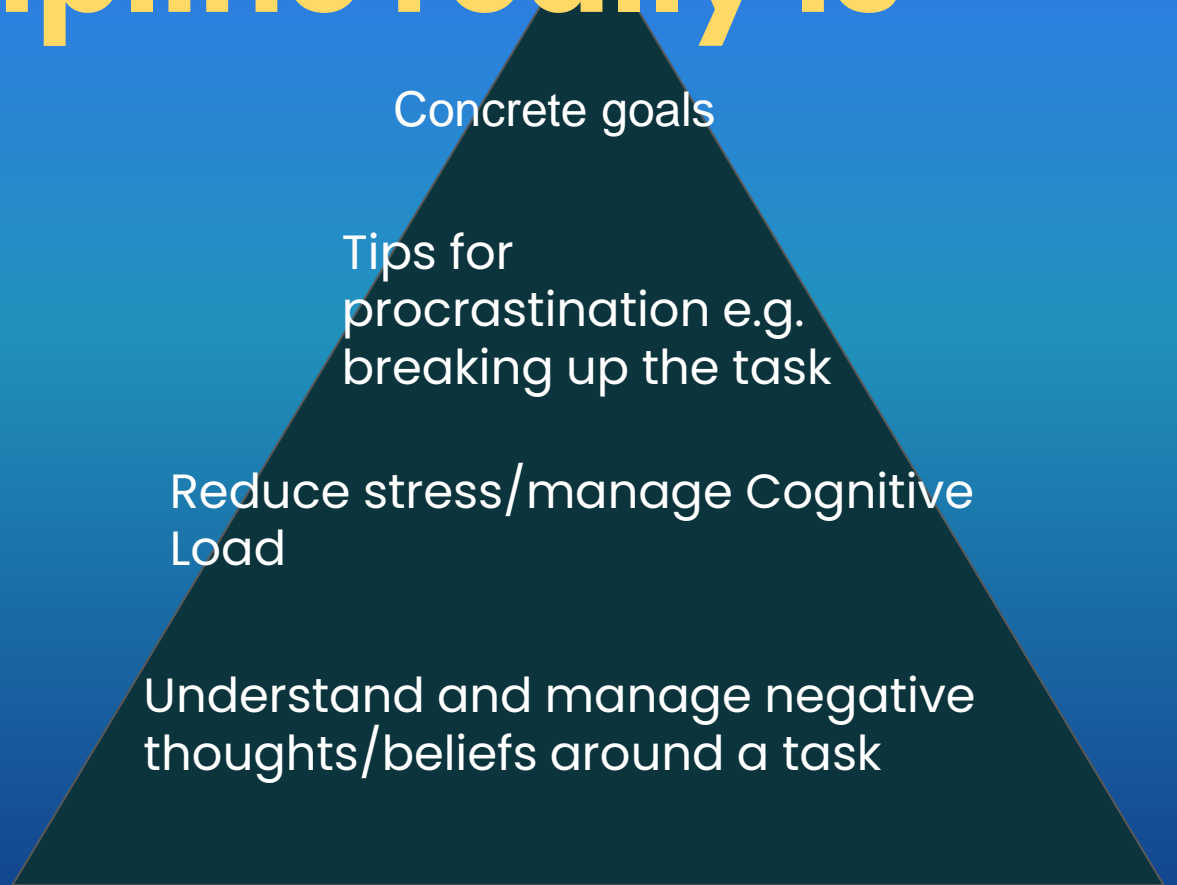
Discipline!

Concrete goals

Tips for
procrastination e.g.
breaking up the task

Reduce stress/manage Cognitive
Load

Understand and manage negative
thoughts/beliefs around a task



How each step can be done

"ARAF" for **negative** thoughts and beliefs)

Reduce **cognitive load** by:

- 'Mind dump' - move thoughts from brain to e.g. paper
- - Write down all the homework/tasks you have to do
- Use a planner (organisation)

Additionally, you can become resilient to **stress**. Exercise, meditate...etc.

Tips you may come across with when you start to consume content related to procrastination are:

- Organisation system
- Increased work productivity e.g. Flow state
- Gamification
- Breaking up the task
- Identifying the first action of the task
- , Reminding yourself that the task is only 'x' amount of time,

Don't beat yourself up! (Seriously)

!! THIS CONTINUES THE CYCLE OF SHAME + GUILT !!

It takes a lot of work to try manage negative beliefs, as well as to **persist** when you relapse into old habits.

Mindset is the most important thing. It takes a lot of **Willingness, resilience, patience and kindness** to beat procrastination.

(Let's remove the old view of 'discipline')



Personal advice:

Accountability partner - help each other, challenge each other + raise stakes of procrastinating e.g. money

Give yourself an outlet for stress e.g. journal, tell someone about stress

Don't fight battle with your phone - Actively try to keep it away.

Don't check the time - time pressure is real.

HABIT TRACKER - motivating.

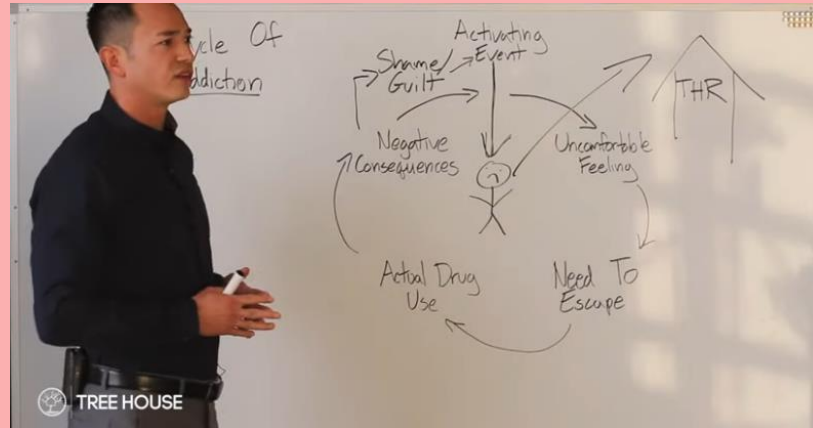
'I am' affirmations app - Start believing you deserve a good life for yourself.
"you only get what you think you deserve"

'True discipline' article

<https://markmanson.net/self-discipline>

Addiction video

<https://youtu.be/WJEiehHLaGQ?si=BZh6G-jjZeXGvbEa>



'Stress' video (nice summary in comments)

<https://youtu.be/Nz9eAaXRzGg?si=ABq3ujvDCIHNrSfH>

