

## Procrastination.org.au

### The Problem, The Causes and The Solution

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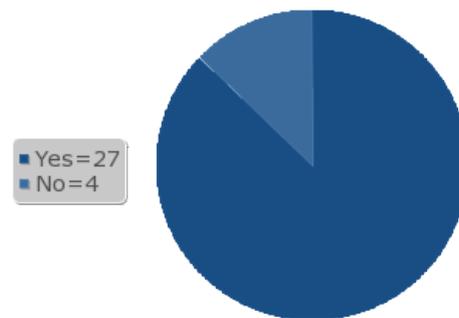
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Most people often define procrastination as “time wasting”. This definition of procrastination was revamped through various dictionaries and finally refined using survey results to produce a definition for **problematic procrastination**, which can be defined as “the delaying or putting off of a task, in order to do another unhealthy task which is less important than the initial task”. (Various Dictionary Definitions, 2012)

I have observed problematic procrastination to be a problem among my peers and myself which is why I set out to make a website, which was the top selection in a conducted survey, to help people understand and learn to control problematic procrastination at a global scale. Statistics show that not many researchers look into procrastination making the creation of this website essential. This website is targeted at secondary school students in Australia as they are the root of the problem. (Robert Boice,1996)

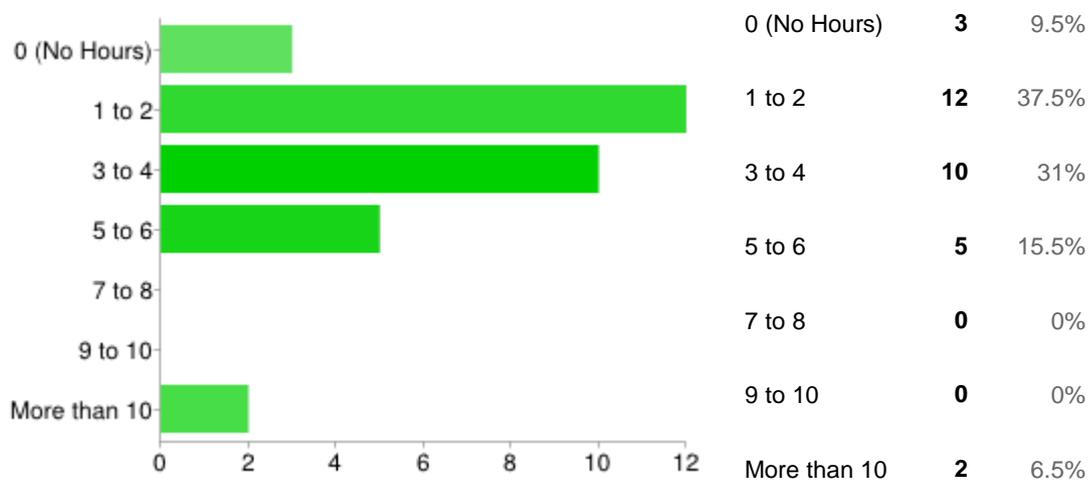
Second year psychotherapy student Alisha Dalton was interviewed via email to provide some insight on the reasons people procrastinate and the behavioural techniques that help control problematic procrastination.

Out of a group of 42 people who answered an extended survey, 32 fell into the target audience with an average age of 16. A whopping 84.5% of the survey sample believed that procrastination was a problem for them with the most common consequences of problematic procrastination being poor academic results, delaying jobs to the last minute, forgetting to complete a job and spending excess time on unimportant jobs. Four survey applicants who did not find procrastination to be a problem believed it was because of their time management and self -motivation. Collected data suggests a majority of all teenagers in Australia procrastinate around 1 to 2 hours on an average day.



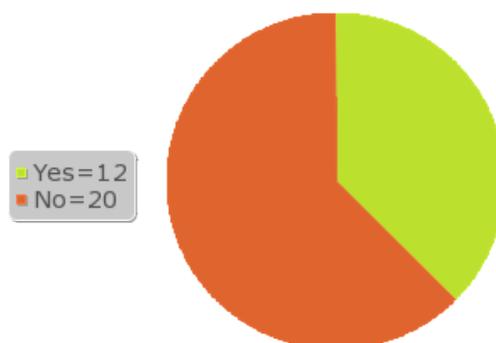
**Figure 1:** Procrastination as an issue survey results.  
**Question:** Is "procrastination" a problem for you?

**How many hours do you spend "procrastinating" on an AVERAGE day?**



Many key findings were discovered about the causes of problematic procrastination. Self-doubt, low frustration tolerance, disorganisation and perfectionism were found to be the top causes for problematic procrastination for teenagers. (Albert Ellis & William J Knaus,1977)

Self-doubt is the act of putting oneself down and often leads to anxiety, depression and hopelessness. It often occurs as a result of a person believing they are unable to perform the task adequately. This then causes the person to doubt themselves and put off the task until they believe they can do it. However, by procrastinating they feel guilty, which causes them to put off the task for even more time. Shockingly, 37.5% of survey applicants believed procrastination is always a bad thing. They believed that "it is a waste of time" and that "no good can come from wasting time". This type of behavioural thinking may allow self-doubting procrastination to constantly reoccur. (Albert Ellis & William J Knaus,1977)



**Figure 3:** Healthy and Unhealthy Procrastination, from survey results

**Question:** Do you believe procrastination is always a bad thing?

Low frustration tolerance (LFT) relates to the inability to cope with present issues even if beneficial to the future. LFT causes one to stop doing a current task they find stressful or boring as they do not see any short-term benefit to doing the task. A substantial 62.5% of survey applicants believed that procrastination is often a good thing, claiming that *“people do need some time off as students and human beings”* and that *“people aren't made to always be studying and stressing themselves out”*. However, LFT often leads to problematic procrastination and is an example of self-defeating behaviour. (Albert Ellis & William J Knaus,1977)

Disorganisation may be the largest cause of procrastination for the target audience. Teenagers often lack organisational skills and the ability to plan ahead which causes them to have a disorganised schedule. This causes one to attempt to finish many tasks within a short time period, which leads to problematic procrastination. (William J Knaus,1979)

Perfectionism is also a major issue with the ever increasing expectations on today's students. One often believes they are incapable to perform a task to a high standard so they put it off until they believe they are ready. However, they will do not attempt to acquire the skills necessary to perform the task which will result in it being left undone. They may also keep altering a piece of work without ever being fully satisfied with the outcome. Perfectionists repeatedly experience problematic procrastination. (John M. Grohol, Psy.D,2008-2009)

Survey results revealed that people often spend time on **Facebook** and the **internet** while they're procrastinating. While the target audience may have contributed to this result it is anticipated that the target audience will learn to control their procrastination so that they can apply their knowledge to other issues in the future.

The key findings for techniques to control problematic procrastination were found to be quite specific depending on the type of procrastinating occurring. Approximately 65.5% of survey applicants were interested in learning techniques to control their procrastination. The majority of these people believed that *“getting work done more effectively”* was their biggest motivation for learning techniques to control their procrastination.

Self-doubt can be controlled by not tolerating the negative behaviour of putting oneself down. One must learn to rate themselves, not by how others see them but how they see themselves. They must also treat every task individually and not rely on their ego to complete every task. One must only consider society's opinions and compare them to their own personal behaviour. This will allow adjustments to be made based on the behaviour that is working and is most beneficial. Undesirable behaviour which causes problematic procrastination can be removed by rating oneself highly when one stops doing that particular behaviour. Over time, this technique allows all of this negative behaviour to be removed. (Albert Ellis & William J Knaus,1977) (William J Knaus,1979)

Low Frustration Tolerance is often caused by a lack of motivation. Hence, those who are experiencing LFT will find that the motivation technique will allow them to maximise their efficiency. Using behavioural methods one can reinforce themselves by rewarding themselves after healthy procrastination and punishing themselves after problematic procrastination. Alisha Dalton elaborated by saying "...the mind will adapt to the positive and negative reinforcements which will lead to less procrastination, every time." This motivation allows short-term benefits to be present as well as the original long term benefits which will help end LFT related problematic procrastination. Teenagers can reward themselves by purchasing clothes or taking short breaks. It is important to note that positive reinforcements work better than negative reinforcements. Therefore, teenagers may take away something enjoyable that they would normally do (such as watch a television show) as a form of punishment and negative reinforcements.(Albert Ellis & William J Knaus,1977) (University of California,unknown date) (charlieissocoollike, 2011)

Organising your schedule and prioritising your tasks will allow more time to be freed for other tasks. It also allows work to be distributed over a period of time, keeping stress levels to a minimum. People often classify time-consuming tasks as hard and put them off as they "take too much time to compete". This is very likely to lead to problematic procrastination. One may divide a task into smaller tasks will result in manageable tasks being completed which will contribute to the entire task overall. It is also recommended that one keeps a to-do-list that prioritises tasks based on their importance and difficulty levels. One would then complete and tick-off each task, effectively allowing one to feel a sense of accomplishment. It is vital that the any developed organisational system is regularly updated. (University of California,unknown date) (Pick the Brain Editor,2012) (Arina Nikitina,2009) (Mary Eule Scarborough,2007)

When it comes to completing a task one must tell themselves that the level of perfection "DOESN'T MATTER!". The most important thing to do is to complete the current task at hand at the level that one is able to. Refinements and alterations will come naturally as one practices the task and implements new skills and techniques into the same task next time. Once perfectionism is addressed it is often fairly easy to eliminate which will result in much more productivity. (Marc and Angel Hack Life,2010) (Albert Ellis & William J Knaus,1977)

A colleague of mine undertook a two week test in which he kept a diary of his procrastination habits. For the first week the participant recorded how much time they procrastinated and for the second they recorded how much time they procrastinated while using the aforementioned techniques.

The observed test results are shown below:

<b>Time spent Procrastinating (Week 1)</b>				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2.5 hours	30 minutes	2 hours	1 hour	30 minutes

<b>Time spent Procrastinating (Week 2)</b>				
Monday (Perfectionism)	Tuesday (LFT)	Wednesday (Organisation)	Thursday (Self-Doubt)	Friday (LFT)
1 hour	10 minutes	30 minutes	25 minutes	15 minutes

The observed test revealed that the amount of procrastination was certainly minimised in the second week, with the most effective technique being motivation and organisation. The total procrastination time of 6 hours and 30 minutes in the first week was minimised to 2 hours and 20 minutes which is a remarkable achievement.

Procrastination is something that occurs for us all so it vital that its 'problematic' aspect is kept under control so that people may be successful in the present and for the foreseeable future. Using the previously mentioned techniques many of my colleagues have learnt to control their problematic procrastination which will truly advantage them in the future. I myself have conquered my habit of constant unhealthy procrastination, some of which occurred during the creation of this website (oh the irony!).

## Word Count: 1500 (excluding table and references)

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### Images:

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