

HOW NOT TO PROCRASTINATE (PODCAST 23 TRANSCRIPT)

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Greetings everyone. This is Kurtis Clements with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to discuss tips for how not to procrastinate. First off, I want to give special thanks to Molly Starkweather for her inspiration for this podcast. Molly knows a little something about procrastination.

How many of you identify yourselves as a procrastinator (at least some of the time)? If so, I am sure you are in good company as many folks put off work until the last possible moment. For some, they thrive under pressure and the work comes together. But for others—perhaps for most—procrastination often leads to increased anxiety and other related problems.

Procrastination does not always work well in an academic course, not even for the instructor. I find keeping current with grading and student responses results in lower stress. I am sure most procrastinators have the best intentions—to start early! But we all struggle to meet life's challenges, and let's face it: Things don't always pan out the way we would like, hence we put things off until we have to get them done. In fact, if you are like the average procrastinator, then you are very good at putting all kinds of things off until the last minute—paying bills, taking the dog out, doing your taxes, and, yes, completing school assignments. Procrastinators—for whatever reason—will wait until the night before something is due, to get to work.

When that work is writing, the process (if I can call it that) goes something like this: You think, then you write, then you research really, really quickly, then you write some more, then you think, and then maybe you read the work out loud to keep on track with your train of thought. You work all through the night, and then, voila! You have finished your project. Phew! You know it's not your best work, but it'll do. Maybe you have told yourself one of the common myths people often use when it comes to procrastination.

Common myth number 1: "Why should I start on this paper tonight when I could draft the whole thing tomorrow?" The reason you should start now and not tomorrow is that if you start now, you can make progress—today! I am reminded of Jughead Jones, from the Archie comics. Can you picture Jughead Jones? Jughead used to say, I'll gladly pay you tomorrow for a hamburger today. Would you give Jughead that hamburger today? I wouldn't! If you want that hamburger now, Jughead, pay me now. End of story. The same holds true for an assignment that needs to get done. Don't put off what needs to get done until a later time. Such an approach can have a kind of snowball effect that makes getting something done all the more difficult.

Here is another common myth: I have to do BLANK first. Put whatever you want in the blank—wash the car, clean the house, mow the lawn, and on and on. In all likelihood, you don't have to do BLANK first. You can sit down and do your schoolwork. You can begin a draft of your paper. You can make



some forward progress. Tell yourself that BLANK can and should wait. Some of you out there are probably saying, Hold on! Waiting until the last minute is how I work best. That is my process. Perhaps, but I'd argue that it's still good to have some wiggle room, that, in fact, with a little conscientious effort, you could probably start just a wee bit sooner so that you are not in an 11th hour, make-or-break, do or die kind of situation. (Please pardon the barrage of clichés, which will be a topic for a future podcast).

You've heard of students who start on a project the very day it's assigned. Indeed, some of your classmates surely can space out their brainstorming, researching, and writing into phases that only take a little bit of time here and there. But you've never understood how that works or been able to do it yourself. Sure, it would be nice not to have to pull an all-nighter just before an assignment is due, but how do you trick yourself into actually starting on the project far in advance? Let me offer some practical tips that you might find helpful.

Number 1: Get organized. Staying organized and on top of your assignments is a must (as you all know) and a planner or its equivalent works. I use a calendar—Google calendar. I have it set up to send me a reminder for my daily agenda each morning by 5 AM. If I have to complete grades by Thursday, I enter a to-do item for Tuesday and Wednesday that says "Grade Unit 2 work" along with any other to-dos or appointments, and first thing in the morning Google emails me my daily agenda. This is what I do to stay organized, and I think it's important that everyone has some kind of system that works and stick to it.

Number 2: Set up a study schedule. You may want to set up a study schedule where certain days and times of the day are devoted to your course work. I know that with all the monkey wrenches life throws at us keeping a set schedule may not always work, but if you try, you just might be able to find a way to manage your time efficiently at least in terms of the course work. As a practicing writer with three young children (ages 13, 10, 7), I have to get up by 5 AM every day of the week so that I have time to work on my writing. Now that I have been getting up so early for years, it is not as great a challenge as it might sound, but the point is to pursue something that mattered to me (my attempt at writing the great American novel), I have had to make sacrifices so that I had the time to work on my writing.

Number 3: Start early. Look ahead at projects and assignments and give some thought to that work. The sooner you can start—even if you are just tossing around ideas—the better off you will be. You might want to write down due dates earlier than they are actually due. I set reminders on my phone, on my email calendar, and even in my paper date book to get something done at least a week before it is due.

Number 4: Ask questions. Don't be shy. If you have questions, reach out to your instructor and ask. This is why starting early is so important, for you don't want to have questions that need to be answered only hours before the actual assignment is due. Your professor is there to help, but he/she can't help if you don't make contact.

Number 5: Just do it. That's right—embrace the Nike slogan and just do it. You will not make progress if you don't start, so you might as well get going. Yes, you may be tired, you may have a job or kids or this, that, and the other—all of that is understandable. It's life. We're busy. But if you have



an essay to write or research to conduct, then that is something else that needs to get done, so just do it.

Let's face it: It's easy to put things off. Procrastination can be a real problem for some folks, so the best advice is to recognize that you have a tendency to wait until the last minute to do things, and try to something about it. Now. Not tomorrow. Not the next time you have a big paper to write.

Thanks for listening, everyone. Happy writing.

