# **Getting organised**

## Addressing procrastination

[Procrastination](https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Procrastination) is a complex process that affects everyone. [Perfectionism](https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Perfectionism) is often a root cause of procrastination and it is possible to reinvest our energy into ‘paying a lot of attention to detail’ and doing a ‘good enough’ job instead of the unrealistic ‘perfect job’. It is a myth that procrastination is caused by laziness. Some underlying processes that contribute to procrastination include:

* unhelpful and unrealistically high ideals
* negative thinking and ‘self-talk’ that lead to negative actions
* fear of failure or of catastrophic consequences if mistakes are made
* low self-esteem, lack of assertiveness and/or an inability to say ‘no’
* lack of interest in an activity, or believing you are on the wrong path

## When we procrastinate, we try to avoid feeling bad by putting off what we know needs to be done. However, procrastination tends only to postpone or intensify negative feelings in the longer term.

As a first step towards addressing procrastination, notice how you talk to yourself. Do you talk to yourself in the same way that you would talk to a friend? Are you kind or critical to yourself? Here’s a [link to a podcast](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/counsellors/podcasts/) on [self-compassion](https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Self-Compassion) other students have found useful.

If our unconscious self-talk is full of ‘shoulds’, consciously changing ‘should’ to ‘could’ can help. ‘Could’ is self-compassionate, based on reality, choice and personal responsibility and can help to reduce the influence of procrastination. For example:

I **could** have got the assignment done on time but **I chose** to spend my time on other things. I **could** choose to do things differently next time.

I **should** have got the assignment done on time but I didn’t. I am stupid and lazy. I **should** just give up.

‘Should’ sets us up for more failure. ‘Could’ sets us up for potential success.

Here are some other strategies that may help you to address procrastination:

* Connect the task to your **lifetime aspirations and goals** to put it in perspective and remind yourself of why it needs to be done (see the **goal-setting activity** in the Getting Organised section of the Academic Skills Hub).
* Use the **To-do list template** in the Getting organised section of the Academic Skills Hub – to list everything that you need to do, prioritise your tasks, and set deadlines for completion. Writing things down clarifies our thoughts and opens them to scrutiny. Keep the list in your pocket or phone to remind yourself of your priorities for that day. NB: explanation in Sem planning?
* If possible, do the most difficult or unpleasant tasks first, or alternate ‘nasty’ tasks with ‘nice’. Do the most difficult tasks when your energy is at its highest and choose a location and environment that is conducive to getting the task done. Plan a **reward** for yourself after doing a challenging task, such as meeting a friend, enjoying a cup of tea, or going for a walk.
* Use the **task analysis** **guide** in the ‘Semester planning’ section of the Academic Skills Hub to break down longer and more difficult tasks into smaller sub-tasks, including some that can be completed in five minutes or less. Complete at least one five-minute task as soon as you can today. NB: explanation in Sem planning?
* Try not to wait until you have a long stretch of ‘free’ time to get started. You can achieve a lot in 5, 10, 15, or 30 minutes. Decide that you won’t live another day with regret. Make a **start** – any start, even a 5-minute start – today.
* Find **someone with a similar task**, or form/join a **study group**, to discuss and work on the task.
* If procrastination has become **chronic** and seems impossible to overcome, consider talking to a professional such as a [counsellor](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/counsellors/podcasts/) or your [Student Support Officer](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/student-support-officers/).

**Supported by the Student Project Fund**