

Monica Gribben

The Study Skills Toolkit for
Students
with **Dyslexia**



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2 Procrastination



This chapter looks at the ‘tomorrow never comes’ habit by taking you through the five-step Getting into Gear Process involved in facing your procrastination habits and in breaking the mould.



Step 1: Identifying yourself – what type of procrastinator are you?

Step 2: Naming your procrastination pattern

Step 3: Taking ownership

Step 4: Making the change

Step 5: Reviewing the change

Your procrastination toolkit

Lightning ideas

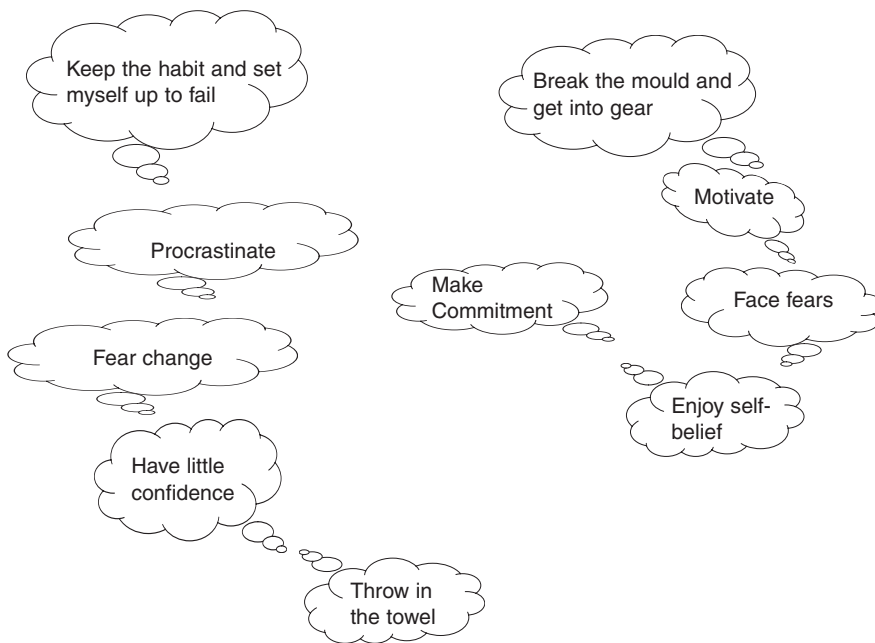
Procrastination – what’s that exactly?

Procrastination is the art of putting things off; of delaying the inevitable. Instead of dealing with tasks as they come along or learning to prioritise, a good procrastinator will find a believable reason for putting things off until tomorrow. Don’t be mistaken though – procrastinators seldom sit around doing nothing. They’re always busy, but with the wrong things.

It’s easy to make excuses for avoiding doing what really needs to be done. Students are often the worst procrastinators, especially when faced with more than one assignment at a time, and having to juggle both the researching and the writing up. It can often become worse when the demands of family life, and all the stresses that come with that, also have to be juggled. Student life can become complex and remaining motivated, well – ‘what’s that?’ you say after a while.

When you procrastinate, you’re only delaying the obvious – putting off working on your assignment. Procrastination doesn’t get your work done for you nor does it make it disappear. It merely delays the

working process and often makes it harder to get motivated as time goes on. Any assignment you have will still be there the next day, and the day after that, and every other tomorrow until you step out and break the mould. The longer you procrastinate, the harder it is to get into gear, and the higher your anxiety level rises. Suddenly, you find yourself stuck and not knowing quite which way to turn or what to do. It's quite simple really; you can either keep the habits or change the behaviours – the upwards or downwards response. What's it to be then? Think, choose and be honest with yourself!



The five-step getting into gear process

Procrastination is something you've practised over a lifetime, so it won't disappear overnight. Remember, getting yourself motivated again will be hard work, particularly if lots of different issues are going on at the same time, and the pressure builds up.

Working your way through these five steps will test your belief about your motivation and commitment, forcing you to face your fears and move out of your comfort zone. By doing this, you should be able to make the changes necessary so that you don't just 'talk the talk' but also 'walk the walk'. When dipping in and out of the toolkit, ask yourself:

- Why do you keep putting things off, and what are the consequences of that?
- What stops you from getting things done?
- How can you break the mould and get into gear with some practical, easy-to-use strategies?

Remember, things don't have to be exact or precise; there's always room for revisiting and reworking things. Just be honest in your responses and you'll get there.

Step 1: Identifying yourself – what type of procrastinator are you?

The first step in this process is to be clear about the part of you that's the procrastinating student. Are you a natural procrastinator or are some of the worries addressed in Chapter 1 still lurking in your worry bag and affecting your thinking? Be clear about why you want to study and what you hope to achieve. Write this down, read it, visualise it and remember it. Let it define your learning.



Activity 2.1 Defining your goals

What do you want to achieve?

What do you need to do to get there?

How do you plan to get there?

Who will help you along the way?

When you look at your goal written down in black and white, how do you feel? Do you believe it's achievable? Or has negativity taken a hold of your self-belief? Remember, you're not alone as a procrastinator or as a student who needs a little kick-start. Lots

of students are in the same boat. The point is that to move from procrastinate to motivate, you need to want to change and commit to it. If you're fed up with being stuck, then maybe it's time to make that move.



Case Study: Ryan, aged 22, final-year marketing student

'I was just settling into doing some work on my honours project. I'd got some books from the library and needed to finally start working my way through these, as my deadline was only three months away. The practical bit was done, it was just the theory I needed to sort out. After all, I'd put off getting started long enough. Anyway, I'd just about started when my friend called, inviting me to a barbeque. Naturally, I dropped the books, jumping at the chance of a free feed. Oh, I'll make a start tomorrow, I thought.

The barbeque went on for longer than expected and I arrived home very late feeling rough, after having had more than a few drinks. I slept late the next morning and, as I'd a dental appointment late on in the afternoon, I decided to leave things until tomorrow again. After all, who can concentrate after having a filling? Another day gone with no work done! ... and so the story goes on. I simply kept putting things off, finding it even harder to get started.'

With hindsight, is there anything Ryan could have done differently? Being a final-year student, do you think he should have learned to prioritise, organise and plan better? What about reading and writing much earlier? What about his stress levels now? How will that affect his performance? What advantages would he have had in saying 'no' to the barbeque or to drinking so much?

Admitting that you procrastinate and how often you put things off is useful, but being able to say what type of procrastinator you are should help identify a specific support strategy. For example, if you're a Stresser and an Avoider then working with a Student Adviser on your procrastination habit is a positive way forward.

As well as giving you some stress-management strategies, your Adviser can help you get to the root of why you avoid getting started. By using your toolkit, you can map out the connections in the different stages of your 'Avoider' pattern. Do you avoid getting started because you don't know how to write in an academic style, or do you have a longstanding fear of failure?



Activity 2.2 Name it to change it!

Ever found yourself in a similar situation to Ryan? Who hasn't! Start charting your progress and ask yourself honestly:

What are the consequences of this? Where do you think you're at now? Do you keep going as you are, going it alone or do you need that kick-start to break the mould? Are you stuck with the negative or can you move forward towards the positive? What can you change?

Seeing a picture of your situation unfold with the help of your toolkit should make it easier for you to answer those questions, and to see whether you can get into gear and commit to change.

Do – when?	Name it to change it	Done – when?
this week	plan assignment; work back from deadline date/...../..... /...../.....



Activity 2.3 Scaling

Where do you fit on the procrastination scale? Circle your answer. Are you someone who puts things off:

all the time most of the time sometimes hardly ever not at all

If you've ticked more than one of the types in Table 2.1, then it's time to get in touch with the things that are blocking you.

Step 2: Naming your procrastination pattern

The next step in seeing the bigger picture is being able to work out your pattern and add to it or even subtract from it. Look honestly at the things that are stopping you, even blocking you, and how you feel about that. Activity 2.4 should help you put a name to your habits.

Table 2.1 Procrastinator types: which are you?

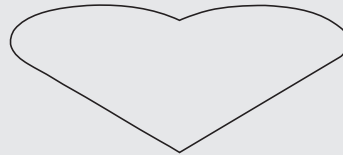
Type	Description	✓
worrier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> constantly fret about not managing constantly worry about failing 	
stresser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use up so much energy stressing about the task that you find it hard to focus and get going 	
avoider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> believe the task will go away or do itself, so you avoid thinking or doing anything about it 	
excuse-maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keep making excuses for getting started or for not getting started 	
putter-offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> do any other mundane task rather than what you actually should be doing 	
dreamer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> constantly dream about being finished but never do anything about getting started so you can get to that point 	
over-doer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gather too much information, take on too much and then can't see the wood for the trees 	
unmotivated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can't be bothered not at all interested 	
perfectionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> never seem happy with what has been produced go over and over things hoping to make it all perfect 	
lazy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can't be bothered even thinking about the task, never mind doing anything to get started 	
pessimist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> so afraid of getting it wrong and failing believe you'll get it wrong and fail 	
over-loader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have difficulty saying 'no' and so take on too much and feel overwhelmed with tasks 	



Activity 2.4 So what's really stopping you?

Things that stop you	(√)
fear of failure	
thoughts of getting started	
beginning the task	
making decisions	
keeping going	
completing the task	
taking time out	

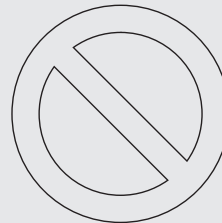
Name it, shape it!
How does this make you feel?



What are your thoughts about it all?



What's really blocking you?
Can you say why?



Taking your current assignment, have you asked yourself the why, how and what questions, and worked out the consequences of all that? What's the most challenging thing about this pattern and your study approach? How does it affect your confidence and belief in your own ability in getting your thoughts down on paper? Why does it shape the way you work or the way you gather information, think things through, examine, rationalise or conceptualise things, or even define your learning? Lots of questions, I know, but they'll help you get to the root of why you're struggling with this assignment.

Can you sketch your current experience? Remember, it doesn't have to be perfect; matchstick men, shapes or symbols are fine – as long as it says something

to you and about you. How about adding some colour? If you like storyboarding, then add some words too.



_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Now that you’ve moved a little way forward in the five-step process, check out your toolkit again and see how things are unfolding. Read your story out loud; listen to it, hear it, share it with someone you trust. Does it seem more real to you now? Do you feel ready to move forward and take ownership of your procrastination? Or do you need to ask yourself again why you’re doing this?

Step 3: Taking ownership

Procrastination is a habit that happens for a variety of well practised reasons. Taking ownership means that you:

- admit to habitually putting things off
- have identified and named your procrastination habit
- have a general picture of your student life as a procrastinator
- want and need to change.

Continually putting things off or waiting until your stress level becomes almost unmanageable creates a negative pattern that can be difficult to break through. What you’re actually creating is a failure to see the value in yourself and in your abilities. At times, you may lose sight of the best in yourself and all the valuable qualities you can bring to your student life. If you’re seeing a more negative than positive picture of how you function as a student, then it’s time to take that next step, and take ownership of your ‘tomorrow never comes’ habit.

Name it, own it! I want to but can't, I'm stuck!

So you're having difficulty seeing the value in yourself and what you can achieve? Looking at your life in two different mirrors might help you see that you've the ability to turn things around and become motivated and committed in student life.



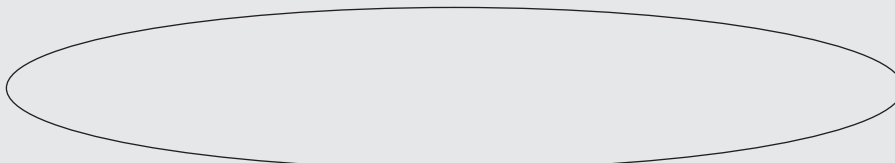
Activity 2.5 Mirroring Janus

Think of two situations in your life: one where you've put things off and another where you've tackled things head on. Mirroring Janus will make you see that you're both part of the problem and part of the solution in this next step. Just as the problem lies within you, so does the solution. Be open and honest in your responses.

What I put off	What I tell myself	Consequences	How I feel about this

What I tackle	What I tell myself	Consequences	How I feel about this

Doodle the difference in your mirror responses – your life situation, attitude, goals, support, reward? More confidence, less stress?



What about your current assignment? Your problem, your solution – doodle it!
What can you do differently?

Problem		Solution	
Consequences		Consequences	
How you'd feel		How you'd feel	

Can you now see the more favourable Janus? What's your choice – the put off or the tackled? Which one causes less anxiety and more harmony? Think of your goals and what you need to do to get there! When looking at the pattern that's unfolded, can you honestly say what you're really procrastinating about and why? Is it as scary as you first thought? Or do you think with a little helping hand, you'll manage? What's it

to be? 'Talk the talk' and all the negatives it brings – the disinterest, de-motivation, fear of failure, lack of confidence, poor self-belief, poor focus, fatigue, anxiety, pessimism, low mood? Or do you now feel ready to 'walk the walk' and commit to self-belief and self-motivation, and move forward with all the positives it brings – confidence, self-esteem, balanced study, relaxation time, good grades, success?

If you're still having difficulty, then look back to Activity 1.1 and your responses, and review your basic planning and organisation (Chapter 1). Have you missed out something? Does it need to be revised in any way so that you can finally take ownership of your procrastination? If so, do it now!

Now that you're halfway through the Five Steps, can you see what's changed in the process – you? ... how you feel? ... how you think? Are your dyslexic difficulties blocking you? Are you generally not managing your assignments, or is there something more going on in your personal life?



Activity 2.6 Advertising you

Still struggling to think of the best in you? Okay, think! If you were an advertisement, how would you sell yourself? You're the latest gadget on the market and everyone wants one. What 'value for money qualities' do you possess? Working alongside a friend, jot down your 'value qualities' and convince the market! It's often easier for others to see your values and gifts, and give a different dimension to your story. Hearing your story verbalised is positive; the valuable will stick and you'll become unstuck.

Taking ownership means it's important to squarely look at what's going on round about you, to face your fears and to get the support you need to move forward. Otherwise, you're on a fast track to the downward spiral.

Or halfway through, does it seem more positive, more manageable and achievable? Has it been worthwhile? What have you learned about yourself from the process so far? Remember the positive! It's easy to let the negative overshadow how you feel about yourself and

about your student life in general. Think of one positive thing that's forced you to take ownership; name it and box it. Are there any other skills you need to learn or other issues you need to deal with before moving forward to make the change?

Step 4: Making the change

With that done and having worked your way through some of the Steps, can you now draw up a plan of how you intend to achieve your goals? Change your habits? Make things work?



Activity 2.7 Name it, colour it!

Activity 2.7 Name it, colour it! features ten thought bubbles with the following text:

- If I focus, it'll be fine
- This is too hard
- I'll never manage this
- I can do this
- If I break it into small chunks, I'll manage a step at a time
- I need to get it all right or there's no use
- It's too much work. I can't handle this
- I'm afraid I'll get it wrong and fail
- I have the ability to do this
- I'm just as good as the next one

Feel you're ready to make the change? Then test your self-belief. Which bubble seems most familiar to you? Which one honestly explains how you're feeling at this point?

Have you chosen a positive or negative thought bubble? Do you feel comfortable with your choice? How far have you come along the way?

Making the change means leaving behind all the things you like, the things that comfort you, as well as the worry, the fear, the thought

that tomorrow is another day. It means reframing your thinking. Want to change your bubble choice at this point or are you happy with it?

Don't be mistaken – bad habits are hard to break all at once. Change is a gradual process and no doubt you'll have many attempts before you feel that things seem right. Making the change though means being realistic about what you actually can achieve. Learn to say 'Yes' and 'No' to what's manageable. Remember – 'little steps, small rewards, big results' – and you'll get there.

Reframing your procrastination.

Procrastination is full of negative language. Language affects your thoughts. Thoughts affect your feelings. Feelings affect your motivation, your doing ... and so you're blocked and stuck. Why not write yourself a letter about all of this? Tell yourself exactly how things have been and, if you had one wish, how you would like to change it all. Now read the letter aloud. How does it feel having written something? Can you scale it?



Activity 2.8 Scale your feeling

Circle your answer:

okay better positive motivated

Trying to reframe your procrastination habit but don't exactly know how? Why not try the 'Move From, Move To' strategy to help you override a negative thought with a positive one.



Move from

Move to

I can't handle this situation

I can do this

I'm afraid of failing

If I try then surely I'll do well

What's the point of even trying?

I need to try so I can achieve my goal

Ever tried writing a positive thought on a card, keeping it in your pocket and pulling it out when the going gets tough? That strategy can help to reframe your thoughts and enable you to move from the negative to the positive. Or, if you prefer, capture your thoughts in a



Activity 2.9 Traffic light, all systems go!

Still putting things off? Why not try the traffic light system to look at the bigger picture, then prioritise and categorise things. Check your progress and what still needs to be done. Revisit your learning style (Chapter 1) or the assignment planning stage (Chapters 4 to 6), if need be. Stop putting off the reframing process – do it now! Oh, and remember to pencil in some ‘me’ time, so you get the balance of study and play in your student life.

Red tasks – attend to that day

Do	Done
Do	Done

Amber tasks – attend to within the week

Do	Done
Do	Done

Green tasks – can wait until next week or longer

Do	Done
Do	Done

sketch and pin it on the noticeboard where you study. And so, with that, you reframe the belief you have in your own ability.

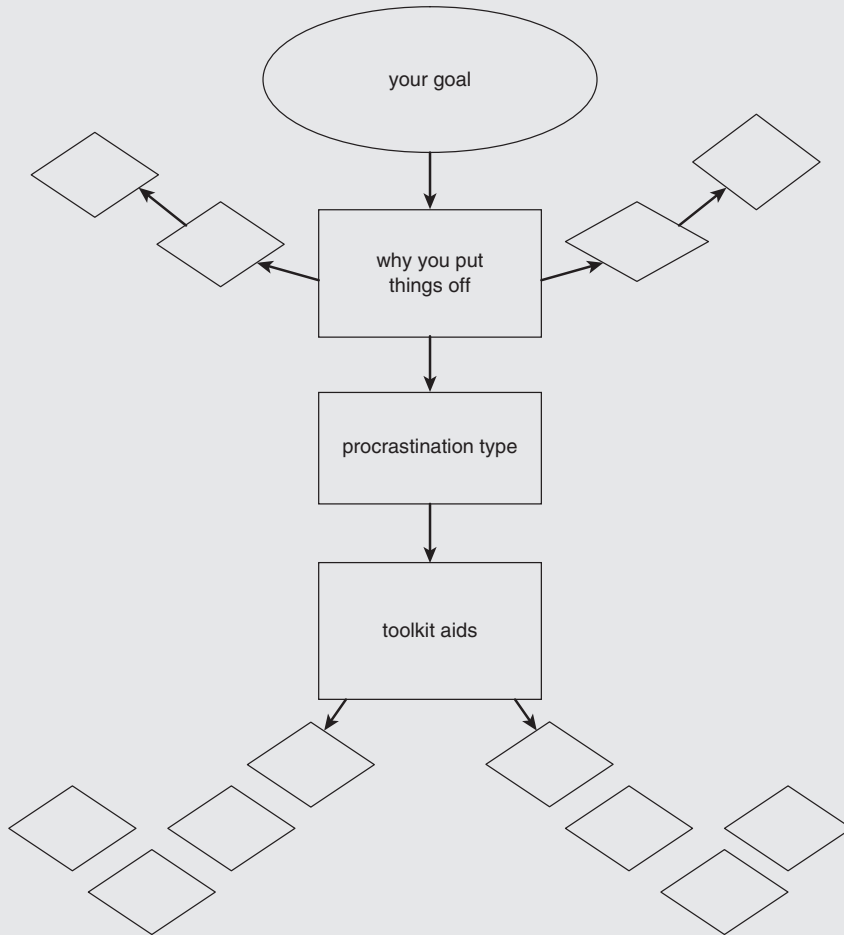
Prioritised and categorised – change should seem more possible now!

Step 5: Reviewing the change

Change is a good thing; it's positive. It's a process that questions your fears, your self-belief, your motivation, your commitment. You'll never really understand how much change has taken place or how much



Activity 2.10 Complete your Procrastination Mapping Man



you've progressed until you've looked at two points: where you've come from and where you're at now.

Draw a picture of your successes; place them inside the Mapping Man. At the same time, list the hiccups you've experienced along the way and show how you've overcome these or learned from them. The Mapping Man can provide a picture of how you use the Steps to arrive at this point. State your goal and add the main ingredients to this changing pattern – the tools and the strategies, the manageable and the achievable, and the people who support and sustain your change.

Have you made real change? Is there some loose change, or have you short-changed yourself? Don't worry, just get back on track and keep peddling away. Change is possible. Face your fears, take responsibility and feel proud of your achievements!

Your procrastination toolkit

The procrastination toolkit is designed to help you break the mould and get into gear. There's something for all of you in the toolkit, regardless of your preferred learning style or where you might feel stuck in the five-step process.

The visual learner's procrastination toolkit

This will let you create a picture, visual image or diagram so you can see the connections in how you do things. That way, you'll understand why you put things off and eventually get stuck. With better understanding, you might be able to face your fears and take some small steps to move forward.



- Bubbl.us
- Coloured stickers
- Dabbleboard
- Inspiration
- Little Book of Procrastination
- Mapping Man
- Mind Genius
- MyWebspiration
- Progress chart
- Storyboarding

The auditory learner's procrastination toolkit

This has something for everyone who finds it easier to hear things first, jot them down or highlight with colour so the information sticks. There's even music in the toolkit to help you relax while working away, a digital recorder to listen back to your ideas and people to chat to.



- Background, relaxation music
- Coloured stickers
- Digital recorder
- Notebook
- Peer support
- Personal tutor
- Progress diary
- Scribbling doodle pad
- Student Adviser
- Timetable
- Traffic Light System
- Wall planner

The tactile learner's procrastination toolkit

Enjoy making a model or creating a poster with colour and shapes? If this method of working makes your learning and understanding easier, then this toolkit is just for you. Things like a stress ball and worry stone will help your concentration and keep you focused when studying.



- Academic poster
- Activity book
- Arts and crafts toolbox
- Background, relaxation music
- Cardboard
- iTunesU podcasts
- Mindfulness exercises
- Mini reflective journal
- Progress chart
- Stress ball
- Stress management
- Subject-related online activities
- Wobble board
- Worry stone

Look back to your learning style (Chapter 1), match up your toolkit and dip in and out of them at any time. Perhaps using a combination of tools from each toolkit will help you work through your blocks better and feel that you're progressing. Once you find the tools that work best for you, stick with them. Don't try to change; otherwise, you might find you become stuck again!

Lightning ideas

- Understand the task and what you need to do
- Look at the bigger picture and see the small parts that make this up
- Prioritise and organise each part, and create your routine
- Set realistic deadlines for the bigger picture and for each chunk
- Tackle the small parts in small manageable chunks – use a timer
- Tackle the part you find easiest first – no need to work through things systematically
- Make the task interesting
- Write your Task for Today
- Record your progress by scoring off your deadlines task by task
- Learn to say 'no' so you can tackle your task without any distractions
- Take regular breaks to relax and unwind
- Reward yourself once each task is completed
- Be confident about what you've done by writing something about your achievement each day
- Change your thinking pattern to change your procrastination pattern
- When you think of something, do it; don't just think about it
- Be persistent in your efforts



Little steps, small rewards, big results



Please go to the Companion Website for this book www.sagepub.co.uk/gribben to access downloadable resources, all the activities featured here and a podcast for this chapter.