



Counseling Center Home 

Services Provided

Location of Services

Questions and Answers

What to Expect

Confidentiality

Articles on...

Faculty/Staff Guide to...

Suicide/Depression

Links to Information on...

Lending Library

Other Services

Campus Links

Internship Information

Staff Positions

CAR Team

Procrastination

Welcome

I. Introduction

I'd like to welcome you all to this talk on procrastination. I'm Dr. Kevin P. Austin, I am a psychologist and director of the Student Counseling Services here at Caltech. I decided to offer this talk because **procrastination is an issue** which a number of students I've seen at the counseling center talk about as a problem for them and an issue that students in general express some interest in.

When I was preparing this talk over the last few weeks, (and no I didn't wait until last night) I was thinking about what I could say to you in the brief time that we have today that **would be helpful to you..** Understanding and overcoming procrastination is a tall order. In part, because the **reasons** that cause people to procrastinate are **complex, powerful, and not always obvious.** There was a part of me that wanted to try to tell you everything I've learned in working with students who procrastinate in the 50 minutes we have. The **reality** is that **I won't be able** to do that and the **truth** is that it probably **wouldn't be helpful** to you. It would be too much to take in . What I will do is share with you a **perspective on procrastination** that I have found useful in working with students who procrastinate. At the end of our time I hope you will be able to think of yourself and the reasons why you procrastinate in a way that allows you to move forward in dealing with it, in a way that is **more understanding and sympathetic** to the struggles you face in overcoming procrastination.

Ultimately **overcoming** procrastination does take the **ability** to **establish priorities, manage time, set goals and break them down into manageable pieces.** But before you can do these things you have to know the reasons why you aren't able to. And that is what I will be talking about today: the reasons people procrastinate.. One piece of advice that's often suggested when dealing with big tasks is to break them down into smaller steps. I think that's useful advice so the first step I can help you with is providing what may be a different perspective on the reasons you may procrastinate, reasons that may not be obvious to you.

II. What is procrastination?

It's the homework set that doesn't get turned in on time

It's the extension that you need an extension for

It's the research that you just can't start

It's the letters that don't get written

It's the bills that don't get paid till they're past do

It's the movie rentals that have bigger late charges then the movie cost to rent

It's the wall you come up against when you try to start something

It's the frustration of being behind . . .again

It's the promise to never put things off. . .again

It's all these things and more. . . Procrastination is the seemingly never ending battle to get things done on time. It's about things being done late and the torture you go through to get them done at all. procrastination is about promises to change but not being able to for reasons you don't understand, don't accept, or don't know what to do about.

III. **Why do people procrastinate?**

Let me begin by asking you why you think people procrastinate?

Most people assume that the reason that they procrastinate is because they lack will power. The idea is that some people have will power and others don't as if will power is a commodity or a trait that is hard wired. The reality is that people who procrastinate demonstrate quite a lot of will power for certain things. It is only when they experience emotional conflict about what they have to do that they procrastinate and the question of will power becomes an issue.

People procrastinate because they **experience** emotions they don't want to feel when they attempt to do things. Those emotions can be of helplessness, powerlessness, being overwhelmed, being controlled, sad or resentful. The reasons a person has these feelings are not addressed by procrastinating but the feelings themselves are **avoided for awhile**. I realize at this point it's not clear how doing certain tasks could bring up these emotions but over the course of this talk I hope you will come to understand how your own emotional make-up influences how you get things done.

What are the emotions you experience that result in procrastination? I don't know what the source of the conflict is for anyone of you in particular. I don't know you well enough to know. But I will be talking about the different kinds of emotional conflicts people can experience when trying to do their work and I would ask you to listen to what I describe and see if any of them **fit for you**. They don't have to fit perfectly or fully describe your own experience to be of some value to you.

Reasons for Procrastination:

Avoidance:

At the heart of procrastination is an approach to facing a challenge that utilizes avoidance. What is procrastination but avoiding your work? But the avoidance isn't just of the work itself, it's avoidance of the feelings that you have when you try to work. Described below are some of the issues people who procrastinate struggle with that result in feelings they want to avoid (resentment from being controlled, overwhelmed by too much being expected, fear they can't do it, etc.)<

A Matter of Will:

Some students get to Caltech and begin to question whether they have the ability or will power to do science. For most students however the issue is more about will than will power or ability. Let me explain. . . I'm defining will as being about your desire and passion for something and will power as the emotional investment and effort it takes to carry out your will. students at

Caltech have already demonstrated tremendous amounts of ability, will and will power prior to attending Caltech. They've taken AP classes, college courses as high school students and/or have been involved in many extracurricular activities while taking heavy academic loads either as high school students or undergraduates else where. They've used their will (passion for science) and will power (energy/effort) to direct themselves toward pursuing studies or a career in science and have come to Caltech for that reason. But Caltech is different and prides itself on the difference. While other institutions do science, it's the high standards, intensity and single mindedness with which science is conducted here that is part of what makes Caltech unique and demanding. Once coming to Caltech, students for whom science was a love and perhaps easy are forced to come to terms with whether they love science enough to dedicate themselves to it as it is conducted here. But some students don't think about the difference between how science is done here and what they are used to. They might joke about what it's like here or even complain but not really reevaluate their decision to be here. They can be proud of what it means to survive Caltech, a badge of honor of sorts, and decide that the degree from here is worth it. But along the way they can lose their confidence in their ability to do science or their interest and it becomes harder to make themselves do all that they have to for the 4+ years it takes to get their degree. It takes unconflicted will and sustained will power to do science here and actually enjoy it. Procrastination then can be the result of not a lack of will power but of uncertain will, not coming to terms with or avoiding the difficult question of whether you want to do science the way it is done at Caltech.

A Matter of Time:

Even if a person is sure they want to be at Caltech managing all the demands here is not easy. Caltech undergrads talk about Caltech as a place where you have time for work, time for play, or time for sleep but you only get to choose 2 out of 3. That pretty well sums up what it feels like here at times for both grads and undergrads. It's a feeling that you don't have enough time for all the things people need in order to have healthy enjoyable lives, you have to choose among them. In the short term, many students are willing and able to sacrifice something to be here. But over the long haul their ability to live without enough time for play/relationships or sleep becomes more difficult to sustain and feelings about how much time it takes to do their work build up. Work gets put off for the sake of relationships or sleep because the person is tired physically or just tired of not having any fun. Some people become resentful of the work load, others overwhelmed by it, still others sad, depressed, or hopeless that they seemingly can't have all that they need or they don't know how to. The result of having these feelings about work can be uncertain will or diminished will power causing procrastination. A person can resolve this dilemma of how to get all their needs met consciously or unconsciously .

Consciously a person can decide that they need work, play and rest in their life and they prioritize their time. They end up having to accept certain limitations for the sake of having the life they want. Some people consciously decide that they don't want the life they would have if they stayed so they choose to leave.

Other people don't really decide how much time they will invest in all that they have to do . They end up avoiding making a decision about how to manage their time in a way that satisfies all their needs. Often this happens because they see no satisfying solution to the problem. How they spend their time just sort of happens. But it happens for a reason and those reasons have to do with emotions. One person may feel really wiped out and not wanting to consider what they have to do by the morning so they take a nap that lasts the night. Another person might get caught up in a conversation with someone

else or having fun and not do their work because they just need to have fun. They don't plan these things they just happen. What comes with this approach to satisfying needs is often a feeling of guilt for not having done work and frustration and futility because they didn't really get to enjoy themselves and the work is still there waiting for them.

Finally, some people flame, unable to choose to leave or find a way to stay and manage all that is required.

A Matter of Approach:

Even if a person is sure they want to be here and manages their time well there are other reasons that go into why someone might procrastinate. In this part of the talk I'll address some of those reasons that people procrastinate that aren't about the environment here or the challenges of time management it produces. These reasons have more to do with the person's emotional make-up and their use of avoidance to manage difficult challenges. Some people talk about attitude toward work and how attitude effects work. I want to talk here about a person's emotional make-up and personality as they are expressed through their approach to work. I put it in this way because "attitude" seems too limiting, like you either have a "good" attitude or a "bad" attitude. Each of us have our own unique personalities and personality is made up of more than just "attitude".

The sections that follow address different aspects of a person's emotional make-up that can influence how they approach their work. These aren't the only aspects of someone's personality or emotional make-up that may contribute to procrastination but they are the ones that are often most relevant to understanding why someone procrastinates. At the end of this presentation I'll talk about some other factors that contribute to a person's emotional make-up and possibly the reasons they procrastinate.

Perfectionism:

Perfectionism contributes to procrastination in a variety of ways that I will outline here and then go on to describe.

Perfectionism

- creates high expectations that feel difficult to meet so they are avoided
- makes the process of doing something too difficult
- causes a person to make the task unimportant
- causes a person not to care how their efforts turn out
- makes everything the person does mean too much

One of the reasons some people procrastinate is that they approach a task with a sense of perfectionism. They are focusing on the end product, a perfect job, and not the process of getting something done. People who are successful in getting work done tend to focus primarily on what it will take to get it done to their satisfaction. They take the time to consider what they want to accomplish and what it will take to actually do the work including the steps involved and how much time all the parts will take. They also plan for the time it will take to do their work by considering other things they have to do. People who are perfectionist tend to think more about how something should turn out, perfectly, and how hard it will be to do it. While it is ideal to do something perfectly, perfectionism makes a task seem bigger than it is. The person feels overwhelmed by the prospect of starting something so big and so difficult that they put it off. It is very difficult to do everything perfectly but this is what a person who is perfectionistic can get into when starting something. Every word

they write gets scrutinized and critiqued for perfection. Every idea they have about the next step in their research has to measure up to some standard of perfection. The process of getting things done becomes a chore and not very satisfying. Over time, even what should be simple tasks can feel big and difficult because of this perfectionistic approach. Who wouldn't want to put off something that seemed impossibly difficult with a fairly high probability of not turning out the way you imagined?

Some students talk about the frustration of trying to get themselves to start their work. Basically, once they get started they are OK but starting is difficult. In order to get something done a person who is perfectionistic often has to push past an emotional wall caused by their own high expectations for how something should turn out. They are in a power struggle with themselves between doing the task perfectly and avoiding the feelings that come with such heavy expectations with procrastination often being the result.

Typically the person doesn't make a conscious choice to begin their work, they are pressured by time running out in order to get started. They can experience a sense of surrender to the pressure of time, a feeling of giving in or being forced into starting. The idea of not having will power can come both from not being able to make themselves start and this feeling of giving in to time pressure.

Unfortunately the way some people push past this emotional wall is to make what they have to do or how it turns out unimportant. They tell themselves these tests, etc. don't really mean anything. They don't prove anything and they are stupid. Or they can tell themselves "I don't care how this turns out, I just have to get it done" In effect, they have told themselves that in order to get something done they have to make it unimportant or give up caring how it turns out. This devaluing of the task can make all of the effort that goes into doing something feel pointless and not satisfying. But this approach to work can also preserve the person's self-esteem. How many of you have said, "if I only had more time". Putting things off shields you from your own judgments that you should have done something better. Neither you nor anyone else can really know what you are capable of if you only had more time, if you only cared about what you had to do and put everything you had into. It can be the way out of the dilemma of believing you are capable but unable to prove it. But it comes with a price, never really feeling like you can prove yourself as capable and questioning your own abilities.

It's also true that the person who is perfectionistic may be placing too much importance on what they do. The outcome of a single effort becomes evidence of how smart the person is or demonstrates how much the person knows. Their idea of themselves as a smart and worthwhile person becomes too wrapped up in every single thing that they attempt. I realize that many of you may be confused by what I am saying, in part because you believe that what you do or how you do on tests or projects is the definitive proof of your worth as a student or researcher. It isn't that test results don't mean anything it's that they come to mean too much. I am not saying that what you do as researchers isn't important or shouldn't be done well. What I am saying is that too much meaning or importance is placed on these abilities and without regard to the fact that no one effort or task proves anything about how intelligent you are. In addition there are other elements that make up who you are and your worth as a person. When you elevate the importance of what you do to be the sole definition of your worth as a person you make that one piece of yourself, intelligence too important and devalue the other things you have to offer as a person. You also put a lot of pressure on yourself to do things perfectly to prove you are who you believe yourself to be, a smart person.

Some of what I have just described can be thought of in these terms:

Fear of failure:

For some students, each time they approach a task they consider important, the feelings of being pressured to do a perfect job come up at the same time there is a sense of the inevitability of failure (doing something that is less than perfect), doing something that leaves them unsatisfied. What if you started early, tried your best and then you could be judged fairly for what you are capable of?

Fear of success:

Some people who procrastinate can also experience fear of success. The fear can be: If you are successful then more will be expected and how would that be? It would be awful if your life meant constantly having to struggle through more and more expectations. You would never be able to finish or feel satisfied. Without naming anyone, how many of you know someone who does things perfectly, always getting things done on time and is really organized? What do you think of these people? Boring? They don't have a life? They don't seem to take pleasure in much other than work? Why would you want to be like that? While it is true that ultimately there needs to be a balance between getting things done and other things in life it's also true that changing the way you approach a task can make it easier and more enjoyable. Choosing between success and happiness is a false choice, you can have both.

Grandiosity:

The field of science is big and it can take big expansive thinking to understand it. Some students can have big expansive thoughts but become intimidated with the prospect of demonstrating their knowledge or fashioning a research project that demonstrates their understanding. Big science needs big thoughts but can make a person feel small when they try to prove themselves.

Independence and Dependence (who's in control?):

Every one of us has to balance two needs that on the surface appear to conflict: the need to be independent and the need to be dependent on others. In order to feel like healthy fully functioning human beings capable of managing and enjoying our lives we need to be independent. At the same time in order to have satisfying healthy relationships and to do all that we need to we have to depend on others. Balancing these two needs for anyone can be difficult.

What does independence/dependence have to do with procrastination? The connection between a struggle with independence/dependence and procrastination is complicated and not obvious. I'll try to explain it the best I can.

Some people are sensitive to being controlled by other people's expectations. Anytime someone expects something of them they resist because they feel controlled by the person's expectations or by the work itself. (I have to do this vs. I want to do this) They can resist the feeling of being controlled either directly by saying no or unconsciously

by doing the task "on their own time", maybe getting it done late, maybe not getting it done at all. They are, in a way, still being controlled by other people's expectations. They are "forced" into resisting without being able to tell what they really want to do. But the battle is really an internal one, it is a battle for independence. In a sense, these people confuse the power that comes from resisting other people's demands with independence. Real independence is the ability to consider what other people expect and to be able to say no or yes to those expectations based on what the person feels is right for them. Basically the most important thing for some people is avoiding the feeling of being controlled by others. All other needs or desires they have take a back seat to this one need. The person doesn't really know whether they want to do something, they just know they don't want to be "forced into it" and a lot of things make them feel "forced". In the end they can't make use of the guidance and support others could provide them because they experience it as their being controlled by other people. And they have a hard time feeling sure within themselves that they can do the work or proving it to other people because they are struggling so hard with just the fact that they have to do it at all. That struggle for independence, to be in control of their life can be an important reason some people procrastinate.

The reverse is also true. Some students have told me about how their mothers or fathers would type reports for them because they were running out of time or mentioned other examples of parents and friends pitching-in. But the help they received from others didn't stop with just a report. They came to rely on others to get a lot of things done and fell into a pattern of having others help them out. The result is that some of these students don't really feel like the work that they do is their own (they can feel fraudulent) and question whether they are capable of doing their work at all. These doubts about themselves come up when they try to start something on their own.

As an aside, the attitude which a person approaches their work is often related to their parents' attitudes, meaning: often times one parent procrastinates or they get things done on time but are so perfectionistic that the son/daughter learns that work is drudgery. (I realize that the very people who get into this battle about independence often feel they have not been influenced by their parents in any significant way.)

Self-esteem:

The term self-esteem has become a cliché but the essence of the meaning of the term relates to how a person regards themselves. Low self-esteem indicating someone who doesn't regard themselves enough. Part of the experience of low self-esteem is not believing you possess desirable qualities in the face of information that conflicts with that perception. This discrepancy between self-perception and how others see us is relevant to the experience of some Caltech students and particularly those who procrastinate. On the one hand everyone here is accomplished, they wouldn't be here otherwise. On the other hand some students can feel very doubtful of their own abilities especially once coming here. Their experience at Caltech can lower their confidence in themselves and can result in avoiding the tasks that make them feel badly, they procrastinate. But the challenges faced here at Caltech can not only erode confidence but exacerbate a lack of confidence that already exists.

Earlier I mentioned how some students place too much importance on

their scientific ability. There is, in a sense, an imbalance in what they value about themselves. Everyone wants to feel good about themselves and some people achieve this by over emphasizing the importance of their intellect because they feel uncertain about their worth in other areas. It can be a way of balancing the good and the bad but it's a fragile balance. It's a balance that can leave a person vulnerable when doubts about their worth arise because they have run up against either the limits of their intellect or the overwhelming demands of a place like Caltech. In these situations when these doubts come up some people flee to activities that comfort them by taking their mind off their work. They can flee to computer games which are familiar thus comforting and that distract them from feelings of not being able to do their work.. Some people seek out comforting relationships and spend a lot of time with friends. They might help these friends with their problems as a way of avoiding their own feelings. Both these activities can serve to provide the person with the feelings they don't get from their work.

Overcoming Procrastination:

In this part of the talk I would like to talk about strategies to overcoming procrastination. Some of the ideas may sound familiar to some of you. Some of you maybe skeptical or critical of these ideas. If you find yourself discounting the ideas it may mean that the ideas don't really address the reasons you procrastinate or that you aren't ready yet to take this next step. If these strategies don't seem to fit for you, you may want to speak with someone about your particular reasons for procrastinating or give some more thought to the reasons mentioned before. Understanding and accepting the reasons you procrastinate isn't an easy thing to do especially if you hold on to the belief that you should just be able to do things no matter what. My point is that people come to deal with their own procrastination in different ways and with different amounts of effort. The suggestions given below are meant to be ideas to consider not prescriptions or imperatives. Use them as they fit your situation.

Overcoming the use of Avoidance:

What does it take to overcome procrastination: An approach to dealing with the reasons you procrastinate that relies on the understanding of those reasons and not avoidance of them. In most cases a person who procrastinates doesn't feel that they have a way to resolve the dilemma they face without the use of avoidance. To get past this reliance on avoidance the person has to understand what the problem is for them and that includes emotionally. But that's made difficult because there is an avoidance of the emotions/feelings work brings up in the first place. So how do you get around this dilemma? Well one way is to consider what the beliefs are that you hold both about emotions in general and those specifically related to procrastination. Some people dismiss emotions as if they should play no role in getting work done. There is a splitting of themselves into the rationale part and emotional part with the emotional part being relegated to a rather minor and restricted role in their lives. But the reality is that emotions are involved in what we do because they are apart of us and we bring them into anything we do. The solution isn't to dismiss them but to understand what influence they have in getting your work done. What I have described earlier was an attempt to help you to consider what emotions might come up for you when you do your work and why they do.

You can do this on your own or with help from someone else. Each time you feel "stuck" or find yourself procrastinating, ask yourself "what is going on here?" what am I feeling and how might that contribute to my procrastinating? This sounds simplistic and maybe like advice you'd get from a psychologist. Well of course I would give this kind of advice. I do put my attention to the emotional problems people have in their every day lives and helping them to see how emotions influence them. If you can't make any head way on understanding the role of emotions in your procrastinating you could talk to someone here at the Counseling Center to help you work on this.

Matter of Will:

Letting yourself know what you really want (your will) is an important step to overcoming procrastination. Sure you may have wanted science or wanted a degree from Caltech as a high school student or as an undergrad but do you still want it after coming here and seeing what it's like. Some students have a very hard time considering going to another school where science is done differently or going into a different field. It can feel like a loss and at the same time settling for less. Yes it would be a loss if you gave up your dreams about science. But not facing whether you still want to do science can mean a loss too. You can lose your interest in science, lose your confidence in your ability and lose a sense of satisfaction that comes from having the other things in your life that are important to you like time for friendships or fun. And there are things gained from letting yourself know what you want, you actually have a chance to get what you want in your life. Settling for less? No-it's more about figuring out what you want.

Managing Time:

Some people need help managing their time. After a lot of experience with doing things at the last minute a person who procrastinates can be a very bad judge of how long something actually takes to get things done. You could ask someone you know that is pretty organized how much time they will spend on a particular task and use this as a rough estimate of the amount of time you will need. The next step is to plan for that amount of time. Where will the time come from? You can't easily do two things at once and you have an absolute amount of time between now and when your project is to be finished. Where will the time come?

How you spend your time: what does it tell you about yourself?

One thing you can do is to make a schedule. Not a schedule of what you plan to do but a schedule of what you have done say, over the last week. This should tell you something about where your priorities and difficulties lie. Some people are very surprised to learn that really they are doing a lot, maybe too much. They sometimes see laid out before them all the commitments they have, not all of which are related to their work. If this is the case then overcoming procrastination may involve cutting back on some commitments. If you find yourself saying that each thing you do is important then you may be avoiding the reality that you personally are unable to do all those things and still get your work done.

Overcoming procrastination may also involve learning to say no to others. Some people get involved in a lot of activities, not necessarily

because they want to but because they can't say no to other people's requests. If your time is filled up with lots of commitments you have to ask yourself, why am I doing these things? If you feel guilty when you consider not doing something then learning what is important to you and not just what is important to others maybe a necessary step for you in overcoming procrastination. The ability to say no to certain requests is part of managing your time and requires assertion. There are books on assertion that we have at the counseling center to help you and links to resources on ASSERTION. You might also consider talking with someone here about why it's so difficult for you to say no.

There is also the issue of being able to tell the difference between legitimate commitments that are important to you and avoidance. Filling up your time with lots of commitments can leave you without enough time for other things, things you maybe avoiding like work, loneliness, conflict with a boyfriend/girlfriend etc..

Your approach to work: Your thoughts about work and your experience with work.

People who procrastinate often hold beliefs that influence how they approach their work and can lead to procrastination. The experience they have with doing work ends up reinforcing their beliefs and their procrastination. Overcoming procrastination requires taking a look at the beliefs you hold about work and changing the experience of working.

Perfectionism: Settling for Less?

One big stumbling block for some people is the belief that not doing things perfectly is settling for less. They think of themselves as wanting something to be perfect, believe they can do it but end up not being satisfied with the results.

This belief is held in spite of the reality that most people who are perfectionistic end up with less because they insist on too much. It is the insistence on perfection that inhibits a person and causes them to avoid their work thus producing a less than desirable result. If I can take liberty with an analogy. It's a little like trying to write the perfect computer program. A person invests allot of energy and thought into writing the perfect program one that is very elegant but they don't consider the impact of the program on other programs required to do the job it is designed for. They may produce a perfect program but if it doesn't consider how it will interface with other programs it really isn't perfect. It's like that with doing your work. If you invest all your time into one thing and not consider the impact on the other things you have to do what do you really have?

One way that a person gets past the trap of perfectionism is to accept that insisting on perfection causes problems and adjusting to the reality that other things are sacrificed for the sake of one perfect thing may be necessary. It's not settling for less, it's developing an approach to work that allows you to get things done and done the best you can given the demands on you.

Another stumbling block for people who procrastinate is believing they need large blocks of time to get anything done. This is often a result of perfectionistic thinking, the task itself feels big so you need big blocks of

time to do it in. It's also the result of a pattern of waiting till the last minute where all you work on for the whole night is the one thing in front of you and it requires all of your attention and time. When you've waited to do something you do need all the time you have left!

There can also be a belief that anything that can be done in a small amount of time isn't worth anything. This is part of the all or nothing thinking of perfectionism and can also come from the experience of trying to start on something, getting stuck and walking away from it. Using small bits of time gets associated with not getting anything done. In effect, you may have to change your approach to working and learn to value small efforts at accomplishing big things. Not getting it all done at one sitting doesn't mean you didn't accomplish anything. This is important because if you feel like you have to get the whole thing done once getting started it will keep you from wanting to start at all. This pattern can become a vicious cycle that reinforces itself. It takes experience working with small blocks of time before you can really get past this idea that it's so tough to get started that you can't let yourself stop. The reason it's tough to get started is that you think you have to do it all! You don't, you just have to do pieces of your work over time to learn that getting things done isn't such a chore. Doing things in small pieces can help you avoid the anxiety you feel when you start something. Being able to break a project down into pieces is a tough task but possible. It takes managing your anxiety when you think about the task and not avoiding it. Think about all the pieces that go into doing the project. This may cause you anxiety but hang in there and do something with this information. You could write down all the things it will take to get a project done and then estimate how much time each piece will take and then figure out where the time will come from. Sure you could spend a lot of time avoiding the task by estimating time but it's a better use of your time than avoiding the task all together. At least you know what you have to do.

Independence vs. Dependence:

I hope at this point it's clear how this struggle for independence/dependence could show itself in a person's approach to their work. Having a foundation of both being able to assert your independence and depend on others makes doing work easier. If you identify the struggle with independence/dependence as having some effect on your ability to do work I would suggest you speak with someone here at the counseling center because it is difficult to develop these qualities in one area of your life without having them in others. If you're not ready to do that then probably the most helpful thing I can suggest is to think about what happens to you emotionally when a demand/request is made of you. At that point you may have to step back from your emotions and examine if the individual request really does thwart your independence. Stepping back emotionally may be hard when the demands on you aren't obviously connected to your personal goals. There are classes that may seem irrelevant to you but they are required because someone else thinks of them as essential. You can struggle with this consciously (raising the issue of why it's a requirement) or internally (what does it mean to me if I do this assignment, what does it mean just to be asked to do it and how do my feelings about being required to do it influence how I approach the task?)

Self Esteem:

I've already said that people who are successful in getting work done think about work differently than those who procrastinate. They think about what they will have to do, what it will take to do it and how they want it to turn out. What they have done reflects on them but only so far, they've done a good job on this piece of work but one effort doesn't mean how smart they are. They've done a good job yes, but the factors that go into doing a good job are about how they approach their work not just how smart they are, this in contrast to someone who focuses on a perfect outcome and become over identified with the outcome(perfect job=perfect me) or a person who doubts their abilities so they have to avoid their work.

Summary:

Overcoming procrastination isn't an all or nothing thing. No one overcomes their procrastination with only one time of doing things differently. It takes repeated efforts, sometimes two steps forward one step backward but if you know where you are headed it makes it easier when you do get discouraged.

There is much more that could be said about why people procrastinate and what they can do to overcome it. In this brief period of time I wasn't able to talk about the compulsivity that some people engage in that looks like perfectionism but is different. They are compulsive about the work they do so they put off starting but they are also compulsive when they are avoiding things like by watching videos. I also didn't get a chance to talk about the role a learning disability might play in procrastination. Sometimes people who procrastinate do in fact have an unrecognized learning disability that makes the work harder, take longer, and can lead to avoidance. There are also issues particular to men, women, and ethnic minorities that go into the meaning of work and the reasons a person procrastinates.

Because I can't cover everything today I would suggest you check out some of the other sites we link to on our home page that address procrastination ([Virtual Pamphlets](#)). You could also come by and check out the books we have or talk with someone here at the Counseling Center about your procrastination. In the end, I hope the ideas on procrastination I have shared give you more understanding of the possible reasons you procrastinate so that at the very least you don't have to punish yourself for procrastinating. There are rational reasons why you procrastinate with rational strategies to address them.

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