

I've been putting off writing this article...

Ormond Simpson

*(First appeared in 'Connections' newspaper of the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand)*

Do you suffer from Procrastinitis? No it's not a disease of the lower bowel, it's the name I've invented to describe the condition of people who, like me, chronically postpone and put off things they know they should be doing – procrastinators in other words.

Procrastinators are now a respectable subject for psychological study. Last year there was an international conference on procrastination in London (no, it ran on schedule). Apparently students are particularly prone to procrastinitis because learning is often self-scheduled, performed alone and to exacting standards, all factors that enhance people's tendency to put things off – especially when writing assignments. Procrastinating students are sometimes perfectionists, putting work off because conditions aren't exactly right or assignments aren't as good as possible. Reports suggest that nearly 80% of students suffer occasionally.

And it can be difficult to overcome - "Telling a procrastinator to 'just get on with it' is like telling a chronic depressive to 'just cheer up'" says one psychologist, " - it simply doesn't work". In other words if you suffer from procrastinitis then you've probably got it for life.

### **Managing your procrastinitis**

But there may be ways you can ensure that it doesn't affect your learning by 'managing your procrastinitis'. One Canadian university suggests a five-fold strategy – realistic goal setting, planning, 'making molehills out of a mountain' (breaking down a big task into a set of smaller ones), working out why you procrastinate (perfectionism, fear of failure, disappointing others and so on) and seeking help. A study adviser at a UK university suggests linking up with another student (especially, oddly, another procrastinator) to keep you both on schedule. So you could get together with other students maybe via your course forum on the Open Poly's website. But in my experience forums sometimes seem full of people who are already working on assignment 2 when you haven't even started assignment 1, which can be dispiriting. So link up with just one other person by asking your tutor for a list of students on your course who have released their names and addresses. Hopefully you can find a friend and possibly fellow procrastinitis sufferer to email or phone.

### **Getting help from your family**

One of the best sources of help for you if you procrastinate is your family or friends. In every survey I've ever done on this, students rank the support they get from family and friends as

among the most significant factors in their success. That support can be particularly important in keeping you on track. For example you could:

- Right at the start negotiate together the time you'll need to study so everyone is clear what is study time and what is family time.
- Share your timetable so that you're all aware of particular 'pressure points' such as when assignments or exams are due
- Cut out the box below and give it to them so they know how and when to help



**For my Family - Helping me to study**

Your help is very important to me when I'm studying! Please can you:

1. Offer practical help with tasks like proof-reading assignments, giving me access to the computer when I need it, taking the children out of the house at critical times, and so on (delete as applicable!)
2. Remember that sometimes I can lose motivation, get behind, or put off starting study. That's when I need your (gentle) encouragement to keep going and catch up.
3. Think about joining me – there are many hundreds of husbands, wives, sons, daughters, aunts, nephews and grandparents who have already signed up to study with the Open Poly alongside their loved ones.
4. And remember it will all be worthwhile when I finish and can thank you properly!

Signed..... (your loving student)

I hope these hints on managing your procrastinitus are helpful. And since I'm a sufferer too how did I manage to finish this article? Well there's another strategy – the editor of 'Connections' has a handy line in blackmail... *(No she doesn't! – Ed)*.

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