Anxiety

Feeling so overwhelmed and anxious about your workload that you 'freeze', put things off and don't get anything done.

Solution

1. **Get started.** Actually starting a task reduces your anxiety about it.
2. **Set priorities.** List all the tasks you have to do in order of importance and urgency, and work through them one at a time.

Putting it off

Putting off starting a task because it feels so overwhelming or difficult that you can't face it.

Solution

Break up the workload into small chunks.

This is a very effective strategy. Break up work into as many small, achievable tasks as you can. Then when you sit down to study, you are not facing a huge, daunting pile of work, but one small task.

Complete a 'chunk' every study period. It might be a task or a period of revision. Take a break after completing a 'chunk'. If it's something you've really been dreading, reward yourself when you've done it!

Creating busy-ness

Putting off starting a task because you are 'busy' with other things (even though you know you should be studying).

Solution

Feeling that you ‘must’ complete irrelevant tasks or do lots of ‘preparation’ before you can start studying is a classic procrastination tactic.

1. **Get started.** If you're anxious about a particular task, starting it can be the first step to reducing that anxiety. Don't put it off - even if you simply jot down a plan about how you will proceed further, at least you've begun.
2. **Set study goals** and vary your study techniques. Try 'chunking' your work (see above) and don't forget your reward.
3. **Make a 'to do' list.** Make a list of what you have to do in order of priority. For example, if an assignment is due next week, then it goes to the top of your 'to do' list.
4. **Be conscious of what you're doing.** If working on an assignment is at the top of your list and you catch yourself just popping out to wash the car—stop yourself and ask: "Why am I doing this now? I'll do it after I've reached my study goal."

All or nothing
Putting off starting a task because you won't be able to produce a 'perfect' result.

Solution

Instead of perfection, aim for reasonable results. Rather than aiming for a masterpiece each time, it's better to produce something - and pass - than to put it off for so long that you produce nothing at all.

If you're concerned that you won't manage to produce reasonable results, it's time to get a little help. Consult with your lecturer/ tutor or make an appointment with a Writing Assistant. Don't be afraid to ask for advice - knowing when and where to find help when you need it is part of taking control of your studies.

Distractions everywhere

Whether we like it or not, we are surrounded by distractions cometing for our attention. Yet giving into them can really derail your productivity and become another method of putting things off.

Solution

Distractions never go away - you have to actively fight them and focus on study:

1. Identify what distracts you. Is it social media, trashy mags, email, or mobile, flatmates? Identifying distractions is key to blocking them.
2. Set firm goals for yourself and set specific timeframes for completing them (starting with short term goals can be easiest).
3. Zone out everything else. Turn off your phone and leave it in another room, close email and social media. Hang a 'do not disturb' sign on the door; put on ear phones and listen to some ambient sound to block out external noise or conversation.
4. Reward yourself when the work is finished – but only if you've remained focused and used the time well.

Daydreaming or drifting off

Finding it hard to sustain a focus on your work because you constantly 'drift off' and think of other things.

Solution

Check your energy level and concentration.

- Take a short break or a little exercise every hour.
- Open a window and walk around.
- Make sure you are well-fed and watered - drink plenty of fluids and don't skip meals. Dehydration and low blood sugar will do nothing for your concentration.
- If you drift off, try visualising a red stop light. Hold that image for a few seconds-then switch to a green light and go back to work.

The too hard basket

Deciding that "I didn't want to do this course / study / unit anyway!"

Solution

Students do change their minds about their studies. They may feel they have taken the wrong path, or that their talents lie elsewhere. However, changing courses should be rational decision, not a reaction made out of frustration because the work is 'too hard'.
1. **Re-examine your motives** for studying.
2. **Ask for advice.** Discuss difficulties with your tutor or lecturer. Seek support from student services like The Learning Centre. Ask advice from the Counselling Service and the Careers Service. Don't just throw in the towel! Before making any changes, be sure about what it is you really want.
3. **Use the 'balance sheet method':**

   - On a piece of paper, write down all the benefits to getting item X done.
   - On the other side of the page, write down all the reasons you can't get it done or have been putting it off.

This activity can help you to define exactly what has been stopping you working. It's likely you'll have a list of benefits (starting with 'relief that the task is finished!') and a few reasons (such as "I really don't understand this assignment") you can then challenge yourself to sort out.

See next: **Considerations**