

Procrastinate Less, Write More

Procrastination. It is the bane of all graduate students, and the downfall of many. In order to reduce the amount of time that you procrastinate, so that you can spend more time writing (not just reading and researching), you must understand your relationship with time.



Time can be your friend or your enemy. For many graduate students, it is a merciless tyrant. You have the luxury of not having to punch a clock. Unfortunately, this luxury makes it easy to allow that all-important activity, writing your dissertation, to slide, as you fill in your day with the humdrum and with emergencies.

The Enemy You Don't Know CAN Hurt You

In *Procrastination: Why You Do It; What to Do About It* by Jane Burka and Lenor Yuen, the authors suggest that procrastinators have a strange relationship with time. They engage in "wishful thinking" -- they believe that they can magically pull and stretch time to meet their needs. They act as if time is not finite and limited. So if time perpetually controls you, it may be because you don't understand it. You either think that:

- Small tasks will be endless (so you put off doing them)
- Big tasks will just take an hour or two (so you don't leave enough time for them.)

As a matter of fact, academics tend to *overestimate* how much time they have actually spent on their most important task, writing.

Another reason time controls you, according to Burka and Yuen, is that you have no idea how much time you're already spending on tasks such as commuting, shopping, cooking or emailing. Therefore it's a mystery how much free time is available for the difficult yet easy-to-put-off tasks, such as writing.

Or maybe you've voluntarily overscheduled yourself due to your "endlessly-expanding" view of time. Little by little you've used up your free time.

How can you tame time?

Enter the "Unschedule." The Unschedule is a time management tool developed by Neil Fiore, the author of *The Now Habit*.



Here are the rules to make the Unschedule work for you:

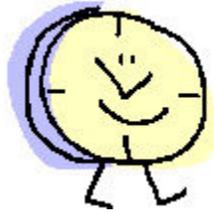
- Use a pencil (my rule) to allow changes
- Write down everything you must do in the coming week, NOT including your working on the dissertation.
 - Include everything, including meals, sleep, commuting, appointments, and classes
 - Estimate when and how long each will take and mark it in your Unschedule on the hours you most likely will do each activity
 - Include recreation, leisure and social activities (crucial!)
- Look at your Unschedule at this point to become aware of
 - How much unscheduled time is actually available
 - What's missing from your life – do you have enough time for fun, socializing, and just decompressing?
- As the week progresses, each time that you work on your Project for at least 30 minutes (Fiore insists on 30, but in our [WritingClub](#) we preach that 15 is enough, and that's been proven true, time and time again by our members), mark it in your Unschedule. Remember, you don't mark it in ahead of time. It works best if you can highlight those time blocks in color. You can then total the amount of time spent working towards your goal at the end of each day and week.

Why Fill In the Time Blocks AFTER You Work on Your Project?

This accomplishes several things:

- You avoid being disappointed in yourself (as you may have in the past because you scheduled so much dissertation writing time and then let yourself down by not accomplishing the work.)
- If you have a rebellious streak, you will not have anything to rebel against, since you haven't filled in the times you MUST work ahead of time
- You will feel good about what you HAVE done as opposed to bad about what you haven't done
- You will be reminded to reward yourself by switching to a more enjoyable activity
- You will more easily be able to track how much you have actually worked on the dissertation each week, as opposed to how much time you wished you would work on it.
- You will prove to yourself that small blocks of time DO add up, and are worth doing.
- You can look for patterns – e.g., discover your best work times or days

If working with a schedule hasn't worked for you, if you recognize that you have a distorted relationship with time, or if you're just a garden-variety academic procrastinator, then the Unschedule may be for you.



Procrastinating on writing your dissertation?

Join the Academic Writing Club and get the structure, support, accountability, coaching feedback, peer interactivity and tools you need to finish!

www.AcademicWritingClub.com