

A SOUL PROPRIETOR ELEARNING GUIDE



**21** Easy  
Ideas for  
Taming the  
Procrastination Monster

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# 21 Easy Ideas for Taming the Procrastination Monster



**W**hile there are many common causes and reasons for procrastination, there are even more “cures”. Pick through these twenty-one ideas to find strategies that work for you to break this cycle of procrastination.

## 1. Banish Guilt

When I was a teenager, I’d be busy working on school projects that were, naturally, due the next day. And my poor mother, out of frustration with me would say, “Son, why do you always wait until the last minute to do these things?” I didn’t really have a response for her but inside I was telling myself, “What’s the big deal? I’ll get it done and I know it will get a good grade. Why worry ahead of time?” And I *always* got the good grade. Somehow. But boy the stress I put myself through.

If you, too, have been a procrastinator since childhood, it may have been made worse by overly-authoritarian parents or teachers. (Get this done or else!) So procrastination can also be a type of avoidance behavior, where those who habitually feel powerless feed the need to take back personal power in the only way known to them—procrastinating on tasks they are ordered to do.

Along with avoidance-based procrastination, unfortunately, goes its offshoots—guilt and shame. We hear the voices of those authority figures telling us that we “blew it again”, “can’t be depended on”; even all-or-nothing statements like “you’re a complete failure” (usually accompanied by comparisons to a perfect sibling or neighborhood example)—long after we’ve grown up and supposedly left all childhood voices behind.

Guilt and shame have no place in working on becoming the person you were born to be. One good dose of shaming (especially from yourself) and you’re likely to revert to the one defense you’ve truly mastered—the mental equivalent of curling up in a fetal ball in a darkened room—procrastination.

**Learn to banish guilt by using cognitive reframing.** Replace those excoriating

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self-lashes with phrases based in reality. For example, instead of saying to yourself, “I did it again. I’m a complete screw-up!” try stating just the facts. (“I spent an hour of ‘me’ time. Now it’s time to put that aside and go to work.”)

It feels much better when you take the blame-and-shame out of your procrastination habits, and focus on realistic solutions.

### 2. Use Parkinson’s Law

Cyril Northcote Parkinson was a British author who once worked for the civil service. He famously came up with the maxim: “Work expands to fill the time available for its completion”—meaning that if we allow a week for a task that should take one day, being human, we will automatically make that task more complex (or waste more time), so that it really does take a full week to complete it.

So keeping that law in mind, Lifehack.org suggests you do the reverse. List your daily or weekly tasks; then cut the time estimated in half. Chances are, you will find yourself unable to procrastinate because you will be more focused on completing each task.

The result? You’ll end up with free time at the end of the work week—when you can properly enjoy it, guilt-free!

### 3. Tame the Time Stealers

Keep an eye out for “time stealers”—small tasks that nibble away minutes and eventually hours from our days. These usually turn out to be tasks such as checking email, checking Facebook, answering the telephone while you’re working, answering the door, getting up to make a cup of coffee... It doesn’t matter what you stop working to do: record it!

Keep a log for a few days, and see where you are spending too much time on one particular distraction (for example, you may discover you actually get up to make six or seven cups of tea or coffee during the day, when you were sure it was only three or four).

**Repetitive behaviors can become procrastination habits.** Tame them by setting a limit to how many times per day you can indulge in that particular activity; or set a time limit—for example, “ten minutes only for checking email”.

(Use a simple timer with an audible alarm such as CookTimer to help you to stick to your new time limits.)

## 4. Put your Mobile Away!

If you're a compulsive message-checker or texter, don't even leave your mobile in the same room.

Unless you're waiting for news of earth-shattering importance (a grandchild about to be born any second or a status update on a critically ill relative), the world won't end without you checking your messages.

And you'll be training people who *don't* respect your work hours that you really do have boundaries.

## 5. Go outdoors!

Next time you feel overwhelmed enough to take a break, don't fall into one of your habitual procrastination behaviors: Take a brisk, twenty-minute walk or go sit on the deck for ten minutes.



Fresh air helps both psychologically and by boosting oxygen production to clear the cobwebs from our brains. Tell yourself you're taking a break—not procrastinating (which you would have been doing, had you got sucked into your traditional game of Candy Crush).

Besides, a brisk twenty-minute walk per day will give you your daily exercise!

## 6. Ask Yourself What's Really Going On

**You can't change a habit until you understand it.** Next time you find yourself procrastinating, stop the procrastination activity you're doing, get up from your seat and ask yourself: "What is really going on here?"

Try to figure out if you're simply daunted by the thought of starting a task you find difficult, or you simply hate that particular task, or you're angry because you have to work late, or you need more information—or whatever the real reason behind your procrastination.

Getting in touch with your real feelings can tip you off to finding the right solution to

that particular procrastination session: For example, if you absolutely hate setting up an email series, get it done now, then plan to outsource this activity in the future.

### 7. Break it Down

If a task seems overwhelming, break it down into its smallest steps. Then focus on only performing “the next step”.

You’ll find you are more easily able to start even the most overwhelming task if you can identify and take that all-important first step.

### 8. Make a “To-Don’t” List

Instead of writing the “To Do” list that you somehow never seem to tackle, do the opposite: Write a list of only the tasks you know you are going to procrastinate over.

Chances are, there will only be one or two (or maybe three). Tackle these first before doing anything else—you’ll be surprised at how great getting them accomplished makes you feel. It will inspire you for the rest of the day.



### 9. Easy or Hard?

Find out whether or not you’re the sort of person who procrastinates less if they start out with the easiest task first—or the hardest. (Actually make notes. Keep an informal log for a couple of weeks.)

Once you’ve noted which preference is strongest, be sure to build starting with the task that best breaks your procrastination cycle first, from now on. I personally *like* getting a few easy things done and out of the way before tackling the bigger stuff.

### 10. Adjust your Expectations

Take a really close look at your personality. Do you constantly “make” things harder than they have to be? Do you expect the worst? Do you tell yourself “I can’t do this” forty times before you actually get started—then have trouble because you’re rushing because you started late?

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If so, do some cognitive restructuring and start giving yourself positive messages about the task. Realize that a task doesn't always have to be the ultimate in perfection—it just has to get done.

Try telling yourself: “It’s no big deal. The first step is...”—and focus only on that first step to get started.

Keep up positive reframing self-messages all through the project.

### 11. Tame your Inner Child

People always talk about “bringing out your Inner Child” like it’s a good thing—and it *can* be... But there’s one place where your inner child is more like a rampaging toddler who has eaten and drunk nothing but sugar for twelve hours, and is tearing apart his room.

With many people, this Inner Child is the real procrastinator. It’s the part of you that finds it doesn’t care about the end goal or even just that day’s goal. It wants to play hooky—or simply just play.

It wants to finger paint, get every toy out of the box, hog the video game controller and have pillow fights. Well, okay: Maybe it just wants to play Candy Crush. Or watch chefs battling each other. Or browse YouTube.

It’s all about instant gratification.

How do you get that child tucked up into bed?

Make a list, and divide it into three columns. In one list, write what you should be doing. Column # 2, write what you actually did. In the final column, list all the negative effects any procrastinative Inner Child behavior had (a) on yourself (b) on others.

Do that for a week. When you actually see the real down sides, sometimes it becomes easier to set boundaries with your inner child—and get that work done.

### 12. Use Prompts

**Sometimes we procrastinate almost by accident.** That quick trip to Facebook to ask a key person a question sees us side-tracked by a Facebook Friend’s tragedy or doing unexpected customer service (when we’d already scheduled time to do that in the afternoon).

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Put up prompts that remind you. Make an infographic of your favorite inspiring phrases—or buy one. Frame it. Keep it on your desk. Or at least print out motivational “reminder” phrases and stick them where you can see them—on your bulletin board; on the wall over your computer; or anywhere that makes them catch your eye.



For example, if you simply need to be reminded to get started, have a large reminder in sight that says

“Start right now!” If you need to remember to take care of an important bill or a cancellation, make yourself a temporary sign the day before that says “Pay electric bill!”

And do remember to move your permanent prompts around. Don’t keep them in the same place, or they’ll eventually blend into the scenery in your mind’s eye.

### 13. Be Specific

If you find yourself thinking in generalities about starting tasks, get specific. For example, instead of thinking “I’ve really got to write that blog post on Engaging your Audience,” change that thought to: “I’m going to write 10 Tips for Engaging Your Audience. Tip Number One is...”

Open up your word processor while you’re doing this—and be ready to start!

### 14. Recognize that Excuses are not Reasons

Next time you tell yourself you can’t do something yet, listen to your reasons.

Realize that ninety-five per cent of these are actually going to be excuses. For example, “I work better under pressure” really means “I’m in the habit of waiting ’til the last moment and using the pressure of a deadline as a motivator.” Like I did in high school. Hell, like I still sometimes do today!

It’s just a habit that puts stress on you—not a justification for waiting.

## 15. Do It Every Day

If you constantly “forget” to do tasks or actions you’re “trying” to do, it may be because you haven’t yet created a habit.

Popular psychology says it takes twenty-one days to create a habit. A NASA study found it took their test participants a little longer—at least thirty days—and they also discovered that if you break your new “habit” for even one day before the thirty-day period is up, you’ll be right back at square one!

## 16. Allow for the Honeymoon Let-Down

When you are actively changing habits, recognize there may be a “honeymoon” period early on, where you are all freshly fired-up and motivated, and you are feeding on early success.

Then comes Reality. You miss a day of practicing your new habit. Your world crashes down. You feel disillusioned and guilty. You start with the negative self-messages.

Don’t catastrophize! Reframe your disillusionment practically: “Well, I missed a day. I’m human. But tomorrow it’s back on the horse! I can absolutely do this.”

## 17. Keep your Lists Short

Focus on no more than three top priorities—and congratulate yourself if you get even just one of them done.

(If you have perfectionist tendencies, put the sub-title “Optional” over priorities #2 and #3—that way, you won’t feel you’ve “failed”.)

Only when you’ve cleared the priorities should you add more tasks or actions to your list.

## 18. Do it Now!

We’ve all seen our kids (or we’ve BEEN the kids) who never, ever clean their rooms or put anything away. What happens? It all piles up—and pretty soon what was once a simple task is overwhelming and feels insurmountable.

As adults, we learn to put away things as we go—we take our plate to the dishwasher,

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put our clean socks straight into the sock drawer or take the energy bar wrapper straight to the kitchen trash can. (And if you don't, read Tip # 11!)

Keep this tip for the small stuff. While you're in the hardware store, just buy that new \$2.99 bathtub plug the moment you discover the old one has broken, instead of letting water leak endlessly from the old one and run up your water bills. If someone writes you a short email with an urgent question you can instantly answer, just do it now.

The trick to using this approach successfully is to pick tasks that you will procrastinate over if you try to follow conventional advice and "schedule later".

Choose tasks you can do quickly and simply, in just a few minutes. This will get you started off on the right foot—and create the habit of reducing clutter.

### 19. Use the Buddy System

You don't have to get a *formal* "accountability" partner. It's better with some tasks or actions to simply team up with a buddy.

For example, if you always put off that morning walk, find a friend who is equally motivated to develop a healthy lifestyle, and arrange to take that walk with her.

In my early adult life I would meet a friend every morning to run, and we did that rain or shine. Hot or cold. ONLY because we didn't want to let each other down. I now have a buddy that I talk to every morning at 7:45 am. We share with each other what our top 3 priorities are for the day and then check in again the next morning to see if we did what we said we were going to do and share that day's plan.

### 20. Track Your Time!

You may be the sort of person who says, sincerely, "I never procrastinate!" Yet, somehow, the day ends, you're behind on deadlines, you didn't do the big task that needed doing and you forgot to mail that card to your grandma in Maine.

If this sounds like you, track your time. Simple apps like Instant Boss will do the work of tracking for you—and you can:

- See which tasks are real time wasters—and decide what to do about them
- See which tasks could have been done instantly—and didn't get done
- See where you procrastinated

## 21. Focus on your success!

Sometimes the simplest strategies are the best strategies of all. Gretchen Ruben, best-selling author of *The Happiness Project*, shares this tip:

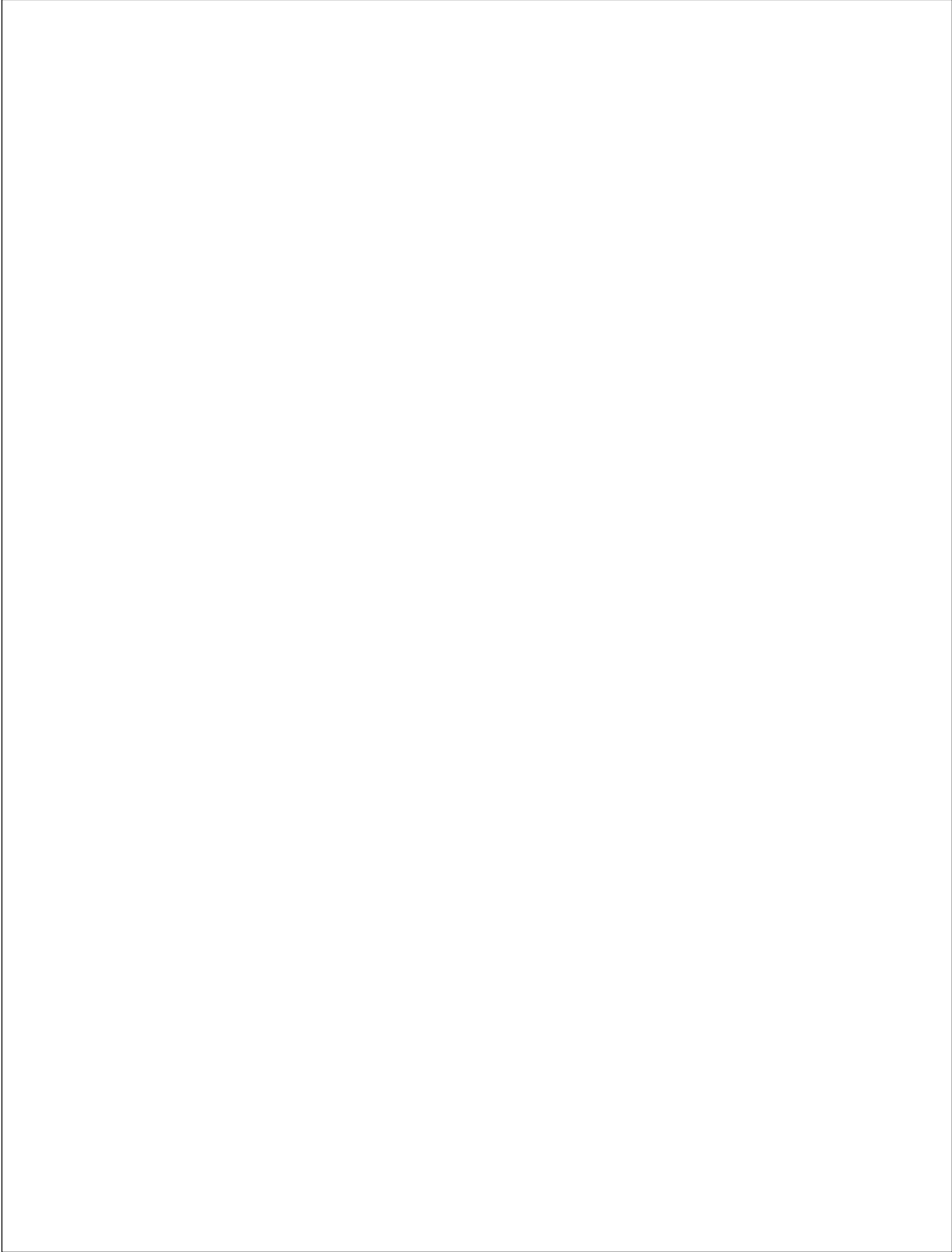
“On the top of a piece of paper, write, “By the end of today, I will have \_\_\_\_\_.” This also gives you the thrill of crossing a task off your list.”



The urge to procrastinate can never be totally eliminated—it does serve a purpose. It’s usually a sign something isn’t right with us. But know what that purpose or reason is when you procrastinate, and know that it’s your right to develop effective strategies to totally bust it, every time.



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