

Reducing End of Semester Stress By Eliminating Your Self-Sabotaging Behavior

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

If you are one of those people who habitually find yourself stressing out and cramming for finals at the end of the semester, there are a few things that you can do that will change that and improve your grade point average as well.

Of course it is a no-brainer to say “Don’t procrastinate.” Many people tell me that they know they are procrastinators, that it causes them all kinds of problems and distress, and that they cannot make themselves not procrastinate. You may not know why you procrastinate. There are many reasons that people procrastinate. You may be self-sabotaging. Perfectionism and/or low self esteem may prohibit you from getting started, staying on target, or completing projects. You may not have the academic skills needed nor the assertiveness to ask for help. You may not have basic organizational or time management skills.

No matter what purpose your procrastination serves and regardless of the reasons you procrastinate, procrastination is learned behavior and can be unlearned. It certainly is helpful to know why you procrastinate because it can make a big difference in how you solve the problem of procrastination. If you have low self esteem, perfectionism that gets in the way of accomplishing tasks, or self-sabotaging behavior, counseling can assist you in working through those personal barriers to success (including procrastination).

If you have skills deficits, regardless of whether they involve academic, personal (i.e., assertiveness, communication), organizational or time management skills, you can learn the needed skills to reduce procrastination and to improve the return on your investment in college days.

Many people procrastinate because of underlying fear. They fear that their efforts will not be good enough, that their performance will be inadequate. Many people resist trying new things that have a learning curve or that they cannot do well immediately. Others get started and quickly figure out that doing well is going to take more time and energy than they planned, but because they do not know how to manage time, or how to break large tasks down into manageable components, they put off continuing their efforts until they have a larger block of time to work with. That larger block of time is not scheduled, so the unlikelihood of a large block of free time magically appearing feeds the procrastination.

Other people who procrastinate out of fear, may do so in an effort to please everyone else in order to be liked. Such people pleasers feel the need to put socializing and relationships above everything else, telling themselves that they will do their studying, reading, outlining, or paper writing later. They may have difficulty being alone. They may have difficulty saying “no” to requests for their time and energy. They may “go out” when they had planned to “stay in” and study. They may live in close proximity to

others (i.e., dorms, fraternities, sororities, etc.) whose activities make it difficult to concentrate. They may lack the ability to be assertive and negotiate for change in their living space. If they spend much time with others who do not seem to spend much time on academics, they may be unwilling to risk being different in order to succeed in school.

Some people self-sabotage due to a lack of ability to prioritize. They don't prioritize tasks well enough to optimize their activity for the biggest return. They may not know which classes would require the most effort. They may not know whether to focus on the textbook, the class notes, or some other resources. They may underestimate the time it will take to research and write a paper, to read and study textbooks, and to review and study class notes.

Many people don't make it through their first year of college partly because they thought they could skate through college without opening a book or by putting forth a bare minimal effort like they did in high school. Many freshmen are rudely awakened to the fact that they are not the smartest kid in the class any more and to graduate from college they will actually have to study. With the sudden lack of structure that they had in high school where they took roll and called your parents when you were not there, the freshman is now challenged with using his/her own devices to make it to classes, to study, to turn in papers, etc. This new found freedom can certainly go to one's head and college students can incorrectly estimate the consequences of their choices. They may not fully understand that borrowing someone else's lecture notes is not the same as being present for the lecture.

If you want to reduce your "end of semester" stress, eliminate your self-sabotaging behavior. If you need help to do that, get it. There are usually resources on campus to assist you in improving study skills, organizational skills, and personal skills.

**Copyright 2011, Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D., <http://www.peggyferguson.com>,
Hubbard House Publishing, Stillwater, OK.**

Tags: procrastination, procrastinate, self-sabotage, end of semester stress, college stress management, college student time management.