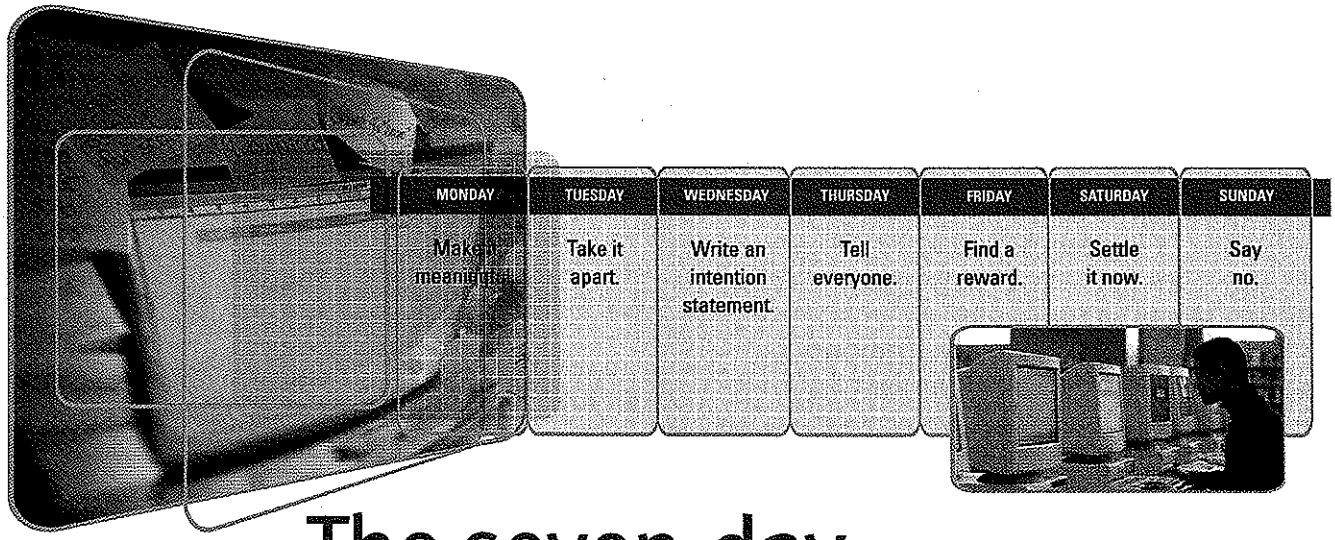

The seven-day antiprocrastination plan

Listed here are seven strategies you can use to reduce or eliminate many sources of procrastination. The suggestions are tied to the days of the week to help you remember them. Use this list to remind yourself that each day of your life presents an opportunity to stop the cycle of procrastination.

MONDAY

Make it meaningful. What is important about the task you've been putting off? List all the benefits of completing it. Look at it in relation to your short-, mid-, or long-term goals. Be specific about the rewards for getting it done, including how you will feel when the task is completed. To remember this strategy, keep in mind that it starts with the letter *M*, like the word *Monday*.

TUESDAY

Take it apart. Break big jobs into a series of small ones you can do in 15 minutes or less. If a long reading assignment intimidates you, divide it into two-page or three-page sections. Make a list of the sections and cross them off as you complete them so you can see your progress. Even the biggest projects can be broken down into a series of small tasks. This strategy starts with the letter *T*, so mentally tie it to *Tuesday*.

WEDNESDAY

Write an intention statement. For example, if you can't get started on a term paper, you might write, "I intend to write a list of at least 10 possible topics by 9 p.m. I will reward myself with an hour of guilt-free recreational reading." Write your intention on a 3x5 card and carry it with you, or post it in your study area where you can see it often. In your memory, file the first word in this strategy—*write*—with *Wednesday*.

THURSDAY

Tell everyone. Publicly announce your intention to get a task done. Tell a friend that you intend to learn 10 irregular French verbs by Saturday. Tell your spouse, roommate, parents, and children. Include anyone who

voices

student

Making lists has been one of my favorite tools to stay on track and prioritize. Not much gives me more pleasure than to cross off duties one by one and to see the number of items left to do shrink to nothing, or what can be put off until another time.

— LAURIE MURRAY

will ask whether you've completed the assignment or who will suggest ways to get it done. Make the world your support group. Associate *tell* with *Thursday*.

FRIDAY **Find a reward.** Construct rewards to yourself carefully. Be willing to withhold them if you do not complete the task. Don't pick a movie as a reward for studying biology if you plan to go to the movie anyway. And when you legitimately reap your reward, notice how it feels. Remember that *Friday* is a fine day to *find* a reward. (Of course, you can find a reward on any day of the week. Rhyming *Friday* with *fine* day is just a memory trick.)

SATURDAY **Settle it now.** Do it now. The minute you notice yourself procrastinating, plunge into the task. Imagine yourself at a cold mountain lake, poised to dive. Gradual immersion would be slow torture. It's often less painful to leap. Then be sure to savor the feeling of having the task behind you. Link *settle* with *Saturday*.

SUNDAY **Say no.** When you keep pushing a task into a low-priority category, re-examine your purpose for doing it at all. If you realize that you really don't intend to do something, quit telling yourself that you will. That's procrastinating. Just say no. Then you're not procrastinating. You don't have to carry around the baggage of an undone task. *Sunday*—the last day of this seven-day plan—is a great day to finally let go and just *say* no. ☒

More ways to stop procrastination

Perhaps you didn't get around to using the seven-day antiprocrastination plan. Well, there's plenty more where that plan came from. Consider seven more suggestions.

Observe your procrastination. Instead of rushing to fix your procrastination problem, take your time. Get to know your problem well. Avoid judgments. Just be a scientist and record the facts. Write Discovery Statements about the specific ways you procrastinate and the direct results. Find out if procrastination keeps you from getting what you want. Clearly seeing the costs of procrastination can help you kick the habit.

Discover your procrastination style. Psychologist Linda Sapadin identifies different styles of procrastination.[2] For example, *dreamers* have big goals that they seldom translate into specific plans. *Worriers* focus on the "worst case" scenario and are likely to talk more about problems than about solutions. *Defiers* resist new tasks or promise to do them and then don't follow through. *Overdoers* create extra work for themselves by refusing to delegate tasks and neglecting to set priorities.

Awareness of procrastination styles is a key to changing your behavior. For example, if you exhibit the characteristics of an overdoer, then say no to new projects. Also ask for help in completing your current projects.

Trick yourself into getting started. Practice being a con artist—and your own unwitting target. If you have a 50-page chapter to read, grab the book and say to yourself, "I'm not really going to read this chapter right now. I'm just going to flip through the pages and scan the headings for ten minutes." If you have a paper due next week, say, "I'm not really going to outline this paper today. I'll just spend five minutes writing anything that comes into my head about the assigned topic."

Tricks like these can get you started on a task you've been dreading. Once you get started, you might find it easy to keep going.

Let feelings follow action. If you put off exercising until you feel energetic, you might wait for months. Instead, get moving now and watch your feelings change. After five minutes of brisk walking, you might be in the mood for a 20-minute run. This principle—action generates motivation—can apply to any task that's been delegated to the back burner.

Choose to work under pressure. Sometimes people thrive under pressure. As one writer put it, "I don't do my *best* work because of a tight timeline. I do my *only* work with a tight timeline." Used selectively, this strategy might also work for you.

Put yourself in control. You might consciously choose to work with a timeline staring you in the face. If you do, then schedule a big block of time right before your project is due. Until then, enjoy!

Step back to the big picture. If you plan just a day or two ahead, you might lose sight of what's coming up over the next few weeks or months. Discover the benefits of backing up to a bigger picture of your life. For example, use the monthly calendar on page 88 or the long-term planner on page 91 to list due dates for assignments in all your courses. Using these tools, you can anticipate heavy demands on your time and take action to prevent last-minute crunches. Make *Becoming a Master Student* your "home base": the first place to turn in taking control of your schedule.

Take it easy. You can find shelves full of books with techniques for overcoming procrastination. Resist the temptation to use all of these techniques at once. You could feel overwhelmed, give up, and sink back into the cycle of procrastination.

Instead, make one small, simple change in behavior—today. Tomorrow, make the change again. Take it day by day until the new behavior becomes a habit. One day you might wake up and discover that procrastination is part of your past. ⊠

PRACTICING CRITICAL THINKING

Some thoughts fuel procrastination and keep you from experiencing the rewards in life that you deserve. Psychologists Jane Burka and Lenora Yuen list these examples:[3]

I must be perfect.
Everything I do should go easily and without effort.
It's safer to do nothing than to take a risk and fail.
If it's not done right, it's not worth doing at all.
If I do well this time, I must always *do well.*
If I succeed, someone will get hurt.

Choose one of these statements—or think of a similar one—and write a sentence or two about how it could promote procrastination.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

In the space below, create an alternative to the statement you just wrote about. Write a sentence that puts you back in charge of your time and no longer offers an excuse for procrastination. For example: "Even if I don't complete a task perfectly, I can give it my best shot and learn from my mistakes."

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____