

Get Started

Learn how to beat the annoying habit of procrastinating and just get started



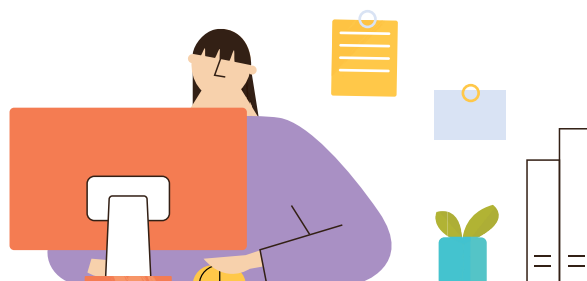
Module 3

A chat with Procrastination Brain

CEDARS – Counselling and Person Enrichment Section (CoPE)

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How to Use this Workbook

This workbook is part of a self-help program which intends to help you overcome procrastination. The program is based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and consists of reading and multimedia materials, reflective exercises and practices. It covers topics such as psychology of procrastination, ways to analyse your own procrastination and beat it, and practical tips to motivate yourself and make your tasks more manageable.

The program is a series of 5 learning modules, each takes you roughly 30 minutes to go through. We recommend completing each module in one sitting and doing 1 module weekly for 5 consecutive weeks.

You can find a list of resources in the community [here](#) when you need support. Counselling and Psychological services are available at HKU for current students. It is free-of-charge, professional and confidential. Don't hesitate to seek help if needed.

Enquiries and Feedback

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Module 3

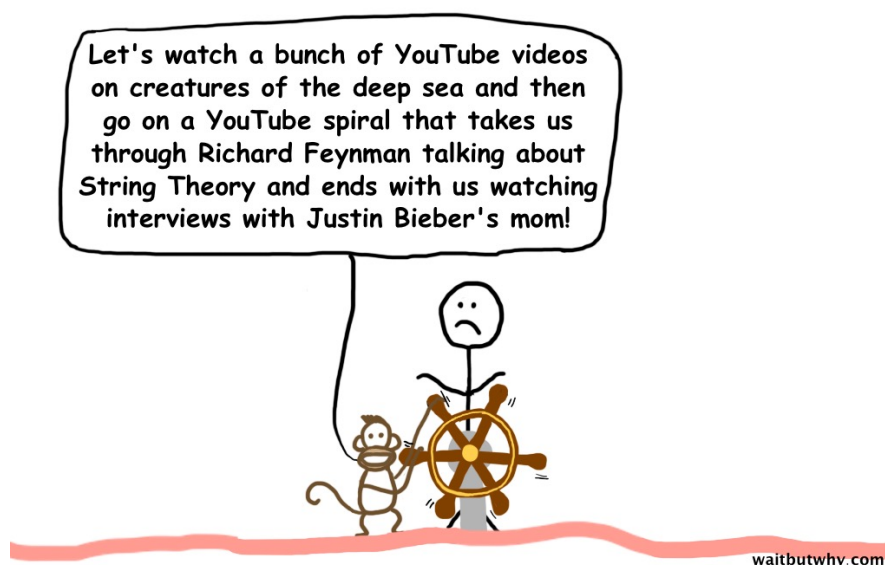
A chat with Procrastination Brain

Introduction

Hello and welcome back :)

Today we're going to dive deeper into your head to uncover the underlying thoughts and feelings that cause you to procrastinate. Buckle up!

- ▶ This module will take around 30 minutes
- ▶ We recommend a quiet, relaxing place
- ▶ Have these things at hand:
 - Your calendar
 - A notepad or notes app on your phone



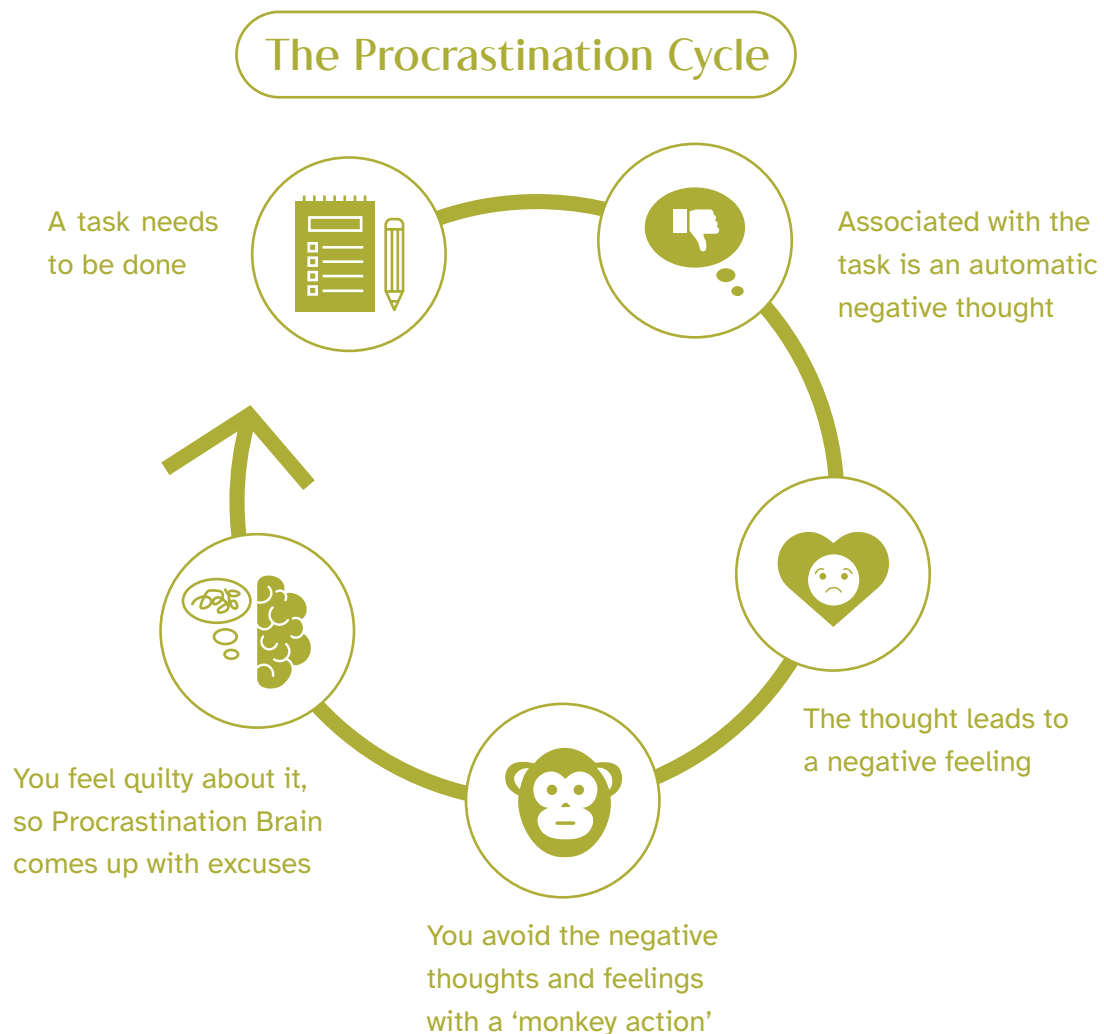
Comic from [Wait but why](#), but don't click this link to procrastinate on doing this module ;)

The Procrastination Cycle

Before we get started, what have been your main insights about yourself and procrastination since you started this programme?

As you might remember, procrastination is always about avoiding something bad.

This can be as simple as not enjoying something, or as complex as a fear of rejection or failure. If you look at procrastination, there's usually a pattern there. We call it the Procrastination Cycle.

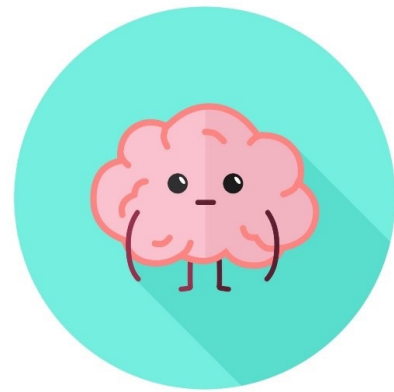


But of course, because you procrastinated the task doesn't get done and the next time you think of it you will most likely re-enter the cycle. Voila, a procrastinator is born!

What is 'Procrastination Brain', you ask?

Meet Procrastination Brain

It's the voice in your head that's always coming up with reasons (or excuses) why procrastination is a perfectly acceptable or reasonable behaviour.



Now let's break down the pattern for you

Grab your procrastination list from the past week and choose one thing from it.

What task did you procrastinate on? (Answer A)

What was the monkey action? (Answer B)

So far, your cycle looks like this:

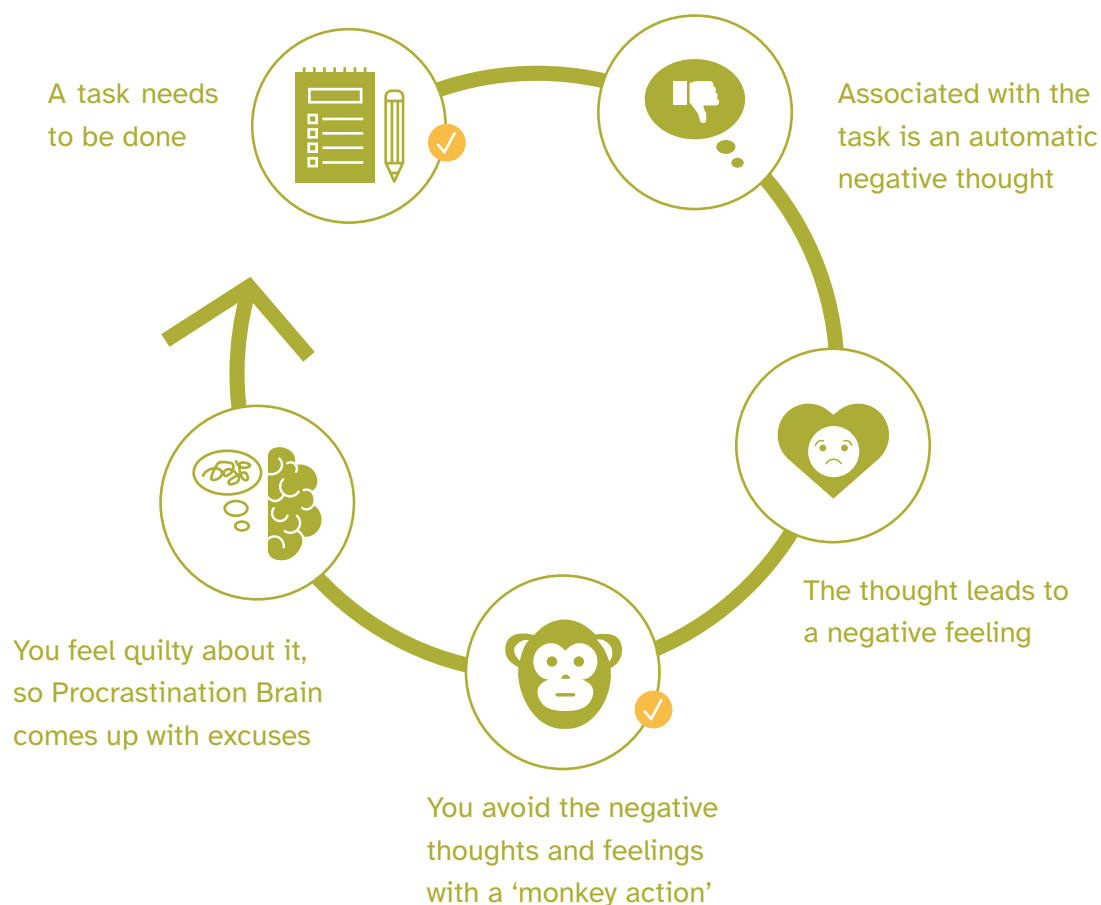
I needed to... (refer to answer A on p.4)

Associated with the task is an automatic negative thought →

The negative thought leads to a negative feeling →

I avoided doing the task by... (refer to answer B on p.4)

You feel guilty about that, so Procrastination Brain comes up with excuses.



You've filled out 2 steps in the cycle already!

You might have noticed that we're not going in the same order as the actual cycle. The reason is that some steps are more tricky to fill in than others. For example, it's easier to identify the 'monkey action' than it is the automatic thought. That's why in this module, you'll complete the cycle in a different order. Starting with the 'easier' steps will help with doing the harder ones.

On to the next step!

Procrastination Brain says...



You feel guilty about it, so Procrastination Brain comes up with excuses

The next step in the pattern is recognizing Procrastination Brain excuses.

These are the excuses your brain comes up with to try and justify the procrastinating behaviour - and therefore keeping this habit alive!

Now think back to when you procrastinated on this task: (refer to answer A on p.4)

Here are some common Procrastination Brain excuses. Which of these excuses did you experience when you procrastinated on the task above? Check all that apply or write your own:

- I don't feel like it right now
- I'm too tired, I'll do it tomorrow / another day
- I don't have everything I need, I can't start yet
- It is too late to start now
- I won't get much done now, so I'll just leave it for now
- I need to get inspired first
- It's too nice a day to do this task
- I will do it once this other thing is finished
- I am too busy to do it now
- I've got to exercise/organise my desk/do laundry etc. first
- I can't focus right now
- I have plenty of time, so I can do it later
- I work better under pressure, so it's okay to leave it for later
- otherwise, namely _____

Though they might feel true, none of these excuses are helpful for you in the long run.

They only temporarily alleviate your negative feelings.

Let's look at your cycle again

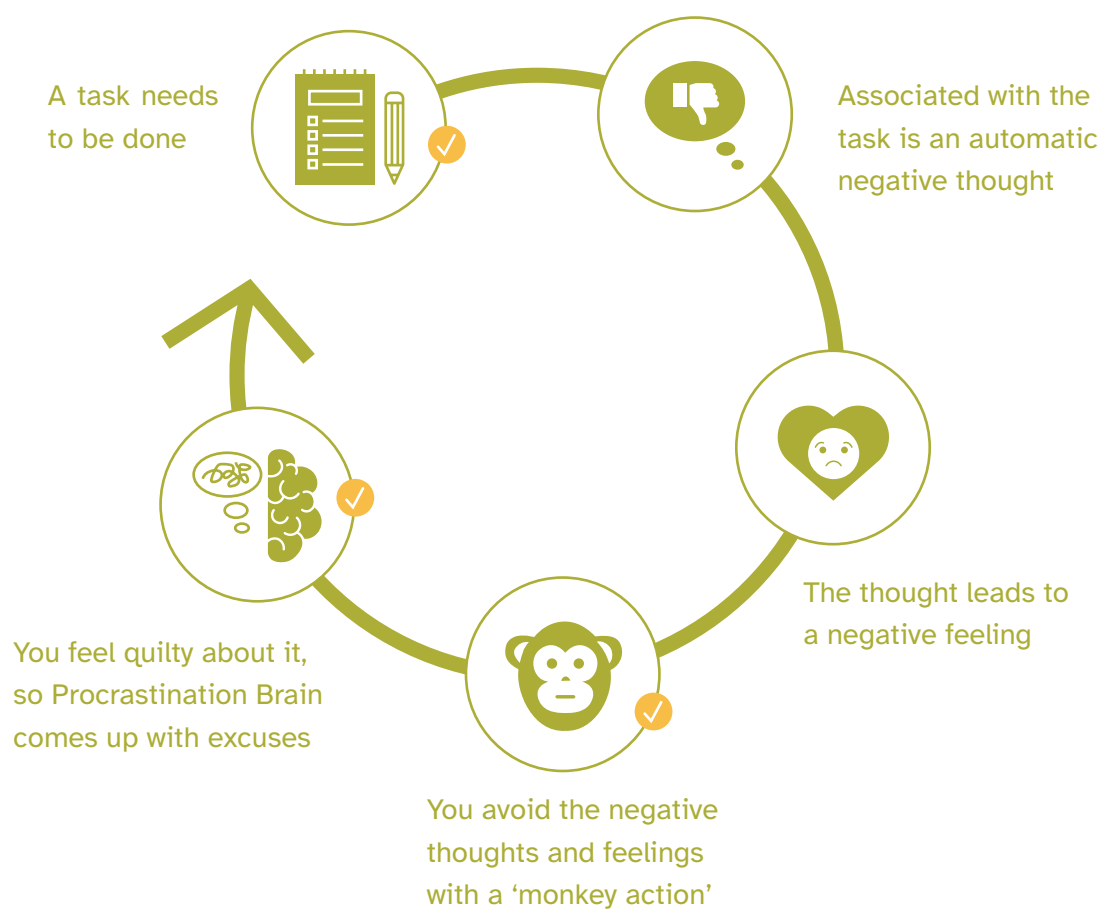
I needed to... (refer to answer A on p.4)

Associated with the task is an automatic negative thought →

The negative thought leads to a negative feeling →

I avoided doing the task by... (refer to answer B on p.4)

Procrastination Brain condoned this by thinking... (refer to p.6 for the excuses checked)



We're more than half-way done!

Now that we've completed the most obvious steps, we can move on to the trickier parts: identifying the thoughts and feelings. We'll start with the feelings as these are slightly easier to pinpoint than automatic thoughts.

Onwards!

Now your procrastination cycle look like this:

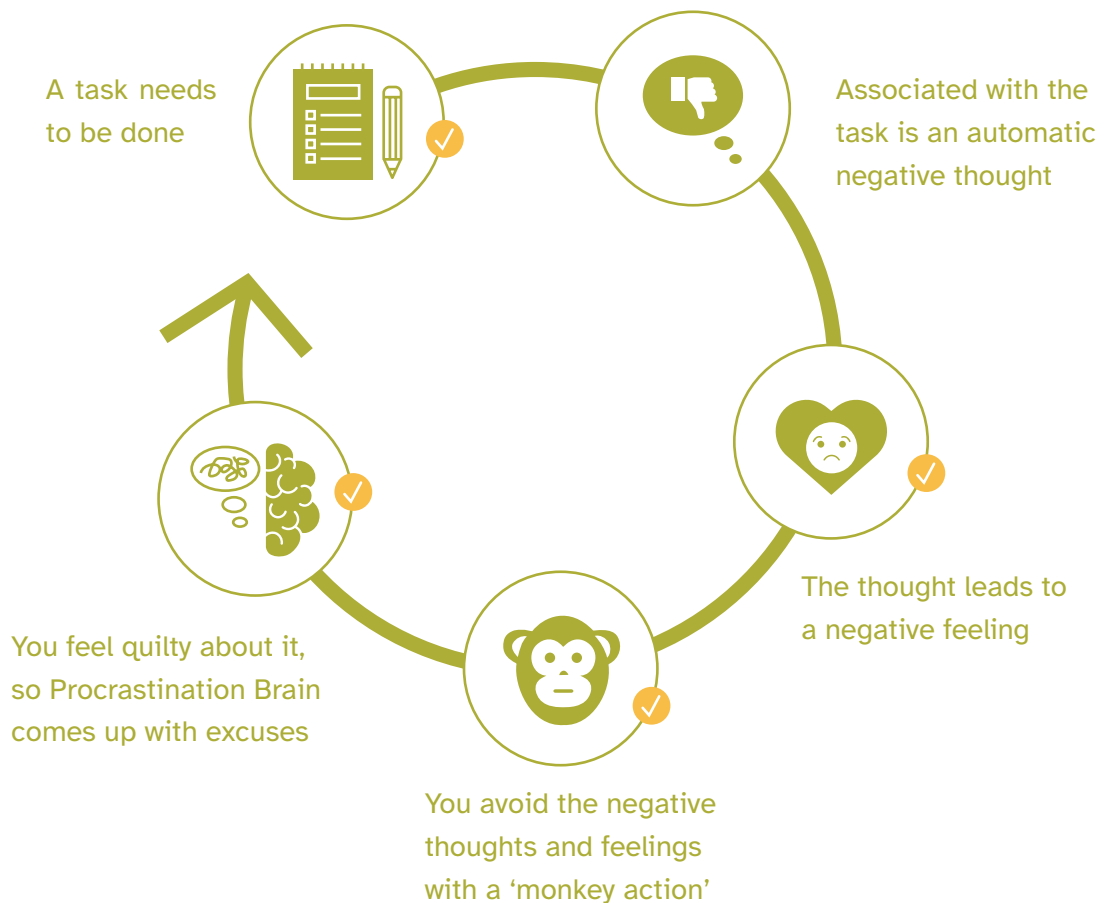
I needed to... (refer to answer A on p.4)

Associated with the task is an automatic negative thought →

This thought made me feel... (refer to p.8 for the feelings checked)

I avoided doing it by... (refer to answer B on p.4)

Procrastination Brain condoned this by thinking... (refer to p.6 for the excuses checked)



Well done, there's only one blank left!

Automatic thoughts



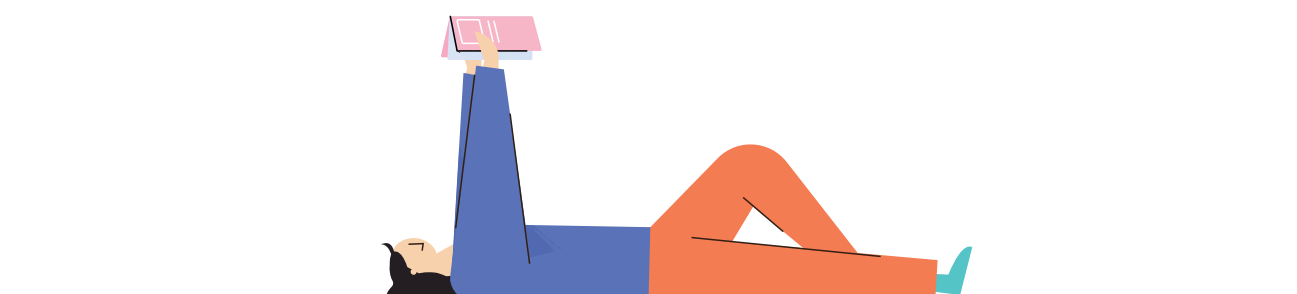
Associated with the task is an automatic negative thought

The last step is to identify the automatic underlying thoughts

Oftentimes, feelings don't appear out of nowhere, but are actually triggered by our thoughts about the situation. Check out how that works in the video below (The video transcript is available on [p.19](#)):



These thoughts can be tricky to identify as they happen **automatically, extremely fast, and mostly subconsciously**. To help bring them to the surface, here are 5 common themes to the types of thoughts that trigger procrastination.

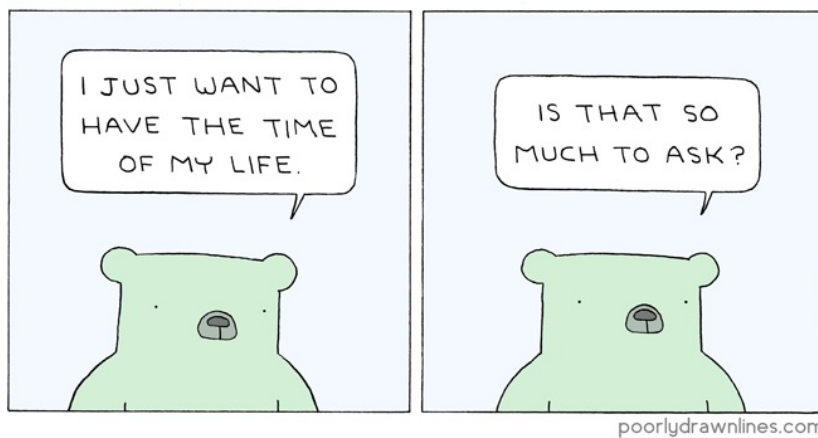


1 Fun first

Some tasks are just not that much fun, and it makes sense not to want to do these tasks. They're not necessarily hard, just boring. It's much more rewarding to do something fun.

Examples of underlying thoughts:

- "I already know how boring this task is going to be, I just don't feel like it"
- "I want to enjoy my day, not waste it on this"
- "Life's too short for this!"



Comic from Poorly Drawn Lines

2 Perfectionism

Sometimes, wanting to do a good job gets in the way. As everyone knows, 'perfect' doesn't exist and aiming for perfection can cause so much stress and worry that you put off the task altogether. Doing something not good enough can feel much worse than not starting on it at all.

Examples of underlying thoughts:

- "It's extremely important for this to be excellent"
- "It's never going to be good enough"
- "If it's not perfect, it's not worth the effort"

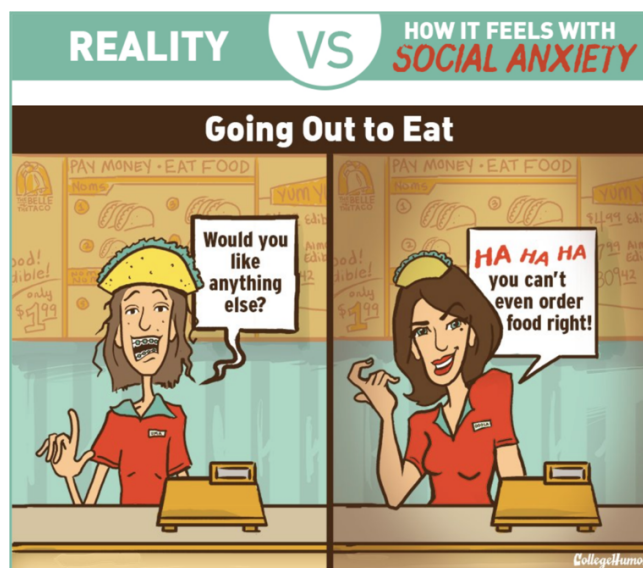


3 Social rejection

If other people see what we do and how we do it, they might judge us negatively on it. At least that's what it feels like, even if most of the time people aren't really paying attention to us at all. Not doing something can be a safer option than putting yourself out there and risking rejection.

Examples of underlying thoughts:

- "Others might disapprove of how I did it"
- "I might get teased, judged or otherwise rejected"
- "If I do a bad job, people are going to dislike me"



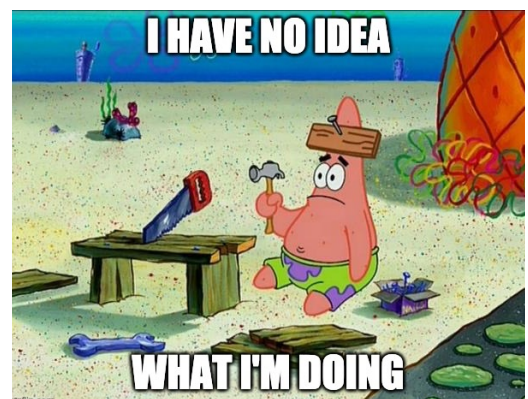
Comic by Shea Strauss on CollegeHumour.com

4 Getting overwhelmed

Especially with big, complex tasks and projects, we often don't know how to approach them. Every time we think about getting started, it feels like there's a maelstrom in our heads with a million things flying around. So then we simply don't start.

Examples of underlying thoughts:

- "I have no idea how I will ever get this done"
- "I'm totally lost and don't know where to start"
- "If I do something wrong now it'll ruin the whole thing"



5 Self-doubt

Especially when something is hard or new, we can question our own abilities. And sometimes our abilities translate directly to our feeling of self-worth. If we do well, we feel good. If we do poorly, we feel bad about ourselves. But when taking action means risking failure, and failing makes us feel bad, it makes sense to try and avoid that risk!

Examples of underlying thoughts:

- “If I can’t get it right, it’s proof that I’m a loser”
- “I’m not smart enough, there’s no way I can do this”
- “I don’t want to risk feeling like a loser”



Comic by The Awkward Yeti



Automatic thoughts

Now you've seen some examples of underlying negative thoughts, it's time to write yours.

As a reminder, the task was: refer to answer A on p.4

And the feeling was: refer to p.8 for the feelings checked

What was the automatic negative thought associated with this task? (Answer C)

Need a reminder? Read the 5 types of automatic thoughts again on p.11 - p.13



And just like that, you completed your first procrastination cycle and got a huge step closer to beating procrastination.

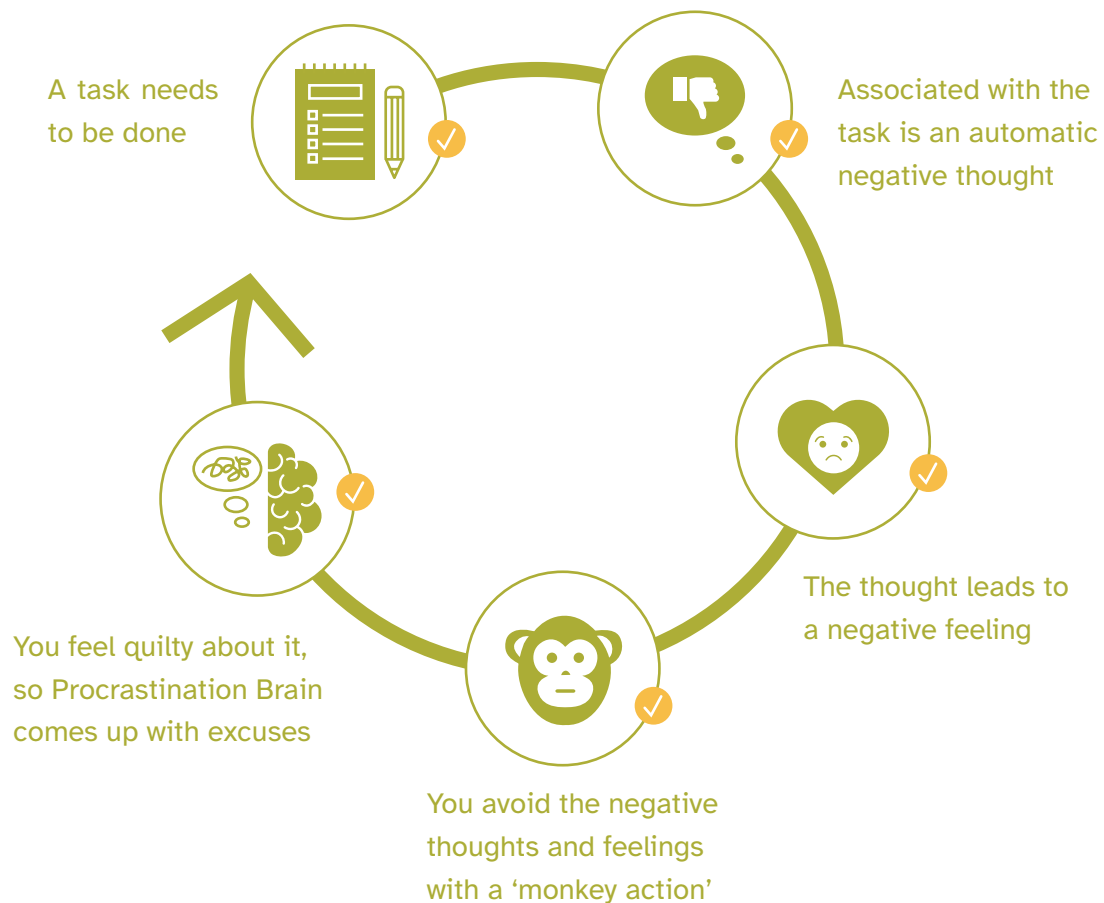
I needed to... (refer to answer A on p.4)

My automatic negative thought was... (refer to answer C on p.14)

This thought made me feel... (refer to p.8 for the feelings checked)

I avoided doing it by... (refer to answer B on p.4)

Procrastination Brain condoned this by thinking: (refer to p.6 for the excuses checked)



Well done!

Wrap-up

Hopefully this module has made you more aware of what's going on in your brain when you procrastinate.

A lot of our thoughts and feelings happen very fast and mostly subconsciously. So it takes some practice to be able to recognize what's going on in our brains!

What did you learn about yourself and your procrastination habits in this module?

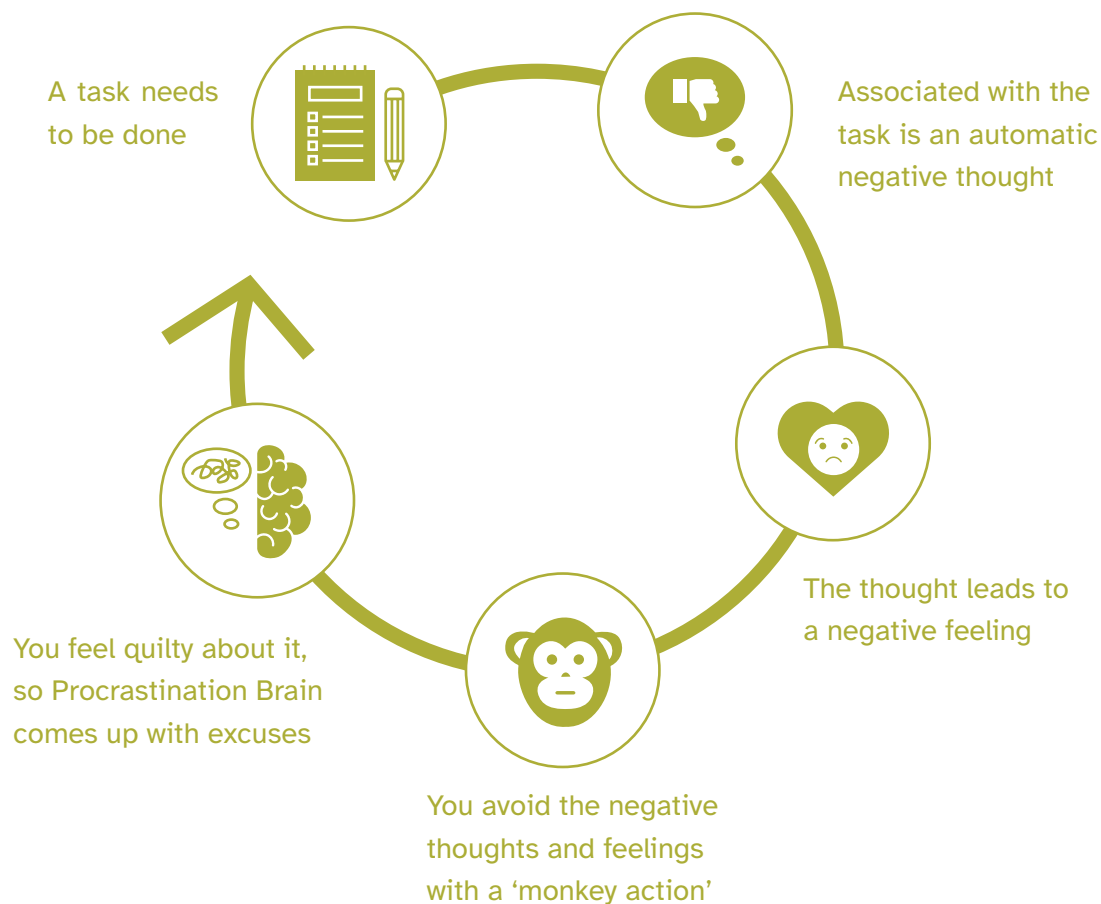
The facts in a row

- You procrastinate when there are negative emotions associated with a task
- These negative emotions are usually triggered by automatic, often subconscious thoughts
- To avoid these thoughts and feelings, we come up with excuses as to why it's okay to procrastinate
- The way to beat procrastination, is to break the Procrastination Cycle. But you can't do that unless you're aware that it's happening



Wrap-up

Now it's time to practice uncovering your procrastination cycles



The more you do it, the faster you become aware of the automatic thoughts and feelings, and the easier you can turn them around to stop procrastinating.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. For now, all your attention should be on becoming aware of your full procrastination cycles as they happen.

We recommend waiting a week or so before doing the next module and doing this assignment in the meantime:

Assignment

For the coming week, fill in the complete Procrastination Cycle every time you procrastinate. Feel free to fill out the cycle in whichever order is easiest for you. You can do this on your laptop or in a notebook, or even on this platform under the 'Tools' section.

Take your time to really dig for your underlying thoughts and feelings, because those are the ones we're going to tackle next time.

The full Procrastination Cycle:

I needed to ... →

My automatic negative thought was ... →

This thought made me feel ... →

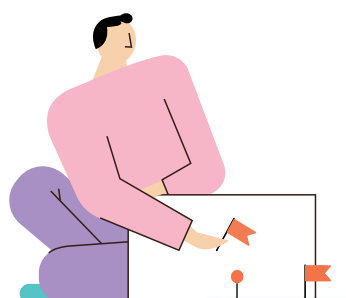
I avoided doing it by ... →

Procrastination Brain condoned this by thinking ... →

Last thing: decide when you would like to do the next module and put it in your calendar now.

What did you think of this module? Please click [here](#) to let us know your views.
You are highly encouraged to complete the next module.

Good luck and until next time!



Supplementary information

Video transcript of “How do automatic thoughts work”

This is how our automatic thoughts influence how we feel.

Oftentimes, feelings aren't caused by what's happening to us (even though it might seem that way), but they're actually triggered by our thoughts.

Imagine this situation: a friend doesn't reply for days when you text to ask him to hang out. You might think: “He doesn't want to hang out with me” and feel a little rejected. But what if you thought “Exams are coming up, he is probably really busy”. Or even “Maybe his phone got stolen by a pickpocket”. Would you still feel hurt?

Or another situation: you were supposed to be on a date, but the other person never showed up. You'd probably be very angry and think: “What a *bleep* this person is!” But what if you thought “Public transport has been really unreliable lately, maybe she got delayed.” Or even “I hope she didn't get in a traffic accident on the way here!”. Would you still feel the same?

As you can see from these examples, our thoughts about a situation often dictate how we feel, and not the situation itself. And the key to changing the way we feel, can sometimes be changing the way we think.

