



PART 2

Read the text below and answer questions 14–26.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PROCRASTINATION: MECHANISMS OF DELAY

A

Procrastination presents a psychological paradox: the person intends to act, can often describe the benefits of acting, and may even predict regret—yet still delays. Philosophers once discussed this as *akrasia*, a failure of volition in which knowledge does not translate into behaviour. Contemporary researchers define procrastination more narrowly as a voluntary postponement of an intended task despite expecting the delay to worsen outcomes. This distinction matters because it separates procrastination from simple scheduling problems: many procrastinators can plan, estimate time, and recognise deadlines, so the issue cannot be reduced to poor *time management*. Instead, the pattern resembles a breakdown in self-regulation, where the ability to align present actions with future goals is repeatedly overridden by competing impulses, emotions, and situational cues.

B

A prominent account of this breakdown is the “mood-repair” theory. Tasks that evoke boredom, frustration, shame, or performance anxiety trigger an aversive state that the individual wants to escape. Avoidance then becomes negatively reinforcing: by turning away from the task, the person experiences immediate *relief*, even if only briefly. Some neuroscientists describe this as an “amygdala hijack,” where threat-related emotion systems dominate attention and bias decision-making toward short-term comfort. The limbic system does not “care” about next week’s consequences; it responds to what feels unpleasant now. Paradoxically, the temporary soothing effect can increase later distress, because the task remains unfinished and time pressure grows, intensifying guilt and anxiety. Mood repair therefore functions like a maladaptive coping strategy: it reduces discomfort in the moment while amplifying stress over time.

C

Mood repair, however, does not operate alone. A second mechanism is temporal discounting—the tendency to value immediate outcomes more heavily than delayed ones. When a deadline is distant, the costs of postponement feel abstract, whereas the comfort of avoidance is concrete and instantly available. Some models combine discounting with expectancy-value theories: if individuals doubt they can *succeed*, or expect the effort to be high relative to the reward, motivation collapses at the starting line. This is why ambiguous tasks, unclear standards, or perfectionistic expectations can be especially



procrastination-inducing: uncertainty raises perceived threat, while low expectancy reduces the perceived payoff of effort. As time passes, discounting weakens the motivational pull of long-term goals until urgency finally becomes strong enough to force action—often in a compressed, stressful burst.

D

Individual differences can make these mechanisms more likely to dominate. Higher impulsivity is consistently associated with procrastination because impulsive individuals are more drawn to immediate rewards and less tolerant of boredom or discomfort. Lower conscientiousness is also linked to delay, reflecting weaker habits of planning and persistence. Yet personality traits do not function as destiny. The same person may delay on open-ended writing but act promptly on tasks with clear rules and frequent checkpoints. Contextual features—explicit instructions, intermediate deadlines, visible progress markers, and social accountability—can reduce procrastination by lowering ambiguity and increasing external structure. This interaction between traits and environment is crucial for interpretation: impulsivity may raise risk, but it does not, by itself, fully explain the behaviour in every situation.

E

A further complication is that not all delay is dysfunctional. Researchers therefore distinguish procrastination from *strategic delay*. Strategic delay can be rational prioritisation: postponing one task to complete a more urgent one, waiting for missing information, or scheduling work to coincide with access to equipment, collaborators, or a specific time window. Procrastination differs because it undermines the individual's own goals: the person delays even when the delay is predictably costly and not justified by competing priorities. This distinction is particularly important in organisations. A manager may postpone a decision because uncertainty is high and new data are expected, which can be prudent; by contrast, an employee may delay a report because the work provokes anxiety and the immediate emotional reward of avoidance outweighs the future cost. Without this conceptual separation, workplaces can mislabel reasonable decision-making as a character flaw, or conversely excuse self-defeating avoidance as “being busy.”

F

Modern environments can amplify the self-regulation challenge. Digital platforms provide frequent, low-effort rewards—notifications, short videos, and endless feeds—with minimal switching costs. For a procrastination-prone mind, these stimuli act like an always-open exit door from discomfort. Importantly, digital distraction does not create procrastination from nothing; it supplies rapid mood repair and immediate reinforcement, making it easier to escape demanding tasks. Over time, chronic delay carries measurable costs: poorer



academic performance, missed medical appointments, financial penalties for late payments, sleep disruption, and reduced work quality. These outcomes reflect not merely lost minutes but cumulative stress. Repeated last-minute effort can become a lifestyle of urgency that erodes wellbeing, and the resulting fatigue can make future avoidance even more attractive, forming a reinforcing cycle.

G

Because procrastination is maintained by both emotional and behavioural loops, interventions typically target multiple levels. Behavioural approaches reduce the “activation energy” of starting: breaking tasks into small steps, committing to work for a few minutes, or creating implementation intentions—specific “if-then” *responses* such as “If I open my laptop, then I write the first sentence before checking messages.” Cognitive-behavioural methods also challenge catastrophic thoughts that inflate threat and reduce expectancy. A counter-intuitive but increasingly supported component is self-compassion. Harsh self-criticism can trigger shame, which increases avoidance and strengthens the mood-repair cycle. By acknowledging discomfort without judgement—treating lapse as a signal rather than a moral failure—people may re-engage more quickly. Effective approaches therefore move beyond willpower: they redesign tasks, shape environments, and address the emotions that make delay feel like the easiest option.

Questions 14–18

Complete the sentences below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

14 Procrastination is treated as a self-regulation problem rather than simply poor

15 The “mood-repair” view suggests that delaying an unpleasant task can bring immediate

16 Procrastination may be more likely when people doubt they can

17 The passage contrasts procrastination with, which can sometimes be rational.

18 Some interventions recommend planning specific “if-then”

Questions 19–22

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.



19 The passage suggests that many procrastinators recognise deadlines and expect delay to have negative consequences, yet still postpone tasks.

20 The passage states that clear instructions and accountability can reduce procrastination.

21 The passage claims that impulsivity by itself fully explains procrastination in every situation.

22 The passage states that procrastination is more common in teenagers than in adults.

Questions 23–26

Select the correct answer.

23 What does the passage suggest about temporal discounting?

- A** People usually value distant consequences more than immediate rewards.
- B** Future outcomes can carry less weight than immediate benefits.
- C** Temporal discounting removes the emotional appeal of avoidance.
- D** It applies only to schoolwork and not to other tasks.

24 Why does the passage distinguish procrastination from strategic delay?

- A** To separate delays caused by personality traits from those caused by digital distractions.
- B** To show that postponement is acceptable whenever a task creates anxiety.
- C** To suggest that workplaces should judge delay only by whether a deadline is eventually met.
- D** Because some delays serve legitimate goals, whereas procrastination is predictably self-defeating.

25 What role does self-compassion play in some interventions?

- A** It may reduce shame and help people resume a task more quickly after a lapse.
- B** It encourages people to treat discomfort as a valid reason to postpone difficult work.
- C** It replaces behavioural strategies by removing negative emotions before work begins.
- D** It creates social accountability by requiring people to discuss their failures publicly.

26 What overall approach to reducing procrastination is suggested?

- A** Concentrating exclusively on removing sources of digital distraction.
- B** Strengthening deadlines and penalties without addressing emotional avoidance.
- C** Redesigning tasks and environments while also addressing the emotions that sustain delay.
- D** Waiting until urgency becomes strong enough to overcome temporal discounting.



Answer Key

14. time management

15. relief

16. succeed

17. strategic delay

18. responses

19. TRUE

20. TRUE

21. FALSE

22. NOT GIVEN

23. B

24. D

25. A

26. C