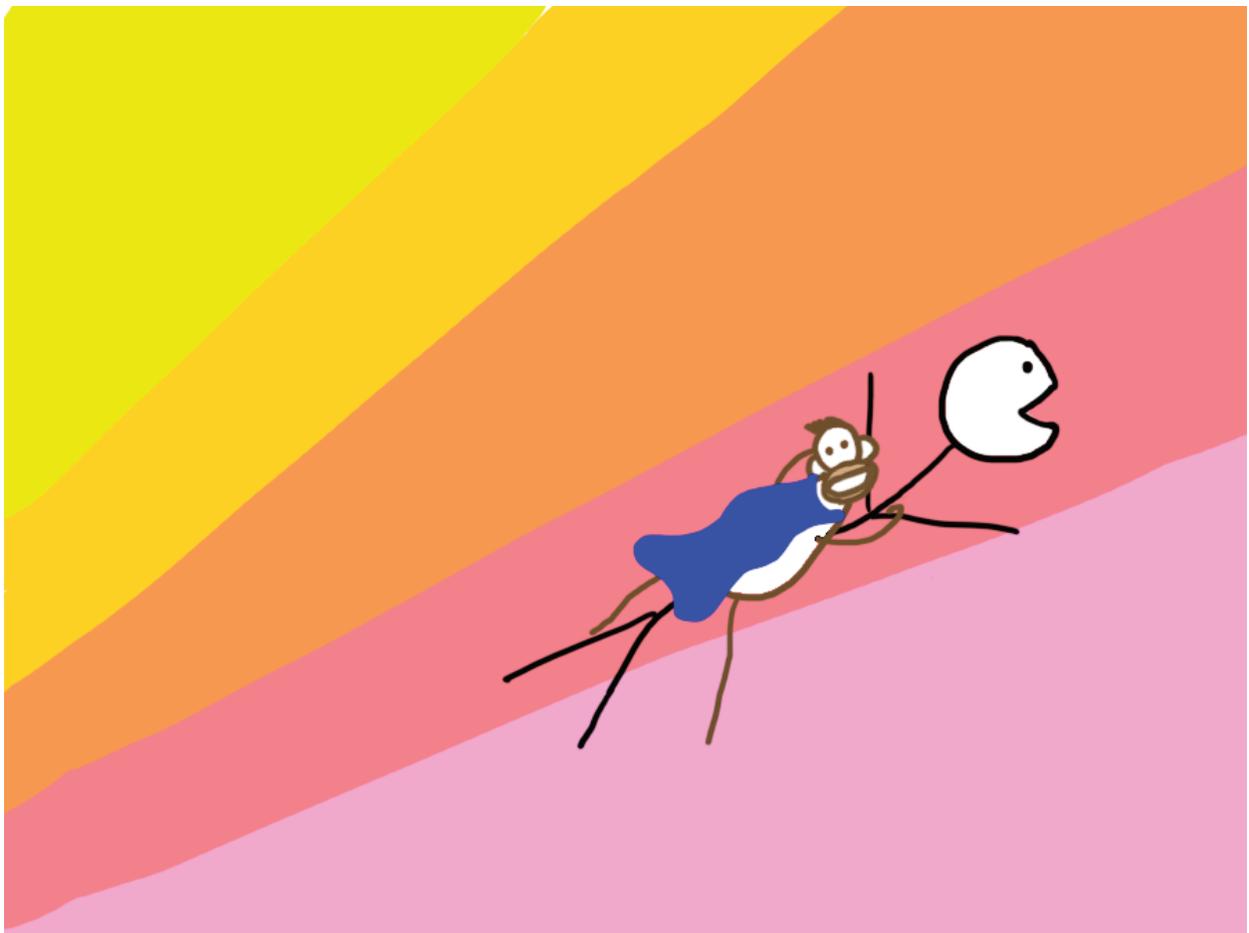




WAIT BUT WHY

How to Beat Procrastination



By Tim Urban

This is Part 2. You won't get Part 2 if you haven't read Part 1 yet.

Here's Part 1.

pro-cras-ti-na-tion |prə krastə nāSHən, prō-|

noun

the action of ruining your own life for no apparent reason

Let me start by saying that I've had just about enough of the irony of battling through crippling procrastination while trying to write posts on procrastination and how to beat it. I've spent the last two weeks being **this guy**, who shoots himself in the foot while talking about gun safety, and I look forward to getting back to irony-free procrastination following this post.

A couple notes before we begin:

- I'm not a professional at any of this, just a lifelong procrastinator who thinks about this topic all the time. I'm still in a total battle with my own habits, but I have made some progress in the last few years, and I'm drawing my thoughts from what's worked for me.
- This post was posted late, not only because it took me 2,000 years to do, but also because I decided that Monday night was an urgent time to open Google Earth, hover a few hundred feet above the southern tip of India, and scroll all the way up India to the top of the country, to "get a better feel for India." I have problems.

All right, so last week we dove into **the everyday inner struggle of the procrastinator** to examine the underlying psychology going on. But this week, when we're actually trying to do something about it, we need to dig even deeper. Let's begin by trying to unwrap the procrastinator's psychology and see what's really at the core of things:

We know about the Instant Gratification Monkey (the part of your brain that makes you procrastinate) and his dominion over the Rational Decision Maker, but what's really happening there?

The procrastinator is in the bad habit, bordering on addiction, of letting the monkey win. He continues to have the intention to control the monkey, but he puts forth a hapless effort, using the same proven-not-to-work methods he's used for years, and deep down, he knows the monkey will win. He vows

to change, but the patterns just stay the same. So why would an otherwise capable person put forth such a lame and futile effort again and again?

The answer is that he has incredibly low confidence when it comes to this part of his life, allowing himself to become enslaved by a self-defeating, self-fulfilling prophecy. Let's call this self-fulfilling prophecy his Storyline. The procrastinator's Storyline goes something like this:

For the Have-To-Dos in my life, I'll end up waiting until the last minute, panicking, and then either doing less than my best work or shutting down and not doing anything at all. For the Want-To-Dos in my life, let's be honest—I'll either start one and quit or more likely, I just won't ever get around to it.

The procrastinator's problems run deep, and it takes something more than "being more self-disciplined" or "changing his bad habits" for him to change his ways—**the root of the problem is embedded in his Storyline, and his Storyline is what must change.**

Before we talk about how Storylines change, let's examine, concretely, what the procrastinator even wants to change *into*. What do the right habits even look like, and where exactly will the procrastinator run into trouble?

There are two components of being able to achieve things in a healthy and effective manner—planning and doing. Let's start with the easy one:

Planning

Procrastinators love planning, quite simply because planning does not involve *doing*, and doing is the procrastinator's Kryptonite.

But when procrastinators plan, they like to do it in a vague way that doesn't consider details or reality too closely, and their planning leaves them perfectly set up to not actually accomplish anything. A procrastinator's planning session leaves him with a doer's nightmare: