

People with dyslexia can delay tasks that involve literacy skills. The consequence of putting off these challenges can be frustrating due to the amount of time wasted as well practical and psychological repercussions resulting from failing to get things done. In turn this can lead to a person with dyslexia or someone else incorrectly labelling them as lazy.

Shifting from one activity to another

A negative coping strategy in addressing dyslexia can take the form of a disinclination to stop doing one task in order to begin another. In order to tackle this, it may be useful to develop an awareness of which activities you gravitate towards when delaying other tasks. When you've identified them, it may be helpful to avoid particular activities altogether until other tasks have been completed. Alternatively, the time spent on these may be limited by setting external reminders such as alarms. Apps are available which can be used to limit the time spent on social media sites.

Identifying problem areas

Keep a diary of tasks which were delayed or avoided during a particular week may be useful.

For each task, the following questions may be asked:

What type of task (e.g. work-based, domestic, social) was it?

Was the task chosen or allocated?

How long a project was it?

What information was available about the processes involved?

What was the degree of familiarity with the task?

What support was in place?

What were the consequences of completing or not completing the task?

Exercising choice

Making active choices about which activities are undertaken and the way that they are carried out is likely to enhance your motivation. This requires a degree of self-awareness in terms of interests and effective ways of working, for example.

Break it down

Longer term goals can seem unachievable but by breaking them down and focusing on one step at a time, they may become more manageable. A project that needs to be finished by the end of the day could be broken down into half hour activities. A project that needs to be finished by the end of the week could be broken down into tasks to be completed each day. Then the sub-tasks for each day could be divided further into half-hour or hour-long tasks.

Often projects need to be spread throughout other tasks and, in this case, it can be useful to plan to dedicate particular times to this project, record this on a calendar, and then plan sub-tasks when the time arrives.



Breaks and rewards

It is important to have planned breaks during activities. How often these need to take place varies from person to person and task to task. It may be useful to monitor the length of time that concentration can be sustained and then plan a break shortly before this point is reached. This is likely to make it easier to return to the task following the break. Rewards should also be incorporated into plans. This may include smaller rewards along the way such as a snack break when a sub-goal has been achieved and a larger reward such as going out for the day when the longer-term goal has been achieved.

Cues and start-times

It may be useful to do repetitive tasks at the same time each day (such as after a meal) as this can help to cue the start of the activity. Setting alarms on mobile phones can also be helpful. Providing a start-time can also be effective. This is a count-down between the cue and the time that you actually begin an activity.

Support from others

When faced with an unfamiliar task, it can be useful to seek advice from someone who has tackled something similar. Completed assignments or projects may provide helpful models. Drawing upon the support of a coach or mentor can often be critical for those with dyslexia and the obligation to let someone else know how a task is going to be tackled and what progress has been made can be a great motivator.

Emotional obstacles

A history of failure or negative comments from others may lead to emotions which contribute to putting things off. An individual may, for example, feel anxious or demoralised when faced with particular tasks. There may also be an opposition to completing tasks which has its roots in childhood.

The way that we think about events influences our emotions and behaviour and although our thoughts about events may be accurate and helpful, they may also be inaccurate and unhelpful. Automatic thoughts may be identified by noticing when distressing feelings arise, labelling the feelings, and then identifying the associated thoughts. Examples of negative automatic thoughts include all-or-nothing thinking such as *'If I don't get this perfect then I am a failure'* and over-generalisation such as *'I didn't complete this task successfully so everything has gone wrong'*. Having identified inaccurate and unhelpful thoughts, these may be challenged through an evaluation of the evidence, and they may be replaced with more positive thoughts.

Mindfulness

Techniques based on mindfulness may help us to become more aware of feelings and thoughts which lead to procrastination. This technique involves labelling avoidance in the moment and acknowledging negative feelings and thoughts in a non-judgemental way.

Be compassionate

When facing the challenges associated with putting things off, it helps to adopt a compassionate approach. This involves using kind and warm self-talk of the type that would be used when encouraging a friend. It may also involve the creation of a mental image of a figure who offers compassionate support.