

Unblocking Scholarly Writing–Part II: Minimizing Procrastination and Maximizing Mindset to Accomplish Publishing

Author ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7006-5414>

Author Affiliation: Jennifer Sue Berna, PhD, Marian University, Wisconsin

SC Classification Genre: Business

Citation: Berna, J. S. (2020). Unblocking scholarly writing–Part II: Minimizing procrastination and maximizing mindset to accomplish publishing. *Scholar Chatter*, 1(2), 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.47036/SC.1.2.1-8.2020>

Creative Commons Attribution



© The Author. 2020. This is an open-access publication through Scholar Chatter LLC.

Abstract

Procrastination can stall converting a completed dissertation into articles published in peer-reviewed journals. This descriptive article, second in a three-part series, briefly explores a behavior (procrastination) that can block writing goals. Procrastination, and its parallel perfectionism, often entails negative self-talk. Procrastination may result in short-term mood repair and emotional self-regulation by avoidant behavior. However, there are negative linked consequences for health and well-being beyond stymied writing efforts. Recommendations are offered to minimize self-limiting behaviors and shift to a growth mindset that contributes to accomplishing journal publication. Intended goals, such as the intent to publish in a peer-reviewed journal, are enhanced by compassionate self-review. Self-reflection that shifts one's internal view toward a growth mindset includes forgiving oneself for stumbles along the dissertation pathway, noticing prior success in writing and revising a document, reframing tasks as achievable, and embracing positive emotions embedded in curiosity and personal initiative. Compassion toward oneself requires a personal commitment to meeting challenges with greater self-kindness and self-acceptance.

Key Words: *Growth mindset, journal publishing, procrastination, self-control*

Introduction

There are inherent challenges in converting a completed dissertation into scholarly articles for peer-reviewed journal publication. A previous article published in *Scholar Chatter* (Berna, 2020) described recommendations to minimize imposter syndrome and apply grit to accomplish publication goals. This descriptive article, second in a three-part series, briefly explores a behavior (procrastination) that can block writing goals and offers recommendations to shift internal self-talk (mindset) and empower oneself to become a published journal author.

Background of Procrastination Discussion

Procrastination can contribute to blocking academic writing goals. Common human experiences of attending to distractions, listening to ‘naysayers’—both external and internal, stopping or procrastinating in completing benchmark tasks, and holding on to stuck mindsets are several behaviors that can hamper accomplishing goals in general. It is conjectured that procrastination may limit attainment of specific goals involved in scholarship and scholarly writing. However, one study of undergraduate students, conducted by Niermann and Scheres (2014) only found inattention, a symptom domain of ADHD, was correlated with general procrastination. This descriptive article discusses and recommends helpful strategies to minimize procrastination, unblock feeling ‘stuck’ in writer’s block, and move forward with a positive mindset to accomplish academic journal publication.

Procrastination can parallel perfectionism (Larsen, 2006) and is often coupled as a coping mechanism for those adult learners struggling with ADD residual behaviors, which may include low self-esteem, negative self-talk, feelings of inadequacy, or fear of failure. With over 40 years of teaching experience, a University of Minnesota science professor admonishes his chemistry students when writing scientific papers to avoid procrastination. Professor Carr (2016) provides that specific advice in a rather deadpan, yet humorous, tone as a bookend beginning and concluding point in a YouTube tutorial on writing scientific papers.

In research measuring college students’ procrastination, connected to weekly in-class quizzes (Perrin et al., 2011), college students usually procrastinated when online study material was supplied non-contingently. When access was contingent on completing previous study material, students’ studying was more evenly distributed (Perrin et al., 2011). While an interesting finding, however, it speaks little to the challenges doctoral students face when writing to convert completed dissertations into peer-reviewed journal articles.

Procrastination in common daily situations was studied by a University of Norway research team (Svardal et al., 2018). Differences were found in procrastinators compared with non-procrastinators regarding time-related and intended behavior. Procrastinators were inclined to delay when an action possibility presents itself. Procrastinators may have a long history of escaping and avoiding aversive situations (Svardal et al., 2018). These are research findings that may ‘speak’ to doctoral students who ultimately became successful dissertators, yet, who may struggle with procrastinating in converting their dissertation into published journal articles. Having a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) can enhance and shift this possibility into a manifested reality.

Minimizing Procrastination Recommendations

Techniques to formulate and realize goal-oriented intentions, thus, instigating rapid, serial implementation, may reduce and prevent procrastination (Svardal et al., 2018). Put simply, strategies to quell procrastination can begin with the adage “*Eat that Frog*” (Tracy, 2001). The book title sticks as a mnemonic (memory aid) for writers who need to tackle the “hard to do” items first. The subtitle (“*21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less*”

Time”) suggests that the approach is easy to do. If only that were so! However, a glance at those suggested ways to avoid procrastination may remind a struggling yet-to-publish author of strategies that have worked in the past. Many writers may have seen and may identify with ideas on avoiding procrastination. In a blog posted for college students, Collins (2020) suggested the “Top Ten” ways to avoid procrastination as: 1) get organized; 2) set simple, achievable goals; 3) create a timeline/schedule; 4) set a deadline; 5) get rid of distractions; 6) time yourself on (writing) tasks; 7) take a break; 8) use incentives; 9) tell someone about your goals; and 10) get the hard stuff first.

While some time management strategies can work for those blocked in their writing goals, procrastination is actually not a time management problem (Pychyl, 2019). Procrastination has nothing to do with self-control (Lieberman, 2019). Rather, procrastination is an emotion regulation problem (Pychyl, 2019). Onset delay was a preferred option for procrastinators in daily situations to avoid uncomfortable or negative feelings (Svartdal et al., 2018), resulting in actual behavior instigating chains of events with negative consequences. For doctoral students, this may result in the career hampering status of All But Dissertation/Defended (ABD). For doctoral candidates with defended dissertations, chronic procrastination’s consequential chain of events can result in remaining unpublished beyond that point.

Procrastination can be considered a cyclical habit loop (Lieberman, 2019). Procrastination is an emotional response pattern for avoiding stressful or aversive situations, the pain of negative moods, or negatively labeled emotions connected to certain tasks. What is needed is an internal hard-wiring of our brains (Lieberman, 2019) since some potential substitute actions could still be forms of procrastination. The following are recommendations (Lieberman, 2019) that can minimize procrastination and contribute to the intended goal accomplishment.

- Self-forgiveness—of past failures, errors, or stumbles along the life path.
- Self-compassion—that supports and boosts motivation and personal growth.
- Self-worth—increased feelings of personal regard are attained by noticing ‘small step’ accomplishments and by reminding oneself of other similar successes.
- Fostering positive emotions—such as wisdom, curiosity, and personal initiative.
- Reframing tasks—consider the positive aspects of finished work and polished products.

Growth Mindset Discussion

Growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) is currently being researched more frequently (see also Denworth, 2019; O’Keefe et al., 2018; Rhew et al., 2018). People vary in their mindsets. The definition of a fixed mindset of interest is that a person has inherent interests merely waiting to be awakened or found (O’Keefe et al., 2018). A person with a growth mindset of interest (O’Keefe et al., 2018) views interests as developed and can grow over time by applying commitment, investment, involvement, and persistence. Having a growth mindset can enhance task performance and boost interdisciplinary problem-solving (O’Keefe et al., 2018). However, a recent meta-analyses study (Sisk et al., 2018) found weak evidence for growth mindset interventions improving academic achievement.

Self-efficacy and motivation are two predictors with a significant impact on academic achievement (Rhew et al., 2018) and are connected to a growth mindset. Having a growth mindset entails the belief that human intelligence can grow (Mindset Scholars Network, 2015). With a shift to a growth mindset, the actions of increased effort, coupled with positive learning strategies, can lead to increased academic engagement and performance (Mindset Scholars Network, 2015). A shift in mindset entails the intent to shift our inner critic dialogue and move from negative internal self-talk to a more empowering internal self-talk and to a personal mantra that may sound like, “I have not mastered that yet.”

Personal beliefs affect what we want and our success in getting it (Dweck, 2006). Debate has arisen over whether teaching adolescent students to embrace a growth mindset can motivate and engage them when the (school) learning environment has embedded challenges (Denworth, 2019). This debate may also fit the context of advanced doctoral students. Adults completing advanced degrees and writing dissertations have often faced the challenging learning environment of working by the light of the moon (while multi-tasking daily as full-time workers, parents, and often extended family care-givers), at the same time as being deeply engaged in their doctoral candidacy. However, a hardened mindset may limit seeing personal strengths in that completed dissertation journey. Rather, a journey-wearied mindset focuses on feeling the emotional burn of doctoral struggles, the pain of stumbling on ever-continuing rewrites, and residual self-doubt ever to become published journal authors. As Light (2020) remarked,

Mastery is a great thing as is transformation. However, in learning to master life, we have to overcome countless obstacles and hardships on our paths... (at times) when everything seems harder than normal. We feel as if we are climbing and climbing but somehow never reaching the top. The journey seems endless, and we just want to throw in the towel... (which) teaches us perseverance and patience, and it reminds us that we need to keep going no matter how tough the going seems. (p. 72)

Light (2020) emphasizes that “(focusing on) overcoming myriad obstacles on our path (can minimize) trigger(ed) feelings of depression or even ‘wanting out’ when the path is steep or seemingly endless” (p. 72)

To become a published journal author, it is possible to “grow, transform, and let go of old ways that no longer serve us...(to) trust the process, let go of fears” (Light, 2020, 73). A shift away from cyclical or chronic procrastination, and a shift to a growth mindset, can result in increased academic writing skill sets. These academic writing skills can be further enhanced with the supportive mentoring of the editorial team of Scholar Chatter, LLC. See, for example, “Four perspectives of disruption in publication: An inspirational white paper” (Conzelmann et al., 2020), available at <https://doi.org/10.47036/SC.1.0.1-10.2020>.

Growth Mindset Recommendations

Rhew et al. (2018) have emphasized the importance of self-advocating and playing an active role in establishing growth mindset attitudes. Scholar Chatter editors offer opportunities (www.scholarchatter.com/membership) to discuss and share the difficulties encountered in

academic writing, as well as provide supportive mentorship to word-smith a completed dissertation into a complete and publishable article.

Advocacy for developing a growth mindset has parallels in cognitive-behavioral therapy approaches that teach individuals to have agency over their thoughts and behaviors (Denworth, 2019). When there is an opportunity for a profound internal transformation, human beings can tend to cling to the older forms of self. Even ways that no longer serve them, such as the fear of changing, can inhibit making way for a new, better version of one-self (Light, 2020). In this chaotic time of a global Covid-19 pandemic, most of all, there is a fear of change (Ronna, 2020). Within the narrowing perspective of an increased generalized sense of anxiety, Ronna (2020) summarizes the current swirling, frenzied human behavior pattern:

Fear is the predominant emotion with the predominant group, still stuck in the maelstrom of negativity within the mass consciousness belief structure. This includes fear of the future, scarcity, the government, and corporations, as well as fear of different cultures, races, or religious beliefs. People fear, therefore they criticize, judge, and lash out in anger and frustration, creating an even greater thought form of negativity and fear around them...They are caught in a web of self-fulfilling prophecy that reinforces their beliefs and keeps them shackled to their illusionary world of suffering, scarcity and chaos. (p. 32)

It is possible to view the internal fear of failure differently. Take time to notice, acknowledge, and even feel fears without buying into or reinforcing those fears (Light, 2020). As a thought moves through your mind or a feeling goes through your body, it is possible to become aware of it without adding more energy to it (Light, 2020). As Ronna (2020, 33) emphasizes, “you are teaching (yourself) through your words and actions. You are teaching with every word you speak and every thought form you send out” to yourself and others. Also essential is to consider whether you are radiating “love, faith and hope” (Ronna, 2020, 33) in these unprecedented times of global transformation. Unconditional love includes our self—and that means quieting our harsh inner critical voice. As emerging researchers and current or future published research authors, we are challenged to “make no mistake, all of you who are on the path are teachers, whether in a formal manner or just by example, and what is needed most is your (positive) radiance and intention” to think, speak and write “for the good of all” (Ronna, 2020, 33).

Procrastination is more than just voluntarily delaying a task such as writing. It is self-harm as there is self-awareness that avoiding a task is a bad idea, yet, we do it anyway (Lieberman, 2019). Rather than being a character flaw, Lieberman (2019) contends procrastination is a way of coping with challenging emotions and negative moods induced by certain tasks. If one is frustrated or frazzled along the path to a successfully defended dissertation, it may be all too easy to recall some of those ‘challenging emotions’ that include (listed alphabetically) anxiety, boredom, fear, insecurity, resentment, self-blame, and self-doubt.

Sirois and Pychyl (2013) studied the primacy of short-term mood repair, considered an aspect of procrastination. Over the longer-term pursuit of intended actions, procrastination

benefits the immediate urgency of handling negative moods (such as low self-esteem). Thus, people engage in the irrational cycle of chronic procrastination, actually knowing it does not make sense to do something known to result in negative consequences (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). There is more to fixing procrastination than posting a large reminder that states, “stop putting things off and start getting stuff done” (Lieberman, 2019). Procrastination is due to an inability to manage negative moods around a task that stimulates avoidant behaviors (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). Procrastination may result in short-term mood repair and emotional self-regulation; however, there are negative linked consequences for health and well-being (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). Focusing on productivity or time management, or merely telling oneself to stop procrastinating, does not address the root cause (Lieberman, 2019) as procrastination is about emotions. Compassion toward oneself is an internal shift (Lieberman, 2019), which requires a personal commitment to meeting challenges with greater self-kindness and self-acceptance.

“Keep it Simple, Scholars!” (Conzelmann, 2016, 2020). “Motivation follows action—get started” (Pychyl, 2019). Say a resounding “Yes!” to yourself and your ability to put pen to paper!

References

- Berna, J. S. (2020). Unblocking scholarly writing—Minimizing imposter syndrome and applying grit to accomplish publishing. *Scholar Chatter*, 1(1), 1–5.
<https://doi.org/10.47036/SC.1.1.1-5.2020>
- Carr, P. (2016). How to write a paper in a weekend—by surviving and thriving in higher education. Published YouTube video, May 28, 2016. (University of Minnesota—Chemistry Dept.).
- Collins, R. (2020, July). *Top 10 Ways to Avoid Procrastination*. Collegexpress. Blog.
<https://www.collegexpress.com/articles-and-advice/majors-and-academics/blog/top-10-ways-avoid-procrastination/>
- Conzelmann, J. D. (2016). *Keep it simple, scholars!—A basic guide for writing & editing dissertations and theses*. Amazon.
- Conzelmann, J. D. (2020). *Keep it Simple, Scholars! Vol.2: Outlining the Elements of the Dissertation, Step-by-Step*. Amazon.
- Conzelmann, J. D., Berna, J., Bame, R., Davis, C., & Miller, K. (2020). Four perspectives of disruption in publication: An inspirational white paper. *Scholar Chatter*, 1(0), 1–10,
<https://doi.org/10.47036/SC.1.0.1-10.2020>
- Denworth, L. (2019). *Debate arises over teaching growth mindsets to motivate students*. Scientific American. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/debate-arises-over-teaching-growth-mindsets-to-motivate-students/>
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. NY: Random House.
- Larsen, K. (2006). *Progress not perfection: Your journey matters*. Expert Publisher.

- Lieberman, C. (2019, March). *Why you procrastinate: It has nothing to do with self-control*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/25/smarter-living/why-you-procrastinate-it-has-nothing-to-do-with-self-control>
- Light, P. (2020). Creating a safe space and a strong immune system. *Sedona Journal of Emergence*, 30(6), 72–73.
- Mindset Scholars Network. (2015, September). Stanford University. Brief. <https://www.mindsetscholarsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/what-we-know-about-growth-mindset.pdf>
- Niermann, H., & Scheres, A. (2014, December). The relation between procrastination and symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in undergraduate students. *International Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 3(4): 411–421. <https://doi.org/10.102/mpr.1220>
- O’Keefe, P., Dweck, C., & Walton, G. (2018, September). *Having a growth mindset makes it easier to develop new interests*. Harvard Business Review Blog. <https://hbr-org.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/hbr.org/amp/2018/09/having-a-growth-mindset-makes-it-easier-to-develop-new-interests>
- Perrin, C., Miller, N., Haberlin, A., Ivy, J., Meindl, J., & Neef, N. (2011). Measuring and reducing college student’s procrastination. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 44(3), 463–474. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.2011.44-463>
- Pychyl, T. (2019, March). *Why you procrastinate: It has nothing to do with your self control*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/25/smarter-living/why-you-procrastinate-it-has-nothing-to-do-with-self-control>
- Rhew, E., Piro, J. S., Goolksaian, P., & Consentino, P. (2018). The effects of a growth mindset on self-efficacy and motivation. *Cogent Education*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1492337>
- Ronna. (2020). Shine your light, and share your vision: Way-Showers the hope of the future. *Sedona Journal of Emergence*, 30(6), 32–34.
- Sirois, F., & Pychyl, T. (2013). Procrastination and the priority of short-term mood regulation: Consequences for future self. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7(2), 115–117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12011>
- Sisk, V., Burgoyne, A., Sun, J., Butler, J., & Macnamara, B. (2018). *To what extent and under which circumstances are growth mind-sets important to academic achievement?—Two meta-analyses*. *Psychological Science*, 29(4), 549–571. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617739704>
- Svartdal, F., Sjur, G., & Faerevaag, F. (2018). On the behavioral side of procrastination: Exploring behavioral delaying in real-life settings. *Frontiers in Psychology—Personality and Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00746>



Tracy, B. (2001). *Eat that frog—21 great ways to stop procrastinating and get more done in less time*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.