



Can't put down your phone and get on with studying? Science says it's not your fault! Source: Shutterstock

The science behind procrastination and how to overcome it

 By [Study International Staff](#) | September 27, 2018

Do you often find yourself putting off assignments, reading and note-taking in favour of more pressing or important tasks?

Are you doing those menial tasks you've been putting off for weeks at the crunch time of your next exam or assignment? Or are you reading this article five minutes into your study-sesh, trying to work out what the heck is wrong with your brain?

Everyone is guilty of procrastination. We tell ourselves 'we work better under pressure' or we'll 'feel more productive tomorrow' to make ourselves feel less guilty for our self-sabotage – but why do we engage in a behaviour that stops us reaching our potential?

It can be easy to criticise yourself and feel frustrated by your lack of concentration – all you have to do is ignore distractions, right?



Picking up the TV remote or getting lost in your laptop is just all too easy... Source: Rawpixel/Unsplash

Well, new research shows your status as a chronic procrastinator may not be your fault.

“It’s all in your head”

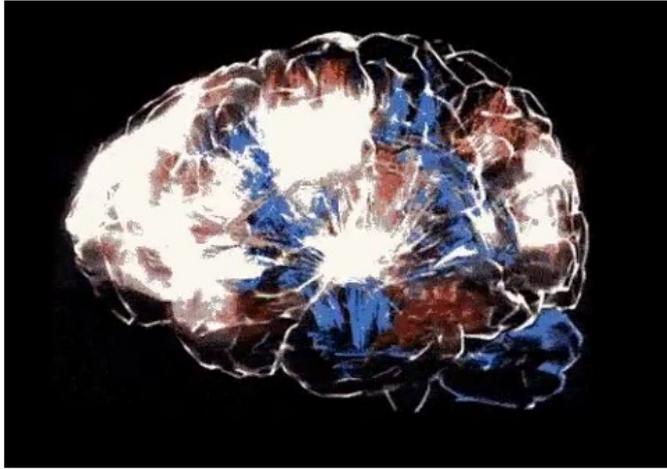
If you’re always leaving things to the last minute and struggling to start assignments early, you’ve probably been told your inability to start early “is all in your head.”

According to scans of 264 human brains, this might actually be true on a neuroscientific level.

Researchers found that those who often procrastinate have a larger amygdala – an almond-shaped part of the brain in the temporal lobe which processes emotions and controls motivation, reports the [BBC](#).

Procrastinators also had poorer connections between the amygdala and a part of the brain called the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (DACC), which decides what action the body will take, usually blocking out competing emotions or distractions to keep someone on task.

In other words, the study reveals procrastinating is not about your time management or ability to complete the task – it is a response to competing emotions that are making you feel anxious to begin your task.



Overwhelming emotions can be the cause of your procrastination. Source: Giphy

“Individuals with a larger amygdala may be more anxious about the negative consequences of an action – they tend to hesitate and put off things,” wrote Professor Erhan Genç, author of the study and academic at Ruhr University Bochum, according to the *BBC*.

So instead of an innate lack of effort or discipline, it could be due to your brain structure – so how can you overcome this?

Mindfulness training

According to research, the reason we procrastinate is due to our brains being overwhelmed with conflicting emotions and struggling to prioritise the task at hand.

This means we can often face the anxiety of not doing well enough, fear of succeeding and having to meet high expectations in the future, or feeling like nothing will be good enough.

Mindfulness training can help us overcome these debilitating and usually stealthy anxieties, shrinking the amygdala that can cause us to feel overwhelmed.

“Research has already shown that mindfulness meditation is related to amygdala shrinkage, expansion of the pre-frontal cortex and a weakening of the connection between these two areas,” said Prof Tim Pychyl from Carleton University, according to the *BBC*.



There are a number of apps that can help you become more mindful, including:

- *Headspace* – which offers a number of guided meditations to help you become more awake in your daily life, and;
- *Calm* – which allows you to unplug from the hectic and connected life that usually overruns our lives.

If you have any questions about overcoming study anxiety or any other mental health worries at university, you can email us as editor@studyinternational.com and we will try to produce content that helps.

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