BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Why do we procrastinate?

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sam
Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Sam.

Neil
And I'm Neil.

Sam
Come on, Neil, let's make a start! I've got a deadline to meet today, and I haven't finished my work yet!

Neil
Let me guess, it's because you delayed, and delayed, and put your work off until the last minute - as usual! You're a real procrastinator, Sam – someone who keeps delaying things that need to be done.

Sam
What can I say? I work better when a deadline is approaching.

Neil
I see, but did you know that that people who procrastinate have higher levels of stress and lower wellbeing? Procrastination is also linked with lower financial and career success, so there's a lot of reasons not to do it.

Sam
In this programme, we're discussing **procrastination** – the act of delaying things that must be done until later, often because they're difficult, boring or unpleasant. And, as usual, we'll be learning some new vocabulary along the way.

Neil
So, without wasting any more time, I have a question for you, Sam. The fact that procrastinating, or putting things off, is bad for us doesn't stop people doing it.

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According to recent research by DePaul University in Chicago, what percentage of people procrastinate so much that it interferes with their day-to-day life? Is it:

a) 10 percent?
b) 20 percent? or,
c) 30 percent?

Sam
I'll guess that around 10 percent of people have a serious procrastination problem.

Neil
OK, Sam. We'll find out the answer later in the programme. Sam is certainly not alone in putting things off until the last minute. Here's Ella al-Shamahi, presenter of BBC Radio 4's, Why Do We Do That? talking to the comedian, Eshaan Akbar, about his procrastination habit:

Ella al-Shamahi
Would you say, Eshaan, that you're a procrastinator?

Eshaan Akbar
I am a serial procrastinator **without a shadow of a doubt.**

Ella al-Shamahi
Why? Why do you think you procrastinate?

Eshaan Akbar
Over the years, I've told myself that I procrastinate because I work better under **pressure.** That's what I've told myself.

Sam
Eshaan thinks that he is a procrastinator **without a shadow of a doubt**, a phrase which is used to emphasise that you are completely certain of something.

Neil
Eshaan also says that, like Sam, he works better **under pressure**, when he feels stressed or anxious because of having too much to do. But maybe, also like Sam, Eshaan has a problem organising his workload and managing his time.

Sam
Hang on, Neil, my time management skills are OK, thank you! With me, it's more of an emotional response – I see a mountain of work, feel threatened, and think, 'how on earth will I finish all that?!'

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Neil
What Sam says is supported by a theory of human evolution which explains how putting things off is an emotional response. Back when we were living in caves, life was dangerous and short, and our ancestors were **impulsive** – they acted suddenly, on instinct, without thinking about the consequences of what they were doing. Back then, being impulsive was a good thing, but in modern life, with work goals and deadlines, when we are impulsive and get distracted, we procrastinate. So rather than being a problem with time management, Sam should blame her caveman ancestors who acted on impulse.

Sam
Hmm, an interesting idea, but it's not going to help me meet my deadline! Let's listen again to comedian Eshaan Akbar talking how he feels when he procrastinates:

Eshaan Akbar
A lot of stuff you read about procrastination focuses on the time management element of it… I probably got a better sense that for me it seems very squarely around the emotional aspect of it. Perhaps I get more emotional **gratification** from doing it last minute. And, I need to understand why I prefer that over the calm serenity of getting things done with **oodles** of time on my hands.

Neil
In the same way that our ancestors felt good living on impulse, Eshaan thinks he gets **gratification** - a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction – from doing things at the last minute. What he doesn't understand is why he prefers to work under pressure, instead of finishing calmly with **oodles**, or lots of, time.

Sam
Unlike Eshaan, I'd rather finish my work feeling relaxed, but there never seems to be enough time.

Neil
Well, breaking down the task into smaller stages also breaks down the level of threat you feel from your workload. Also, forgiving yourself for procrastinating in the past seems helpful in avoiding procrastinating in the future. So, forgive yourself and start making changes, Sam, before you end up like the timewasters in my question: what percentage of people procrastinate so much that it interferes with day-to-day life.

Sam
Well, I guessed it was 10 percent.

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Neil
Which was… the wrong answer, I'm afraid. In fact around 20 percent of us have a procrastination habit so strong it makes life difficult. Okay, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned from this programme on **procrastination** – delaying, or putting off, doing things until later, often because they're difficult, unpleasant or boring.

Sam
The phrase **without a shadow of a doubt** is used to emphasise that you are completely certain of something.

Neil
If you're **under pressure**, you feel stressed or anxious because of having too much to do.

Sam
Impulsive behaviour is sudden and spontaneous, done without thinking about the consequences.

Neil
Gratification means a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction.

Sam
And finally, when you have **oodles** of something, you have a lot of a very large amount of something pleasant…. like time, which once again we've run out of. I'm rushing off to finish my work, Neil, but remember to make time to join us again soon, here at 6 Minute English. Bye for now!

Neil
Bye!

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VOCABULARY

procrastination
delaying doing things that must be done until later, often because they are boring, difficult or unpleasant

without a shadow of a doubt
used to emphasise that you are completely certain of something

under pressure
feeling stressed or anxious because of having too much to do

impulsive
acting suddenly and instinctively, without thinking about the consequences of your actions

gratification
feeling of pleasure and satisfaction

oodles of (something)
a very large amount of something pleasant

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