

# Personal behaviour project: academic procrastination



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Academic procrastination was the behaviour to be modified. The principal investigator observed that during the last few trimesters, James displayed signs of procrastination in his studies. The investigator noted that poor time management and the reluctance to start was the crux of the maladaptive behaviour. Thus, these few constructs were being selected to be modified in this behaviour modification project. The investigator observed that such procrastination usually led James to have poor sleeping habits and increased anxiety. In this project, the Premack Principle and Implantation Intention theory were utilised as theories to be implemented. It was hypothesised that using these theories in the application of procrastination could be an effective behaviour modification for treating such negative behaviour as in the literature. Moreover, various studies have shown positive result when applied theory in the school based settings in general. In conclusion, results has shown that the theory was applicable as an intervention in maladaptive behaviour (procrastination) and thus online gaming proves to be an effective reinforcer to increase probability of working on assignments in a stipulated timeframe before its deadline.

#### Personal Behaviour Modification Project: Academic Procrastination

A research study on procrastination was conducted to look into this maladaptive behaviour. It was suggested that this negative behaviour in which the student who lacking proper time management skill and feeling stress, choose to put off work or studying that need to be done was academic procrastination. Academic procrastination was aptly defined as leaving academic tasks to the last minute and to feel the discomfort (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Milgram, Mey-Tal & Levinson, 1998).

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Procrastinators often undermine the importance of time and overall time required to complete a task, thus having a bad time management as a result (Schouwenburg, 1995; Milgram, Marshevsky & Sadeh, 1995; Burt & Kemp, 1994).

Procrastinating students tend to push tasks intended to be completed earlier on, towards the last minute before the deadline stipulated (Lay & Burns, 1991; Pychyl, Morin & Salmon, 2000). Ferrari (2001) suggested that when these procrastinators were under pressure of an impending deadline, which was considered initially boring and trivial to start with, the procrastinators will become infused with sense of urgency; fight or flight response, increased their arousal level and pressurise them to finish off their task on hand.

Thus, regardless of timeframe and deadlines, procrastinating students were shown to gravitate more towards accomplishment of non-academic tasks than academic ones. Also, tasks that require more effortful thinking and individual's skills are likely to be procrastinated early in that semester (Ferrari & Scher, 2000; Rothblum et al., 1986; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Silver (1974) suggested that the processes during the initial stages of a project or in the academic setting; assignments particularly are more aversive as there was higher tendency of important decision making such as topic selection and also structuring of the project skeleton was required at this stage. Procrastinating students generally engage in pleasant and desirable activities earlier in the day and postponing tasks that more resource demanding and effortful in nature later in the evening and night (Ferrari, Harriott, Evans, Lecik-Michna & Wenger, 1997).

Thus, as shown in the literature reviewed above, the principal investigator found that James seems to exhibit such traits and it has been happening in the past few trimesters; placing academic task later in the day and when the deadlines are looming, James will then draw his willpower to complete his assignments till the last minute. However, this will always come at an expense of having the sleep time, which drains James mentally out and physically the next following day. Yet, till the commencement of this project, it seems like the above maladaptive strategy was the veritable routine for academic related tasks. This was because it was shown that academic procrastinators tend to remember more instances where assignments were pulled off successfully during the last minute than non-procrastinators and thus using this maladaptive technique in future endeavours (Ferrari et al., 1995). The investigator also found that bad time management was also exhibited in James as he tend to place other activities such as leisure and social activities as a priority instead of academic tasks.

Gollwitzer (1999) developed implementation intentions in order to bridge the link between implementations and intentions, essentially effectively translating thoughts into actions. Owens and colleagues (2008) suggest that this was done by augmenting the goal intentions by adding specifications to when and where to have the behaviour in mind was to be performed. In addition, it has been proven so that by forming an intention to implement a plan of action would result in stronger likelihood for this course of action to follow through and become successful (Owens, Bowman & Dill, 2008).

In the Premack principle, Premack (1965) looked at reinforcements in terms of responses and not as a form of stimuli. The behaviour serves as a  
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reinforcer if it was more likely than the instrumental response. Thus, a higher probability response will serve as a reinforcer for the lower probability response. It was shown that this theory was widely used in behaviour modification settings as it was highly successful treating procrastination in educational settings like in school (Ferrari et al., 1995).

The investigator found that James likes to accompany his girlfriend in online gaming where they always enjoy their special bonding moments online, where he will also interact with his girlfriend whose current pursuing the degree in overseas. In accordance to the Premack Principle, the higher probable activity/behaviour could be the engage in online gaming every night with his love one. The lower probable behaviour, as explored earlier on, was that the delaying in doing academic tasks towards the end of the day and keeping up with deadlines till the last minute. Thus, the investigator suggested that online gaming would in forces James to re-prioritise and make time for his girlfriend at night despite how busy James was.

This project was to validate the above mentioned theories hold truth and generalising theories successfully into this behaviour modification project. The goal in mind for this project is to be able to finish the 2 assignments which were a business module presentation by Week 3 of SP53'2012 and an essay by the Week 6 of SP53'2012 before the deadlines. However, unlike previous few trimesters when James was enrolled in, this few assignments has to be systematically done over a stipulated time frame to reduce procrastination which causes the delay in tasks till late at night.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

James being the only participant while his girlfriend served as reinforcer in this project.

### **Materials**

The participants have access to their individual computer with webcam which has their favourite game pre-installed. For James, a laptop with webcam was being use. As for James's girlfriend, she uses the computer in an Internet cafe in her neighbourhood. Participant are to be logged onto the game as per arranged every night. Each night number of hours spent on gaming was recorded. In addition, the time that James completed the agenda for the day was also being recorded. The agenda was daily tasks that need to be done systematically to the built-up of an essay or presentation portion.

### **Procedure**

A brief summary of roles that has to be play between James and the reinforcer (James's girlfriend) was being explained clearly before the project was implemented. Once, the agenda set for the day has been fulfilled by James, the reinforcer (James's girlfriend) will meet James online and they will begin play and interacting in the game. This project lasted for 6 week, Monday to Friday excluding weekends as time allocated for weekends was classified as personal time for the both participants as both of them pursue their own non-academic activities such as leisure and family. Hence, to be more precise, from 9pm to 12 midnight would be the stipulated time for this

“reinforcing” act. After the session, they would then retire to bed for the day. This would promote sleep onset and thus eliminate night-time rushing of assignments.

The high probable behaviour would then reinforce the act of less procrastination during the day as the devoted time was set. As low probable behaviour, the theory of Implementation Intention was being used onto scheduling task allocation. For the first 3 weeks of the trimester, James had to complete the presentation project. For the 1st week, the agenda for the week was to finish up reading up on the topics at hand. In this case, it was ‘interactive marketing’. Reading up was segregated into planning out definition, body and conclusions. Primarily an overall understanding was needed for the 1st week. The 2nd week was to find the relevant contents for the presentation. In this case, no restriction was placed to which one had to be done first and the duration needed for each part. The 3rd and final week was consolidation of the assignment. This was segregated into 2 segments. The first 2 days were spent on writing up for the presentation in point form, the next 2 days were formally written into a Word document and finally the last day was proof-reading and correcting the errors.

As for the following assignment, it was the essay, in which ‘The white paper’ was the key theme, an APA formatted document with an individual effort. For the 1st week, the task was to read up on the topic. For the 2nd week, literature gathering was the task at hand, discerning the ones needed. As for 3rd and final week, the first 2 days were to write down all the points highlighted in the literature found. Then next 2 days were making the essay’s flow sensible and then critically evaluating the points written in the <https://assignbuster.com/personal-behaviour-project-academic-procrastination/>

essay. And as for final day, it was to proof-read and includes references at the back.

For all these activities planned for each day, James had to finish the daily agenda before 9pm whereby it was the time for the online gaming. Hence, once each daily agenda was achieved, James will notify his girl to give the confirmatory answer whether or not the agenda was done. Not being able to finish the daily agenda by the stipulated deadline would not incur punishment but would result in less time to engage in the enjoyable and highly probable behaviour.

The time log was written down every day and as such, the results section tabulates the hours spent on the online gaming activity (high probable behaviour) and the time of completion for daily activity (low probable activity).

## **Results**

The results are shown in the tables as be illustrated. The result reported that the week where he need to do reading for the presentation in the first week of the day, James had 2.5 hours of gaming time with his girlfriend while the rest of the days of the week are 2 hours each on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday as show in table 1. The result for the second week which he supposed to do sourcing of article and journal with planning , James had 2 hours daily of gaming time with his girlfriend while on Friday he have 2.5 hours of gaming time as show in table 2. As for third week, the final week of the presentation preparation week where he need to consolidated and wrap up the whole presentation assignment, James had 2 hours of



gaming time on first two days of the week where rest of the week he had 2.5 hours of gaming time with his girlfriend as show in table 3.

Lastly, in the week of essay preparation week, the first week where he need to do reading up of topic he had have 2.5 hours of gaming time daily while on the Friday he had a total full 3 hours of gaming time with his girlfriend as showed in table 4. While in the second week which he supposed to do sourcing of article and journal with planning for his essay, James had all the fully 3 hours of gaming time daily with this girlfriend while on the Thursday and Friday he had only 2.5 hours as show in table 5. As for third week, the final week of the essay preparation week where he need to consolidated and wrap up the whole presentation assignment, James had all the fully 3 hours of gaming time daily with this girlfriend while on the Friday he had only 2.5 hours of gaming time as show in table 6.

## **Discussion**

The above results collected from the 6 week of project indicate that the project modification was a success as the hypothesis was held true for most of the part in this modification project. For the first 2 weeks, the results above showed that procrastination was still at hand and the higher probable behaviour did little to enhance the lower probable behaviour. It was suggested that this could probably be due to the confounding fact of James not used to this schedule as he need to make academic task as his day to day priority. Moreover it was also suggested that James was too used to his old habits of procrastinating and the delay in academic task. However, in week 3, improvements were highly noticeable as James managed to be only

half an hour late consecutively in three days of a row and he had 2.5 hours of online gaming time with his girlfriend online as showed in table 3.

At the end of the 1st assignment, which is the presentation, it was observed that there was remarkable improvement in compared with the baseline. James was no longer pushing academic tasks toward the night and he did manage to get better sleep, more sleep as well; James also noticed the tangible benefits did not arise yet as towards the end of the presentation. He realised that since the workload was divided, he was not over-taxed from the start as somehow the benefits are not really obvious at the stage.

The time management was tighter and meeting up earlier was evidently seen during the 2nd assignment. It was during week 5 and 6 when James had actually met the deadline and was having the full session of the whole 3 hours online gaming with his girlfriend. Thus the hypothesis was spot on whereby the reinforcing high probable behaviour did strengthen the lower probable behaviour. With an elevated behaviour as more day-time allocation for academic task, it seemed that it did also strengthen the high probable behaviour by wanting to have the full 3 hour online gaming experience with his girlfriend.

However, it was during the last day of testing whereby an anomaly happened. It was the day before submission of the essay where James had to do proof read and add in the reference list. James was once again affected by procrastination. It seemed like he has underestimated the time needed to place the references and proof reading of the essay.

For this project itself, there were a few factors that somehow mediate the effects of Premack's Principle and Implementation Intention theory.

Foremost, with every time of the online gaming session, James's girlfriend would check on his progress each day. She would evaluate the situation, giving feedback on how he should improve and also give encouragements when needed which suggest him to work hard on doing his assigned task to obtain earlier meet-up timing. In addition, she also reprimanded him on days which he fumble and threatened not to give him the next day's session by not meeting him for online gaming the next day. Thus, these factors greatly mediated the need for successful attempts for the daily agenda to be fulfilled.

As such, this leads to the question of whether or not such behaviour is caused by the fact that they are in a relationship, to be precise, in the "honeymoon" phase of the relationship. They only just dated less than a year and thus they are not "used" to each other and due to the fact James does not see her every time, such online meeting in game experience was precious. Hence it begs down to the question if it was not for the online meeting in game, there would not be reinforcement at all. Moreover, this gaming session would not persist for a long time as it is time-consuming and high expenditure on her side. In addition, without this relationship, would this context for Premack Principle be aptly applicable? She might leave this relationship and thus the high probable behaviour is thus dubious.

As for limitations for this project, it seemed time as always is a factor. The short period of testing the hypothesis does not reflect longitudinal credibility and whether or not procrastination is eliminated at best. Procrastination in <https://assignbuster.com/personal-behaviour-project-academic-procrastination/>

itself is a complex behaviour involving various constructs that shed light into what causes this phenomenon. Thus, this project undermines the complexity by testing only one component which time management only. Inclusion or testing other constructs would be optimal as well.

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