

# How to Use The Now Habit to End Student Procrastination

By Dustin Le

The Now Habit is a book written by Neil Fiore, Ph.D., who is a licensed psychologist, author, and former president of the Northern California Society of Clinical Hypnosis, which explores in depth a topic that teachers are far too familiar with: procrastination. In the book, the author goes into methods that professionals and students alike can use to increase their productivity, stop putting things off, and (the cherry on top) enjoy more guilt-free leisure time.

This article goes into five ways teachers can help their students reduce stress by using the methods learned from The Now Habit to remove procrastination from their vernacular. Show your students how to combine these methods with awesome goal setting skills (the Reverse Engineering Method is a good one) to create the consummate student.



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## Strategy #1: Fill Up Your Unschedule

One of the most important and unconventional techniques that the author introduces to the world is a concept he calls the Unschedule. The Unschedule is a tool that will help your students plan all 24 hours of their day.

Normally when setting goals, people first enter their deadlines, appointments, chores, and other required arrangements into their personal planners. After their planner is filled up, they fill up the gaps with fun activities for themselves.

According to Fiore, the traditional method has it all backwards.

Why? Because when people schedule unpleasant “work” tasks first, the priority is the work, not the fun. In order to correctly manipulate human nature using psychology, it is much more effective to start with the fun. When flipped around, this blankets the week in positivity, a theme that states: My happiness and well-being are more important than

work. By rewarding ourselves before we plan the work tasks, we are [paying ourselves first](#).

What are some fun tasks? Here are some examples a student might add to their daily list:

- Exercise
- Hang out with friends
- Watch a movie
- Play board games
- Play basketball
- Travel

In addition to the fun tasks, the Unschedule should also include pre-scheduled tasks, such as meals, sleep, doctor's appointments, and showers. After all these tasks have been scheduled, then it is time to fill in the gaps with work.

### **Why Does This Work?**

Fun trumps work in most people's eyes. By scheduling fun activities before anything else, this does two things:

1. **Reward-Based Thinking:** First, it gives students a reward to look forward to for the week. This, combined with the consequences of not doing work or not going to school, means that both negative and positive reinforcement are used in conjunction with one another. According to [this study](#) associated with the National Institute of Mental Health, this combination of reinforcements increases the chances of compliance.
2. **Fun Comes First:** Second, as mentioned above, by putting fun activities first, your students will send a subliminal message to themselves that their enjoyment in life is just as important as the work they have to do. They tell themselves subconsciously that they are allowed to have fun and do it guilt-free.

### **Strategy #2: The Work of Worry**

Sometimes, worrying can be helpful, as it helps us prevent screw-ups wherever we are. But when worrying becomes a debilitating habit instead of a productive one, there needs to be some type of change.

This is where the work of worrying comes in.

When students notice themselves worrying about a particular task, such as starting to even do the task in the first place, it is time to write a plan. This plan consists of asking six important questions.

1. **What is the worst that could happen?** It is important for your students to acknowledge the very bottom, as oftentimes probing a worry more deeply will reveal how little of a concern it should be. It is also important to acknowledge that there is never true failure, only a new starting point.
2. **What would I do if the worst really happened?** In this step, have your students make a plan of action that addresses the worst-case scenario. Some steps to consider are:
  - a. Where can I go to get help?
  - b. What would I do to cope?
  - c. What would I do after that?
3. **How would I lessen the pain and get on with as much happiness as possible if the worst did occur?** This step addresses the forward steps your students would take to get into a happy place as soon as possible.
4. **What alternatives would I have?** Understanding the other options that students have creates a sense of safety. It's important to know that there is more than one route that you can take. Life is not perfect.

**5. What can I do now to lessen the probability of this dreaded event occurring?** Now we move away from the hypothetical situations and address the problem itself. This includes a list of small actions students can take that will get rid of worrying and snowball into bigger actions.

**6. Is there anything I can do now to increase my chances of achieving my goal?** After addressing the prevention of the worst-case scenario, it is finally time for students to consider the steps to take that will help them move toward their goals.

Using this exercise, students will find that quickly answering these questions will help them build more and more confidence as they move from one question to the next. By the last step, they have addressed all the possible negative events, how to prevent them, and how to move forward.



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### **Strategy #3: Use 30-minute Sprints**

Oftentimes when starting a new project, the overall venture is overwhelming. It is a mountain to climb and you are at the bottom looking up. Fiore address this stressful factor with the idea of the 30-minute session. I call it a sprint because it is a strong, quick burst of highly focused work.

Essentially, the idea is to adapt a mentality of “constantly starting,” rather than focusing on the end result. This moves your focus from the big scary project and breaks it down into more manageable steps — what you can do to get going every day, or even every

hour. By shifting your focus, you lessen the stress of the task. Combining this with the Unschedule technique helps tremendously.

Very simply, when starting a project, you must limit yourself to 30 minutes of quality, focused work time. Fiore strongly emphasizes the importance of guilt-free play, and thus, you are not allowed to work over that 30 minutes. Some people do a 30/30 split, wherein they work for 30 minutes and break for 30 minutes. I personally find this break to be far too long and inefficient, as it slows down the momentum gained from the 30-minute session of work. Instead, I and many other students prefer the Pomodoro Method ([I wrote about it here](#)). The only difference is that the pomodoro method employs a shorter break.

### **Conclusion**

Based on psychological principles of human behavior, these strategies are designed to be easy and make sense to the chronic procrastinator. When used together, these three techniques will help your students conquer their procrastination and build good habits that will last a lifetime.

Source; <http://www.edudemic.com/destroy-student-procrastination/>