

Bribery: The Key to Literary Success

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WR 121Z

Procrastination is key. That is, procrastination is the key cause of my personal stress cycle that's accompanied almost every writing project I've completed in the past nineteen years. To give some perspective those nineteen years included approximately fourteen writing courses, and across all fourteen or so, the cycle has remained consistent. The assignment is given, the timeline is set, my ideas start swirling, "this will be a breeze," I think. Wrong. I am wrong. Every. Single. Time. Days pass and I forget about the assignment. Weeks pass and I start to remember only because an alarm bell starts dully clanging in my ears. Days, or occasionally hours, before the due date arrives a tsunami siren (which, if you're unfamiliar, sounds like a cow mooing) begins a non-stop serenade in my head. Finally, with the weight of an elephant perched on my adrenal glands, I begin frantically writing. The product is usually less than ideal and is more than a little disappointing, especially when I think back to my grandiose ideas I conjured when the assignment was first announced. This has been my process for as long as I remember, and while the people in Harvard's Continuing Education Department decided first in 2016 that there may be some lurking benefit to procrastination, I am simply not satisfied with my process (Harvard Division of Continuing Education, 2024). Of course, there have been a few noticeable exceptions that have undoubtedly proven the rule. I have occasionally, ever so rarely, written my

initial ideas in an easily accessible location and returned to them promptly, even writing a first draft before the 24-hour countdown begins. Impressive you say? Why thank you, I agree.

Now upon reflection, these shining moments of executive, literary accomplishment have one common defining occurrence. Bribery. That's right I bribe myself. I am not ashamed to admit it. Whether it's with a "sweet treat" as my baby niece would say, a screamo jam sesh, five minutes to read a trash romance novel, a luxurious bath with one of those fancy yet pungent bath bombs, or honestly literally anything I covet, a bribe gets the job done. I can't exactly pinpoint why this method is so enticing to me, but I'm of the mind that this is a great habit I should put much effort into developing. Perhaps it has something to do with spoiling myself silly for completing mundane tasks. It could be that these little rewards feel like prizes earned on some mysterious and magical journey. Might be some other reason. A real mystery for the ages, if you ask me. Regardless of my personal enjoyment, this motivational method is actually supported by science. No seriously. Offering and then providing a reward once a task is completed gives the brain a little shot of dopamine (Watson, 2024). This hormonal boost reinforces the behavior, making a repeat performance a not-so-nauseating possibility. Now this reward doesn't necessarily have to be the absolute most spectacular thing to have ever existed in the history of existence for this to work. In order for your brain to interpret it as a reward it simply needs to be more desirable than the task it takes to earn it. These rewards don't necessarily have to be given after every single accomplishment for this method to work either. Actually, it is more beneficial if the reward is distributed at random intervals. This is a classic behaviorism technique

studied and used in psychology to train certain behaviors. The more the rewards are given in an intermittent fashion, the higher the desirability to repeat the task becomes, as the potential for a reward looms. Trust me, I know what I'm talking about. I mean I am a psych major after all and the four psych classes I have under my belt make me a trustworthy expert on all things psych-related. Right? Just kidding, I double checked with Harvard.

Through my current method (AKA wait till the last moment, have a breakdown, produce mediocre material, rinse, and repeat), motivation has come through the fear of the negative consequences I'll face if I don't complete the assignment on time. While this method delivered me to valedictorian status at my high school, the journey itself was not so enjoyable. This new strategy would flip the script, so to speak, transforming my fear of failure into anticipation of pleasure. Not only would this method improve my mental health, which to be honest is beneficial enough, but it would also substantially improve my writing. Now it may be a bit of a leap but stick with me here. I'm thinking that if I take my time brainstorming, drafting, and revising all before the due date arrives, my finished product will most likely be better than the slapdash, Red-Bull-induced concoctions that are the result of my chronic (borderline pathological) procrastination. Revolutionary idea, right? I wonder what my life would have been like if I had discovered the power of eating a York Peppermint Patty after writing my introduction at an earlier point in my education. Oh, how I wish someone had told me sooner that procrastination is not the most effective way to go about writing a quality paper (approximately fourteen writing instructors across two continents are currently shaking their heads in disgust). But no matter, it is not too late for me to begin my transformative

journey from procrastination caterpillar to preparation butterfly. No longer will an essay haunt me like a reaper, sharpening its blade with an eerie screech, just waiting for that countdown to begin and for me to play the part of Scared Girl #3 in a horror film, running screaming about the haunted recesses of my mind and tripping and falling down a flight of stairs before finally starting my outline.

References

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Abstract: “Bribery: The Key to Literary Success” is a comical, conversational journey from one human to another about the tips, tricks, and trials of motivating to complete a writing assignment before the last minute. This piece, and the subsequent wisdom it tries to impart, comes from a lifetime battle with procrastination and a recent diagnosis of ADHD.

Bio English: Danielle is a born and raised Oregonian whose love of reading began with her discovery of Twilight at ten years old. She is an Auntie to two precious little humans and two gigantic fluffy dogs, a Licensed Massage Therapist (LMT), and a full-time student at WOU, majoring in Psychology and minoring in Biology. She loves to paint, draw, read novels, write and, like any self-respecting Oregonian, she loves to be outside.

Bio Español: Danielle creció en Oregon y empezó a amar los libros cuando leí “Twilight” cuando tenía diez años. Es tía de dos niñas tan chiquitas y dos perritos gigantes, es una terapeuta de masajes, y una estudiante de WOU. Su especialización es de psicología y su especialización secundaria es de biología. Le encanta pintar, dibujar, leer, y escribir. También le encanta estar fuera de casa como cualquier Oregonian.

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