How to spot procrastination

1. "I work best under pressure, so I'm waiting until I get that adrenaline surge at 3am the night before it's due."
2. "I don't know how to do start this p-set, so I'm waiting until I know how before I do it."
3. "Relax. The world won't end if this doesn't get done."
4. "I waited until the last minute last time and it worked out okay, so why not this time?"
5. "I spend the first 4 hours staring at a blank screen. I might as well do something else for 4 hours and then just start writing after that."
6. "If I work on this, I'll miss out on..."
7. "The thing that caused me to delay was a fluke."
8. "I'm burned out."

*No one gets to the top of Everest by looking at the top, nor do they get there in one climb.*
Climbing Mt. P-SET

Descent: go to office hours; see a tutor; check your work

Final Climb: work more problems

Camp IV: work the next problem or get help

Camp III: work the first problem

Camp II: read or re-read text or notes

Camp I: look over the pset

Base Camp: resting (hiding) in your warm happy procrastination place; plan your ascent.

Climbing Mt. Paperdue

Descent: rewrite, proofread

Final Climb: hone your thesis, develop ideas

Camp IV: reorganize and review

Camp III: add 2 sentences to each cleaned-up sentence that develops idea

Camp II: organize and clean up the sentences

Camp I: transcribe your notes

Base Camp: waiting for clarity and inspiration in your happy procrastination place
Procrastination: What’s Really Going On (and some Antidotes)

**Insecurity**
- “what if I can’t do it”
- may feel inadequate to perform at the level you expect of yourself, or that others expect of you (real or imagined)
- last time I tried it didn’t go well
- last time I tried it I did well but that was only luck
- I didn’t understand the lecture so there’s no way I can start the problem set
- what if I don’t look smart (difficulty/effort suggests I’m not smart)
- task is difficult so I must be doing it wrong

ANTIDOTE: mindset

**Too much going on**
- There’s so much on your plate you don’t know where to begin, so you don’t begin at all
- don’t manage time well
- don’t plan
- underestimate how long things take
- can’t get off the merry-go-round
- putting it off until you feel calmer (weekend, after finals, etc.)

ANTIDOTE: make a plan

**Rebellion**
- In the absence of parents and teachers telling you what to do, sometimes you rebel anyway
- Sometimes rebellion indicates motivation issues (i.e. my father wants me to be an engineer but I want to be a philosopher) and a limited task balloons to epic proportions: doing this p-set doesn’t mean I have to be an engineer

ANTIDOTE: make it meaningful

**Self-sabotage**
- can be a reaction to stereotype threat
- blaming a failure on the fact that you procrastinated instead of lack of skill

ANTIDOTE: accurate assessment

**Head-in-the-sand**
- a method of coping with day-to-day pressures and experiences

ANTIDOTE: parse and segment

**Low Frustration Tolerance**
- perfectionism – avoiding the frustration and energy drain of picking apart your own work
- writing is re-writing, not failure to have done it right the first time

ANTIDOTE: delay gratification