How to Overcome Procrastination

Putting off something until later is a habit which can be overcome. Like any other harmful behavior pattern, it takes time and persistence to change, but it can be done.

1. Clarify Your Goals:
   - Be sure the task you think you should do is going to help you reach one of your goals. If not, then you should reevaluate your tasks.
   - Make a list of your goals. Post these goals on 3x5 cards so that you can see them often—in your notebook, on your mirror, beside your bed, on the refrigerator, etc.

2. Manage Your Time Effectively:
   - Break up your goal(s) into small steps. Then write out the list of steps so that you can clearly see what you need to do.
   - Prioritize your tasks. Write out a schedule for yourself on a daily and weekly basis.
   - Establish a regular time each day to work toward your goal(s).
   - Organize your environment so that it's conducive to working or move yourself to a better environment.
   - Plan extra time into your schedule if you still think you will procrastinate.

3. Change Your Attitude:
   - Recognize some harmful attitudes which get in the way of accomplishment. For example, do you feel the world is too difficult and that you can't meet its challenges? Do you feel like a victim of circumstances? Do you think you can't function without the approval of others? Do you always expect perfection from yourself and from others?
   - Learn to value your mistakes as learning experiences.
   - Learn to recognize the games you play such as running away, daydreaming, socializing, sleeping, doing other tasks, etc., to avoid doing a dreaded task. Then call yourself on these avoidance tricks.

4. Change your behavior:
   - Ask your friends for help. If your friends won't help, make new ones. Set up a contract with someone. Make an appointment to study with someone who has good study skills.
   - Work for a specified reward. You might try imposing a penalty if you don't accomplish your goal.
   - Make something you enjoy doing contingent on you first doing the task you've been avoiding. For example, I'll play tennis after reading two chapters.
   - Keep a list of the tasks to be done on a 3x5 card and carry the card with you constantly.
   - Do something on a daily basis—even if it's only 5 minutes. At the end of 5 minutes, try 5 minutes more!
   - Start with the most unpleasant task first.
   - Rehearse mentally. Imagine yourself going through the steps to accomplish a task you are dreading. You will find it easier after practicing several times in your mind.
   - Make sure that the rest of your life is in good shape so that the avoided task is less awful when considering the general good quality of other aspects of your life.

5. Accept Yourself:
   - Give yourself time to change. Try to be patient with yourself.
   - Expect and forgive backsliding.
   - Laugh at yourself when you make mistakes. Being hard on yourself is self-defeating.
   - Give yourself credit and praise for anything you are able to accomplish, no matter how small.