

Goal: To be financially independent, solvent, able to pay bills—through freelance writing career.

Step: To finish writing projects in a timely manner.

Problem behavior: Doing “anything but” writing articles, compulsively; writing other things, hypergraphically; procrastinating until last possible moment (and often beyond).

[Other problem behaviours for later: not exercising, not doing dishes, not using groceries, not maintaining personal hygiene, not doing laundry, not returning calls/emails, not dealing with financial problems (St. Vincent/Indigent Fund), not leaving house—all avoidant behaviours]

ANTECEDENTS [what happens right before problem behaviour?]

BEHAVIOUR

CONSEQUENCES [reinforcers, both negative and positive]

Is the problem behaviour one of:

- excess?
- deficit?
- misplacement?

What are the antecedents of the deficit behaviour [NOT WRITING ARTICLES] in terms of:

thoughts

- this is stupid and repugnant and loathsome
- I don't want to do this
- I don't want to write about fast food/dying, I want to write poems/songs/something else
- I'll just do this other thing for a few minutes and then I'll start
- I'll have to talk to people, I dread interviews
- this is such a waste of my real talent, why can't I get paid for writing more interesting stuff
- Oh God.

emotions

- dread/terror/anxiety [“I'll suck, I'll do a bad job, I can't, it's too hard/big/impossible”]
- guilt [“I should have been working on this hours/days/weeks ago already”]
- shame [“What's wrong with me, everyone else can do this, I'm lazy/stupid/hopeless”]

sensations [bodily]

- sinking in pit of stomach, nausea
- fragile feeling like I'm going to burst into tears just from contemplating it
- racing pulse, shallow breathing
- [eventually] numbness and desire to hide under desk

events [observable, inner or outer]

- outburst of compulsive organizing/sorting behavior [activated avoidance = anxiety = manic]
- just giving up, going to bed, lying on floor [passive avoidance = shame = depressive]

What's happening when you are able to write the articles on time?

- when other people are busy working/writing around me
- when I'm not emotionally overwhelmed, not in emotional conflict with partner
- when I already feel really strong/confident, something has already gone right or I've already received some praise, when I've recently been praised for something else I wrote
- when the deadline has just passed or is really an irrevocable deadline and it's *looming*
- when I read the New Mexican want ads and realize how little I want to do/can do in SF
- when another person walks me through it, even having me talk and then write, sentence by sentence (like Seguin used to help me with movie reviews and I help her with her thesis)

What is the nugget of the problem?

The core dread/terror and shame, which feels surrounded with brittle defenses and tears when I even *touch* on thinking about it. Total panic. And not wanting to look at the way the shame becomes overwhelming and thus provides an out—if I feel so horrible and bad/stupid/useless that I just curl up on the floor and wait to die, then—hey, I'm depressed, so obviously I can't do the assignment. Mom sometimes covering for me in one way, but in another way her and Dad upbraiding me for not being tough enough, being lazy, not having enough willpower, not realistic, not willing to face the facts, this is just how it is, when I was in school I never had an incomplete, I wish all of us could just travel around and not have to work" &c. Professors letting me get away with lateness because of the good excuses and the high quality of the work but the punishment in the meantime was self-induced, just cringing when I'd think about the incomplete. And now it's not a question of finagling professors, it's a question of *getting paid*. I hate thinking the thought, my mom and dad were right, because then the consequence feels like (but I know isn't really) well, then they're right about the other stuff too.

What have you tried?

- literally tying myself to my chair
- promising I'd call friends/therapists to check in
- trying to get other people to help me (sometimes successful)
- spending time with other people also working
- trying to buy more time from editors with brilliant excuses
- calling and cancelling the assignment (more brilliant excuses)
- using the (10+2)*5 system and other procrastination hacks
- calling best friend/therapist to vent
- setting a timer
- giving myself rewards
- punishing myself ("you can't leave the house/call your boyfriend/have fun until you finish")
- beating myself up verbally, telling myself what a failure and burden to society I am
- trying to scare myself with want ads and financial ruin
- ignoring it all entirely and hiding under a big pile of coats
- panicking completely and bursting into tears
- feeling so ashamed I hide or curl up on the floor
- suicide

What skills could you use?

cheerleading/talking back to myths, emotion regulation, pleasant events, building positive experiences, Teflon/nonjudgmental mind, one-mindedly, turning the mind, willingness, RA