

Tim Urban: Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator

Tim Urban writes a popular blog called *Wait But Why* that millions of people read every month. You are going to watch his TED Talk, called “Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator,” in which he discusses different types of procrastination. According to Tim, there are two types of people: the first type are rational decision-makers, who choose the most efficient way to work towards a deadline. The second type are procrastinators, who get distracted easily and who choose instant gratification instead of planning for the future. Tim explains how avoiding long-term planning can lead to stress, all-nighters, and poor quality work. He also explains that everybody procrastinates on some things, and that we should all be careful about getting distracted from our most important goals.

Tim Urban's idea worth spreading is that we're all procrastinators, and that we should think harder about what we're really procrastinating on before we run out of time.

Before You Watch**Activity 1**

Activity aim: To build background knowledge about procrastination.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

Worksheet: Before You Watch

- Show students the sentences and have them read them aloud.
- Point out that the activity directions state that procrastination is a disadvantage to completing tasks.
- Have students complete the activity. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Have students compare their responses in pairs.
- Check answers by reading the sentences aloud as a class.

Answers

avoids; delay

Activity 2

Activity aim: To build background knowledge about procrastination.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

- Ask for a volunteer to describe procrastination based on the previous activity.
- Ask students to think about things that a procrastinator would do or say. You can write these on the board or have students make a record of them.
- Show students the sentences and have them choose their responses.

- Go through the answers as a class.

Answers

I waited all week to do the homework, and then did it right before class.

I know I need to clean the house, but I'm watching videos instead.

I haven't had a dentist appointment in three years. Maybe I'll do it next year.

Extension

- Ask students to write three unique sentences: two should be statements a non-procrastinator would make, and one should be a statement a procrastinator would say.
- Have students exchange their sentences with a partner, who will try to identify the procrastinator's statement.

Activity 3

Activity aim: To build background knowledge about procrastination.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

- Show students the sentences and elicit whether they are related to home, school, or work.
- Explain that some items may have multiple responses. Discuss why this is possible.
- Have students discuss in pairs which setting (home / school / work) is most conducive to procrastinating.
- Elicit responses from students and have them explain their reasons.
- Have a class vote to see in which area most students are likely to procrastinate.

Answers

Answers will vary. Students may respond as follows:

1. work/school; 2. school; 3. home; 4. home; 5. school/work

Extension

- Ask students to choose the statement they most identify with; share their answers in small groups. Have groups tell the class if there are more procrastinators or non-procrastinators in their group.
- Have students form groups based on which area they procrastinate in most. Ask groups to work together to write two more examples of things procrastinators might say.

Watch

As students are guided to the correct answers through the in-app feedback, it is not necessary to review each question in the app. However, briefly reviewing any questions students have about individual items, or reviewing one or two of the activities would be appropriate. If class time is restricted, this option could be a way of checking comprehension and vocabulary in lieu of doing the in-class activities. Another suggestion to open the in-class discussion section would be to take a poll of students' answers to the first and last activities, which indicate their personal opinions and attitudes.

After You Watch

Comprehension: Activity

Activity aim: To ensure learners have comprehended specific information from the talk.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

Worksheet: Comprehension

- Have students form small groups. Ask them to summarize the talk as best they can.
- Display the sentences and have students read through them. Ask students what they notice about the sentences; elicit that they all contain false information.
- Instruct groups to rewrite the sentences so that they contain true information, based on the talk. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Have students get together in pairs and compare their sentences.
- Go through answers as a class. Call on one student from each group to provide an answer until all items have been reviewed.

Answers

1. In college, Tim made a plan for writing a 90-page paper, but he didn't follow it.
2. Tim procrastinated when he was younger, and he also does now.
3. The main difference between procrastinators and non-procrastinators is that procrastinators' brains have an Instant Gratification Monkey.
4. The Panic Monster usually shows up just before a deadline.
5. When Tim wrote a blog about procrastination, thousands of people responded to say they have the same problem.
6. There are two kinds of procrastination, according to Tim.

Extension

- Ask students to compare their answers to the ones provided, and explain how they are similar or different.

Vocabulary: Activity 1

Activity aim: To ensure learners are familiar with key vocabulary.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 2 minutes

Worksheet: Vocabulary 1

- Divide the class into pairs and designate a Procrastinator and Non-procrastinator in each pair. Tell students to identify the terms that are associated with their label.
- Visit each pair eliciting one term at a time until the columns are complete. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.

Learn English with TED Talks (Intermediate)

Lesson Plan

- Have students explain any incorrect answers by relating to what Tim Urban discussed in his TED Talk.

Answers

Procrastinator

distracted
instant gratification
miss a deadline
pull an all-nighter

Non-procrastinator

complete long-term goals
complete short-term goals
make rational decisions

Extension

- In small groups, have students play a guessing game using the terms from this activity. Students take turns describing a term, but without using any of the given words. The other group members try to guess the term.

Vocabulary: Activity 2

Activity aim: To ensure learners are familiar with key vocabulary.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 4 minutes

Worksheet: Vocabulary 2

- Show students the word list and make sure that they understand all key vocabulary. If some students are unsure of their meanings, ask for volunteers to provide definitions.
- Have students complete the paragraph individually. Set a time limit of two minutes. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Have students compare their responses in pairs.
- Call on a student to read aloud the completed paragraph.

Answers

procrastination; distractions; procrastinator; Instant Gratification; deadline; Rational Decision Maker; all-nighter

Grammar: Activity 1

Activity aim: To consolidate learners' existing knowledge of relative pronouns and relative clauses.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

- Play the clip and ask students to pay attention to the bolded words.
- Ask students to identify what *which* and *who* refer to. Ask one or two students to support their answers with specific information from the excerpt. (*Which* refers to a thing: "You have to keep well-slept, well-fed and propagating into the next generation." *Who* refers to a person: "Rational Decision-Maker.")
- Ask students to write out the sentences that contain the relative pronouns.
- Have them work in pairs to determine whether these clauses contain essential or additional information. Point out that if the additional information is left out, the key meaning of the sentence does not change.

Answers

Which refers to a thing; *who* refers to a person. They provide additional information.

Grammar: Activity 2

Activity aim: To ensure learners comprehend relative pronouns and relative clauses.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 4 minutes

- Read through the information as a class.
- Provide additional examples of defining relative clauses, such as: *We want to live in a country where it's warm all year.* or *They have a daughter who is a chemist.*
- Provide additional examples of non-defining relative clauses, such as: *Last year he bought a new bicycle, which he doesn't like now.* or *My boss, who is a good manager, has an office on the third floor.*
- Emphasize that with non-defining relative clauses, the additional information can be left out without changing the overall meaning of the sentence.
- Point out the last example and call on a student to read it aloud. Then ask the student to repeat it without the non-defining relative clause (*which is very large*).
- Ask for another volunteer to explain how non-defining relative clauses are marked in written sentences (they are set off with commas).

Extension

- Ask students to work in pairs and write new sentences using the relative pronouns given. They can exchange papers with another pair of students and identify each sentence as containing a defining or non-defining relative clause.

Grammar: Activity 3

Activity aim: To ensure learners comprehend relative pronouns.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 3 minutes

Worksheet: Grammar 3

- Tell students to quickly read through the conversation and make note of any words they don't understand. Work as a class to clarify any unknown words.
- Have students complete the conversation. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Check answers by having two students read the completed dialogue aloud.
- Ask students to identify the procrastinator (B) and the non-procrastinator (A). Ask them which person they identify with more.

Answers

when; which; that; who; where

Extension

- Ask students to work in pairs to write another conversation about procrastination using the same pronouns. Have a few pairs act out their conversations for the class.

Grammar: Activity 4

Activity aim: To ensure learners comprehend relative pronouns and relative clauses.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

Worksheet: Grammar 4

- Have students unscramble the words to make correct sentences. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Have them exchange papers with a partner to check their work.
- There is more than one way to make grammatically correct sentences, but students should form sentences that contain defining and non-defining relative clauses.
- Check answers by calling on students to read out the answers.

Answers

1. A thesis is a long paper that students write.
2. Procrastinators are people who delay tasks.
3. Tim talks about a time when he procrastinated.
4. The dark playground is a place where unearned fun happens.

5. The blue zone is a place where important things happen.

Extension

- Ask students to write a few additional scrambled sentences using relative clauses. Have them exchange papers with a classmate's and complete the activity.

Grammar: Activity 5

Activity aim: To ensure learners comprehend relative pronouns and relative clauses.

Class length: 90 minutes

Pacing: 6 minutes

- If you have not played this game before, take a moment to explain the rules and how to play, which follow.
- How to play: divide into two teams, X and O. Take turns letting a team member choose a square. The student then has ten seconds to write a correct sentence using the relative pronoun provided, and five seconds to accept feedback from their own team. If the sentence is correct, the team marks the square with their letter. If the sentence is NOT correct, the opposing team has a chance to make a sentence and take the square.
- The winning team is the first to get three letters in a row (either horizontally, vertically, or diagonally).

Answers

Answers will vary.

Extension

- If you would like to collect written practice, request that ALL students write a sentence for each of the spaces as they play game live. This has the added benefit of ensuring that all students practice actively even if one team wins quickly.

Speaking: Activity 1

Activity aim: To ensure learners are able to pause appropriately with relative clauses.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 2 minutes

- Write sentences on the board that contain defining relative clauses and non-defining relative clauses. For example: *We have a neighbor who speaks three languages.* and *Our neighbor, who is from Russia, speaks three languages.*
- Read the sentences aloud and ask students which one contains pauses.

Learn English with TED Talks (Intermediate)

Lesson Plan

- Elicit from students that these pauses occur before and after the clause that provides additional information.
- Have students listen and repeat the sentences.
- Play the audio a second time and have students identify the pauses.

Extension

- Play the audio again and instruct students write out the sentences. Have them work in pairs to mark the defining and non-defining relative clauses.
- Have students write sentences that are true for them, using relative clauses.

Discussion: Activity 1

Activity aim: To allow learners to have further discussions about procrastination using terminology from the TED Talk.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 6 minutes

- Review the metaphors from the TED Talk. Ask for volunteers to describe the role of each character.
- Divide the class into groups of three or four and have students share their procrastination stories using the metaphors.
- Have each group choose one story to share with the class. Then have other group members explain why they chose this story to share.

Extension

- Have students vote on who they think they feel is the biggest procrastinator in the class.
- Ask them to provide reasons why one person deserves the title more than another person.

Discussion: Activity 2

Activity aim: To allow learners to have discussions around short and long-term goals and to prepare them to discuss long-term goals.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 2 minutes

- Ask for volunteers to define short-term and long-term goals. Ask other students to give examples of each. Write the examples on the board under the headings *Short-term goals* and *Long-term goals*.
- Have pairs look at the list of goals and answer the questions.

- Check answers as a class. Ask students to look again at the list of examples you wrote on the board and ask if there are any similarities.

Answers

They are long-term goals.

Discussion: Activity 3

Activity aim: To allow learners to discuss long-term goals they may have.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 10 minutes

- Ask students to think about the long-term goals they discussed in the previous activity. Have students take a vote to choose one of the goals.
- Draw a circle on the board and write the goal inside. Ask students to work in pairs and give them two minutes to discuss ways they could stay motivated to achieve this goal.
- Call on pairs to give their answers; write them around the circle on the board.
- Have pairs choose another goal, or assign the goals evenly among the class. Set a time limit of five or six minutes. Ask them to write detailed, specific plans for achieving their goals.
- Do not elicit the strategies that students have outlined at this point.

Answers

Answers will vary.

Discussion: Activity 4

Activity aim: To allow learners to discuss long-term goals they may have.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 12 minutes

- Have pairs present their two-year plans to the class. As pairs present their plans, write any common steps on the board.
- Supply students with three stickers or sticky notes and ask them to place the stickers on the methods that they think will be most successful.
- As a class, discuss the most successful methods of motivation.

Answers

Answers will vary.

Project: Activity

Activity aim: To allow learners to think deeper about procrastination in their own lives and produce an extended piece of writing which consolidates their ideas.

Class length: 90 minutes

Pacing: Outside class time

Worksheet: Project

- Display the life calendar. Ask students if they can remember from the TED Talk what it is.
- Model calculating and finding the approximate location of the box that represents a person right now, using your own information.
- Tell students to choose one long-term goal in their own life.
- Have students review the methods of motivation they discussed earlier, and identify ones that might help them achieve their goal(s).
- Encourage students to provide specific steps and details for how they will accomplish their long-term goal. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.