How to Achieve Closure

Closure is the positive feeling you get when you finish a task. Lack of closure results in the panicked feeling that you get when you still have a million things to do, and this stress may entice you to give up.

Dividing a task into manageable goals, listing them, and checking them off your list as you complete them helps you obtain closure. For example, suppose your chemistry professor assigns three chapters of reading. If your goal is to read all three chapters, you may feel discouraged if you don’t complete the reading at one time. A more effective way to complete the assignment involves dividing the assignment into smaller goals. To do so, you think of each chapter as a separate goal, or you subdivide the chapters into sections. You experience more success by completing each section or chapter. Even if you fail to complete all three chapters in one sitting, your progress results in feelings of accomplishment.

Unfinished business also results in a lack of closure and procrastination. You may have several tasks with the same deadline. Although changing from one task to another serves as a break, changing tasks too often wastes time. Each time you switch, you lose momentum. You may be unable to change gears fast enough or find yourself out of the mood for study. You may find yourself thinking about the old project when you should be concentrating on the new one. In addition, when you return to the first task, you lose time. This happens because you have to review where you were and what steps are still left to be finished.

Often you solve this problem by determining how much time you have to work. If the time available is short (that is, an hour or less), you need to work on only one task. You alternate tasks when you have more time. Completing one task or a large portion of a task contributes to the feeling of closure.

Sometimes, when working on a long-term project, other tasks take precedence before you can complete it. If this occurs, take time to write a few notes before moving to the new task. The clarity of your thinking or the status of your progress may seem fresh at the time, but you’ll forget what you were doing after awhile. Your notes could include the goal of the task, how far along you are toward its completion, and a list of questions to be answered or objectives to be reached. You need to store references, papers, and other materials for the task together. This provides the organization you need when you return to it.

Finally, update your daily "To Do" list at the end rather than at the beginning of the day. This gives you a sense of accomplishment for the day’s activities and prepares you for a quick start the next day.

Source: Study Methods and Reading Techniques, Rhonda Atkinson and Debbie Longman, West Publishing.