THE UN-SCHEDULE
(for procrastinators)

SCHEDULE FUN?
Instead of scheduling large blocks of time, which tend to be easily put off (e.g. “I can’t do that twenty-hour paper this afternoon. Might as well wait until the weekend.”), the unschedule only schedules free time. Work is recorded only after it is completed. Procrastination is overcome by aiming at specific times for just starting. (Sound impossible? Read on.)

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS SEEM TO OVERPOWER ME
Isolation and concentration make it easier for us to daydream. This can be useful if we’re trying to be creative, but is often distracting, and sometimes disturbing if we’re trying to forget an unhappy event. (One of the most seductive and clever distracting thoughts is, “Why am I having all these distracting thoughts?”) Expect distractions and let them flow through your mind.

WHY WE PROCRASTINATE
If we anticipate a long period of solidarity and punishment, we will usually resist ever starting the task. This is especially true if we add to the task. This is especially true if we add to the task of self-criticism (e.g., “Boy am I lazy and stupid.”) or anticipate catastrophes (e.g., “I’m probably going to flunk out and be totally devastated and unhappy for the rest of my life.”) Ironically enough, we often try to start on difficult tasks by trying to build up our anxiety with such criticism and nightmares of failure. Yet, research and experts of human behavior tell us that we will most frequently do things when we anticipate pleasure (in the near future), especially when there are so many more pleasurable alternatives available. (Given the choice between reading a boring book and eating an ice cream cone, odds are strongly in favor of the ice cream cone, unless we can remind ourselves of the long-term pleasure of getting our degree and avoiding all the anxiety of cramming.)

A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES ...
By aiming at simply starting on difficult tasks (going one stop at a time), we can achieve a sense of accomplishment sooner than if we set big goals with distant rewards. Every half hour or fifteen minutes can be used to get something done, or at least, something organized so that starting is easier for us next time. By setting our sights on sub-goals we have a better chance of success.

WOW! I GOT STARTED!
By recording it (i.e., the time worked) we can see our progress rather than our failure to meet our schedule. By scheduling rewards or alternative activities (e.g., seeing friends, swimming, reading more interesting material) we lessen our sense of deprivation associated with studying and begin to experience work as something which gives us a sense of pride. Allowing us to enjoy our leisure without feeling guilty.