Planning to avoid procrastination: a quick self-inventory (2018, URI AEC)

Think about something you are planning to get done this week that you feel you may procrastinate on. Alternatively, think about something you have procrastinated on in general. Write it down.

Now, write out the answer to this question:

1.) What are the things about this work that are sources of stress for me? In other words, what do I fear or feel uncomfortable about that might be related to the work? List as many as you can think of.

2. Now, look at your list. For each one, ask yourself first whether the fear is realistic — in other words, is it likely to happen as a result of doing the work? If it isn’t likely or is unrealistic, make a line through it (don’t erase it).

3.) If it feels like a legitimate concern (that is, “if I do this work, I will likely start to feel this stress,” ask yourself “What can I do to address that feeling so that I can do the work?” List your responses on a separate sheet.

Try to be specific about this. For example,

• if you are going to become frustrated when you do your math homework because it’s confusing, then consider “how can I make my math homework less confusing?”
• if you think you are going to feel overwhelmed by how much there is to do, ask “how can I break the work up to make it more doable?”
• If you think “I get stressed because I realize I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do”, ask yourself, “how can I get clear on the work at hand so I know where to get started?”

4.) Decide on a next step, based on your responses to numbers two and three. You can either go ahead and start on the next step while you have momentum, or you can plan it as the first thing you need to do as part of your study plan. If you crossed out your procrastination-inducing concerns in number two, spend a moment affirming to yourself that the first step in your study plan is a “go”. If you addressed a concern a legitimate in number three, make your strategic response your first step in studying. The steps you chose in number three are necessary to help you approach the task as something doable. They may need to be done first to raise the likelihood of doing the rest.