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## Neurodiversity and Learning Strengths- Students and Procrastination Andrew Fuller

*'N.T...not today, not tomorrow'*- an Australian Northern Territory saying.

With momentum, you can fly through things. Without it, everything feels like trudging through porridge. It is at those times that we tend to put things off until later or sometimes try to avoid them entirely.

Procrastination has a few major downsides- deadlines & due dates loom larger, bills pile up, unresolved friendship issues take up a lot of our mental space & we lose sleep. Procrastination interferes with learning & diminishes resilience.

To stop procrastinating, we need to kickstart our momentum. To do that, we need to understand what is happening to our brain.

### Converting Neurodiversity into Neuro-advantage

Neurodivergent people may procrastinate because they feel anxious & overwhelmed or just as often, they have lost track of timelines & dates.

Fortunately, we live in a time where devices can remind us of due dates & organisers can schedule events for us. Once we have found a system that works & one we can stick with, it is then a matter of dealing anxiety & overwhelm.

Let's talk about how to help all kids & especially neurodivergent kids, to understand what makes them want to avoid things & sometimes put them off indefinitely.

All young people & especially neurodivergent kids, need to know how their brains learn. This sets all kids up for success in their lives & helps neurodivergent kids understand that difference does not equal disadvantage.

### Meet Rex

The lower, primitive part of our brain contains 80% of our brain cells. Despite this, it is fairly basic & mainly focuses on keeping us alive, safe & comfortable. It doesn't want to do things that seem hard or risky. It is pretty much the same brain that dinosaurs had. Given its similarities let's call that part of our brain, 'Rex' (after Tyrannosaurus Rex\*).



### Meet Albert, Albertina, and Alberta

The smarter, more developed, super-computer part of the brain we could call our pre-frontal cortex, but it is kind of cooler to call it our inner 'Albert' or 'Alberta' or 'Albertina' after Albert Einstein.



Rex works in one way while Albert/Albertina/ Alberta operates in an entirely different way. Albert/Albertina/ Alberta can make plans, stick to schedules & think things through. Rex doesn't like to think too much, doesn't really respond to words but does respond to actions.

If Rex is 'out of sorts' nothing works well. That is why sleep, food & movement all calm Rex.

## How neurodiverse kids procrastinate.

Some neuro-divergent kids are the '*masters of minimalism*' while others are the practitioners of '*just-in-time management*'. Everything is done at the last possible second before it is due or done with as little personal input as possible.

The '*just-in-time managers*' do anything rather than completing what they need to do. This of course, can be incredibly frustrating for parents & teachers. This looks like procrastination but can be an efficient way of completing tasks. There are long periods of what looks like wandering distractibility followed by an intense period of hyperfocus. Once we know this about a neurodivergent kid, we simply need to know their pattern & how to kickstart their hyperfocus without unnecessary drama.

The '*masters of minimalism*' have equated learning with hard work to be avoided. They are more likely to have low levels of dopamine. As a result, they either tend to under-perform or other people make kindly intended but damaging excuses, that result in them never reaching their potential.

## How Parents Can Help

While neurodivergent kids can be wonderful to parent & their quirky, idiosyncratic ways of behaving & thinking can be heart-warming & delightful, there are also times they can be make parents want to tear their hair out.

One of those times is when something *really* needs to be done but they show no signs of doing it. Pep talks & threats of dire consequences don't work. Parents need to develop a process to overcoming procrastination to avoid their own personal anguish & increase their child's chances of success.

Many neurodivergent kids love the stimulation of computer games. Wise parents use this as a reward & inducement if they get tasks done first.

When we start doing something we can do easily, our momentum increases. We get 'on a roll' & can sidestep procrastination.

Complete the analysis of learning strengths at [www.mylearningstrengths.com](http://www.mylearningstrengths.com) & use the free letter to create a conversation about building on the identified strengths. Discuss these with your child's teacher(s). Obtaining the full Personalised Learning Success Plan moves you into action & beyond procrastination.

Let's consider a few ways to utilise different learning strengths to kickstart momentum (a complete discussion would require an entire book, so these are just some starter ideas.)

## Spatial Reasoning

Kids with learning strengths in spatial reasoning often find it easiest to start by thinking in pictures.

### *Calming Rex*

Begin by drawing or sketching out ideas. Create a flow chart, concept map or just doodling your thoughts will get you into action.

### *Activating Albert, Albertina, and Alberta*

Then discuss the linkages between visual concepts adding them to or subtracting to them from the visual map as the discussion progresses.

## Perceptual- Motor Skills

Kids with learning strengths in perceptual-motor skills are usually active people who like doing things.

### *Calming Rex*

Routines & rituals at home & school help these kids to go through the paces of completing a task. Shake off the jitters by doing something active. Say, 'This is the way we do this'. The aim is for them to roll their eyes with boredom (because they have heard you say it a thousand times before) & for the task to be completed with as little drama as possible.

### *Activating Albert, Albertina, and Alberta*

Don't sit around waiting for inspiration. Get moving & get doing. Walk it out, pace it out, step through your main plans.

## Concentration and Memory

Learning strengths in concentration can be a great advantage but they can also be an obstacle. Some neurodivergent kids get so focused on the things that they like doing they forget to complete what they need to get done. One way to use your concentration & memory skills is to work out the main thing that you need to do & then work out the first thing you need to do. Remove all other distractions & just start by doing ten minutes.

### *Calming Rex*

List everything you remember about a particular topic.  
Make a focus map (similar to a dart board with the main idea at the centre).

### *Activating Albert, Albertina, and Alberta*

Short bursts of concentration & activity are going to beat marathons. Use a timer. Aim to stretch concentration eventually to 20 minutes of focused activity.

## Planning and Sequencing

Learning strengths in this area equip kids to develop plans but not necessarily follow through on them.

### *Calming Rex*

Take a planning walk & consider the steps you will need to take to solve this.

### *Activating Albert, Albertina & Alberta*

Imagine forward & plan backwards. Define a goal or outcome you want & then draw or write in sequence the steps needed to create that result. You may find planning occurs more easily using post-it notes for each of the steps.

## Thinking and Logic

For neurodivergent kids, sometimes having great thinking skills can get in the way of doing things. Some of them can wrap their minds in convoluted loops of thinking that lead nowhere.

They may get trapped in weighing up the pro's & cons of specific actions. Sometimes this can make them less certain & more worried than they need to be. Help them to stop evaluating & predicting (great skills but you don't need them now).

### *Calming Rex*

Puzzles, riddles, jokes, problem-solving, guessing games.  
Developing checklists and to-do lists.

### *Activating Albert, Albertina & Alberta*

Start with the easiest thing you can think of.

## People Smarts

Neurodivergent kids with this learning strength are tuned into people. Having someone to work with, will help them to get started.

### *Calming Rex*

Combining socialising while getting things done makes it much easier to feel safe & start.

*Activating Albert, Albertina, and Alberta*  
Eventually divide up tasks so you spend time some time working together and also develop self-reliance and independent problem-solving skills.

## Language and Word Smarts

The internal dialogue of these kids is often littered with fear, doubt & self-recrimination. Despite their learning strengths in words, they are rarely easily persuaded out of procrastination.

*Calming Rex*  
Talk about unrelated issues until calm.

*Activating Albert, Albertina & Alberta*  
Create a story of what will happen if we can get started & make this happen. Imagine the task is already completed & you are telling someone else about the payoffs & benefits.

## Number Smarts

Kids with learning strengths in number smarts often like certainty and control.

*Calming Rex*  
Rate the tasks to be done and prioritise them. Give them a choice of which to begin first & when to start.

*Activating Albert, Albertina & Alberta*  
Create a to-do or a numbered checklist. Negotiate with yourself that you can only do something you like once you have ticked off & completed one of the items on your list.

## Kickstarting Momentum

Procrastination is a barrier for many students. This is a major issue in the lives of many neurodivergent kids.

Kickstarting our momentum begins with calming Rex. Rex pays attention to what we do, not what we say.

Overall, there are three main strategies to overcome procrastination:

1. Start small- Once we start doing something, Rex often goes along with it. The hardest part of overcoming almost any challenge is starting.
2. Wait for dopamine to replenish. I'll outline how to do this, in a later paper on motivation.
3. Do something even worse than the challenging activity you are procrastinating over. Finding something you really hate or don't like & doing it until you feel like doing the original task is not fun, but it is surprisingly effective.

## Next steps

All students need to know how to overcome procrastination.

Schools could ask parents & students to complete the assessment of learning strengths & use this as a basis for collective planning over the next term. This could also be integrated with career planning for senior students.

Schools could also consider hosting professional development sessions on neurodivergence & learning strengths to consider ways of building on the strengths of all students.

It is essential that we regard neurodivergence as a strength rather than as a deficit & applaud, support & build the strengths of all of our wonderful young people.

*\*Oliver Emberton originally introduced me to Rex & Albert & I am eternally grateful.*

## More information

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**Andrew's website**  
[www.mylearningstrengths.com](http://www.mylearningstrengths.com) has helped over 45,000 young people in the past year discover

their learning strengths.

### **Linked in**

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/andrew-fuller-2238a325/>

### **On face book:**

andrewfullerpsychologist  
Learning Strengths

### **Books for Parents**

*The Bright Kid Challenge*  
*Unlocking Your Child's Genius*  
*Tricky Behaviours*  
*The A to Z of Feelings* (Bad Apple Press)

### **Book for Teachers**

*Neurodevelopmental Differentiation- Optimising Brain Systems To Maximise Learning* (Hawker-Brownlow).

