

The Beauty of Unfinished Projects: 6 Reasons to Leave Stuff Undone

By Brooke Kosofsky Glassberg



Modern life can feel like an endless string of open browser tabs: Some days you’re deep in the productivity zone, finishing one project before moving on to the next. Other days, there are living things to keep alive, texts to return, bills to pay, and the creative muse feels utterly M.I.A.

So what’s a Type-A to do? Start by reading our list of compelling reasons to cut yourself some slack. Then feel great about your decision to leave a few ends deliciously untied. (Now please excuse me while I find ways to procrastinate until deadline.)

1. Pausing a project can make you more creative.

For the same reason we do some of our most brilliant thinking in the shower or get unstuck by stepping away from our desks, sometimes we need to get out of the weeds and give ourselves space for a breakthrough. It’s easy to get so focused on results and forward progress, but that’s so not the way of creativity. Done right, it’s messy, experimental, freewheeling. Unfinished work is really an essential byproduct of the process. That’s the stuff that’s *supposed* to fall away, eventually clearing your path to the finish line.

2. It deals a humble blow to our perfectionist streaks.

Don’t let things that are meant to be fun stress you out! Instead, allow yourself to feel the grace of imperfection — it’s *cool* to be able to see the the beauty in working on something on its way to becoming what it is. After all, *we’re* the ultimate work-in-progress. And even if you never do finish what you started, you’ve probably learned a thing or two.

3. Dabbling is underrated.

Isn’t “dilettante” such a fun word? It’s completely acceptable to experiment with lots of things in little doses, rather than committing to one passion for all eternity. Creative minds are hard to tame; that’s exactly what makes them creative. Different hobbies engage different parts of your mind. Besides, if it wasn’t A-OK to be a little distractable, then why would all those aisles at the craft store exist?

4. Absence really does makes the heart grow fonder.

It’s easy to lose sight of how amazing what you’re making actually is when you’re in the thick of it. Taking time off from something we care about reminds us why we enjoy doing it in the first place, and it leaves open the possibility of returning to it when you need it most. Coming back after a break, reenergized, can help give you appreciate your work.

5. Dwelling is even less productive than quitting.

Better to press pause with intention than to feel guilty for your wandering affection. That ambivalent half-in, half-out gray space is a recipe for crazy-making. So kill the guilt! Do something else, whatever it is, that brings you joy right this second, even if it’s never going to result in some imaginary masterpiece. Your sanity will thank you.

6. Maybe you've gone as far as you're going to go.

It’s common to lose interest once we’ve reached a certain level and the novelty has worn off. I became obsessively consumed with brush lettering and calligraphy for a solid year until I got pretty good, and it wasn’t as challenging anymore. I had reached the point at which I had to decide to turn it into something bigger (open an Etsy shop! Start an Instagram account! Take up digital lettering!) or sit back and be content with what I had accomplished. Quitting can be closure, a final pat on the back from yourself. It frees up time and headspace for the *next* thing you want to conquer.

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