

33 it's a cinch by the inch

for you to know

People can become anxious if they try to think about or do too much at one time. You can lower your anxiety level by breaking a big project down into smaller steps. The saying, "It's a cinch by the inch, but it's hard by the yard" reminds us that tackling something a little at a time makes it easier.

It was 1:00 P.M. and Stephen wanted to go skateboarding with his friends at 2:00 P.M. His mother told him he had to clean his room before he could go. He looked around at the dirty clothes and clean clothes mixed together on the floor, the empty soda cans lined up on his desk, the magazines mixed with homework papers, his unmade bed, and the layer of dust over everything. He thought, "I'll never get this all done" and felt a knot of anxiety beginning in his stomach. His mom came into the room and reminded him, "It's a cinch by the inch. You can't do it all at once. Start with one small task, complete it, and then move on to the next."

Stephen looked around the room again, trying to see a lot of small tasks instead of one big one. He began to relax a little. He saw the soda cans first and carried them down to the kitchen. Then he made his bed. Next he sorted his magazines and homework, put his magazines into the drawer and his homework into his backpack. He saw that his room was looking better already—all he had left were his clothes and dusting. First, he separated the clean clothes from the dirty ones. Then he put his dirty clothes into the hamper. Next he folded his clean clothes and put them away. It was only 1:40 P.M.! He got the dust-cloth, cleaned his desk, dresser, and nightstand, and still had fifteen minutes to spare.

directions

Help Sara use the idea, "It's a cinch by the inch" in the following scenario:

Sara was listening to the teacher assign an English report. When she heard all the work that had to be done, she felt perspiration start to form on her palms, and the muscles in her shoulders begin to tense. The report had to be typed and put into a folder, with a special cover designed to coordinate with the subject. She had to choose a book to read and watch a video about the same story, then compare the two in her report. She also had to turn in an outline of the report and make notecards for an oral presentation. Sara thought she could never get it all done by the end of the semester. Her shoulders got tighter and tighter.

Reread the preceding paragraph and identify all the small steps involved in Sara's big project. Write them separately on the lines below.

Look at the list of steps that make up Sara's project. Close your eyes for a minute and think about having to complete all those steps yourself. Rate your anxiety level about completing the whole project on a 0 to 10 scale (0 being completely peaceful and 10 being highly anxious).

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Now close your eyes again and think about having to complete just one of the steps. Rate your anxiety level about completing this project just one step at a time on the same scale.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

activity 33 * it's a cinch by the inch

Describe any difference between your first and second anxiety ratings. Tell why you think your anxiety level went up, went down, or stayed the same.

more to do

Sometimes the things that make us feel anxious don't even have that many steps. We may be anxious just because they are in areas where we don't have much confidence. For Sara, just the step of typing the report produced anxiety because she wasn't sure of her typing skills. Sara learned that she could break even this task down into small steps: turn on the computer, open up a new file, type the title page first, type one page at a time.

Describe a task you must complete that makes you feel anxious.

Break this task down into small, manageable steps and write them here.

Take one of the steps above and break it down into smaller steps.

activity 33 * it's a cinch by the inch

How does your anxiety level differ when you focus on the whole project versus just one step?
