

# organize today!

Ideas and tips to help you live  
an organized, simpler life at work and home

WINTER 2005

## Paper, Paper Everywhere!

**B**ills to pay. Newspapers and magazines to read. Receipts, warranties and instructions to save — the list goes on and on. Each day we are bombarded with papers that need our attention. How are you handling your paper mountain?

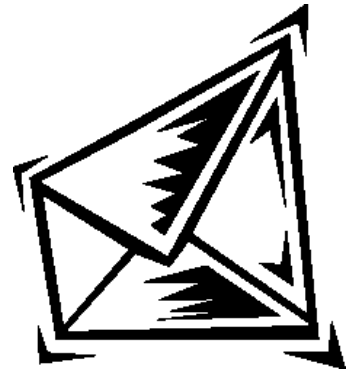
Plan ahead: What better time to tackle that continually flowing stream of papers than Get Organized Month in January, sponsored by the National Association of Professional Organizers. Local professional organizers will be part of a national effort to sponsor hundreds of events and programs across the country. Contact your professional organizer or visit [www.napo.net](http://www.napo.net) to learn more.

If you feel that papers are taking over your life (or home or office), read on. This newsletter will help you wade through your continually flowing stream of papers, help you make smart choices about storage or disposal of them, and have you feeling in control in no time!

## Little-known facts about paper

- The average person gets only 1.5 personal letters each week, compared to 10.8 pieces of junk mail.
- Each person will receive almost 560 pieces of junk mail this year.
- In a lifetime, the average American will spend eight months opening junk mail.
- 90% of all documents handled each day are merely shuffled.
- Companies spend \$20 on labor to file one document, but \$120 on labor to search for a lost document, and a whopping \$250 on labor to recreate a lost document.

Source: National Association of Professional Organizers



## Getting started: A mission statement

Why do you want to get your papers organized?  
Some ideas might include:

- To be able to retrieve things when you need them.
- To feel and appear more in control of your life.
- To reduce visual clutter.
- To lift the burden that disorganization causes.

Whatever your reason for getting organized, write it down and make it your own personal mission statement. Write it in big block letters and hang it next to the area you're tackling. This will keep you going!

# Paper management, step by step

## Gather supplies

First, gather file folders, hanging file folders, felt-tip pen and large garbage (or recycling) bags or boxes. Every household or office also needs an appropriate type of file cabinet or box; the size will depend on the amount of papers you must keep. Make a commitment to work on this project for at least one uninterrupted hour. Enlist a friend or professional organizer if you need help or encouragement.

## Determine where to start

Start on desktops, countertops or urgently-needed surfaces. Your most recently-received papers will be here. Resist the urge to start with the papers on the floor or stuffed in paper bags or boxes.

## Identify

Determine the types of papers you receive on a regular basis as you start sorting. Gather all the papers from the surface you're working on into a neat pile. Pick up the top one. Ask yourself, "What is this? Do I need to keep it? Do I need to take action on this? Or do I just need to file it in case I need to retrieve it later?" Toss as much as you can.

## Sort

As you encounter papers that need to elicit an "action," (e.g. class to sign up for, RSVP to send) put them in a folder labeled "TO DO."

As you encounter bills to pay, separate them out by putting them in a folder labeled "BILLS TO PAY." (Try a bright red folder.)

As you encounter papers that simply need to be read and then disposed of, such as magazine articles you clipped or newsletters, put them in a folder labeled "TO READ." Tip: Take this folder with you when you'll be waiting in lines (i.e., doctor's office, dentist, bank, mechanic, etc.)

As you encounter papers that need to be discussed with your significant other or co-worker, put them in a folder labeled "DISCUSS WITH XXXXXXXX."

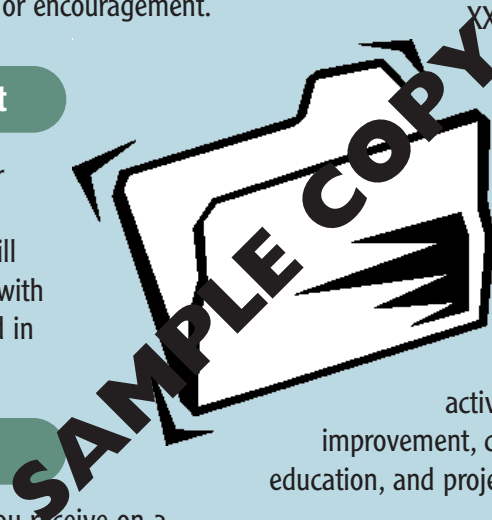
Everything else should be either thrown out or filed neatly according to subject. Sort into simple categories that make sense to you. For example, some categories might include medical, pets, taxes, hobbies, outdoor activities, utility bills, car, home improvement, credit cards, insurance, 401k, education, and projects.

## Continue & toss

Work on getting all surfaces clear of papers using the above techniques. Then, conquer the remaining piles (if any) from the floor or elsewhere. You should find there is more in the "toss" category in these piles. Remember, only 20% of the things we file will ever be retrieved again. When in doubt, throw it out!

## Maintain

From here on out, manage paper daily. Sort mail immediately. Toss out junk mail. Put remainder into "TO READ," "TO DO," or "BILLS TO PAY" folders. (Keep these folders in an easily-accessible spot, such as the kitchen.) Make time weekly to file everything in your filing cabinet or box.



# Dealing with kids' paperwork

**M**any adults can handle their personal paperwork, but don't have a clue when it comes to helping their children get theirs under control. School calendars, lunch menus, homework assignments and odd-sized art projects can all contribute to a mountain of paper. Here are a few tips to help you help them get organized...

- Papers that need to be referenced daily or weekly, (e.g. lunch menus, calendars, sports schedules) might work well attached to the refrigerator or to a kitchen bulletin board.
- Start an art project box for each child. Oversized professional artist's portfolios work well. Your local art or office supply store will have a variety of sizes and materials (leather bound, cardboard) to choose from in a wide range of prices. As projects come home, place the favorites in the portfolio. At year-end, select only the top five (or ten) to save. Place the rest in underbed storage boxes (which can be stored anywhere in the house; perhaps the basement) labeled with the years or grades of artwork it contains.
- If your child comes home with papers that need to be read, signed, or require payment, adopt a simple "in/out box" concept straight from corporate America. Label a box (or basket or cubby or clipboard) for each family member. Store conveniently in the kitchen. Instruct children to place papers that need parental approval in their box. Parents should check their boxes each evening and place completed paperwork in the appropriate child's box for retrieval. This eliminates mad-dash mornings!
- To get your children in the habit of managing schoolwork with ease, set up a desk or workspace just for them. Stock drawers (or clear storage boxes) with basic supplies, such as paper, pens, pencils, scissors, glue, and Post-it® notes. Help younger children empty their school bags in the afternoon, and allow them to make decisions about which papers to keep and which to toss. This will get them in the habit of dealing with paperwork regularly and saving only those things that are precious to them.



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## Eliminating the "P" word: procrastination

Okay, you're revved up, ready to get organized. You've got the ideas, you know you need to do it — but you never seem to get started. Deal with procrastination today for a happier, stress-free tomorrow!

- If a project seems too big and overwhelming, start with something small. Clear out old magazines from the rack. Tidy up the scraps of paper on the fridge or bulletin board. Clean out your purse or briefcase.
- For larger projects, enlist the help of a spouse or trusted friend. Break down the project into parts, and set a goal to finish one part today.
- If you are really overwhelmed, or just would like some good advice, contact your local professional organizer.

*Order  
is the shape  
upon which  
beauty  
depends.*

*- Pearl S. Buck*

## Ask the Organizer

**Q** *Help! I have catalogs everywhere. They won't stop... I order from some of them, but they are overtaking my house!*

**A** First off, take an inventory of the catalogs you receive. Contact the companies you no longer wish to deal with and ask them to remove your name from their mailing lists. Then, dedicate a space in your home specifically for catalogs only. Perhaps a basket on your kitchen counter or office desk or a magazine rack in the family room. As you receive new catalogs, toss older editions. Scan new catalogs and tear out pages with items you wish to order, along with the order form. Toss the rest of the catalog.

**Q** *How can I stop junk mail from entering my mailbox in the first place? Whom should I contact to get these off these mailing lists?*

**A** Write to Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, P.O. Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008. Be sure to include all variations of your name. The easiest way to do this is to submit address labels from some of the junk mail you receive. Please note that this will not remove your name from catalog lists that you have requested in the past. You will have to contact these individual companies for removal. This service is for household use only.

