

De-Clutter Your Life Reduce Your Stress!!

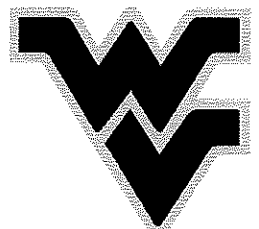
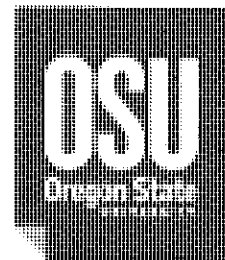


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52 Weeks To An Organized Home Challenge: 2015

Join Over 70,000 Others For Free Here:

Home-Storage-Solutions-101.com/organized-home.html

Each Monday get a new challenge delivered directly to your email inbox!

[Week 1:](#) Kitchen counters and sink (Jan. 5)

[Week 2:](#) Kitchen cabinets and drawers (Jan. 12)

[Week 3:](#) Pantry and food storage (Jan. 19)

[Week 4:](#) Refrigerator and freezer (Jan. 26)

[Week 5:](#) Recipes (Feb. 2)

[Week 6:](#) Recycling / trash cans (Feb. 9)

[Week 7:](#) Coupons (Feb. 16)

[Week 8:](#) Meal planning/buying groceries (Feb. 23)

[Week 9:](#) Addresses and contact info (Mar. 2)

[Week 10:](#) Mail (Mar. 9)

[Week 11:](#) Paying bills (Mar. 16)

[Week 12:](#) Receipts & tax documents (Mar. 23)

[Week 13:](#) Filing system (Mar. 30)

[Week 14:](#) Email & digital information (Apr. 6)

[Week 15:](#) Magazines & newspapers (Apr. 13)

[Week 16:](#) Passwords, manuals/warranties (Apr. 20)

[Week 17:](#) Home office (Apr. 27)

[Week 18:](#) Emergency preparedness (May 4)

[Week 19:](#) Cleaning schedule (May 11)

[Week 20:](#) Bathroom (May 18)

[Week 21:](#) Medicine/first aid supplies (May 25)

[Week 22:](#) Entryway / mud room (Jun. 1)

[Week 23:](#) Living room / family room (Jun. 8)

[Week 24:](#) Dining room/eating areas (Jun. 15)

[Week 25:](#) Laundry room (Jun. 22)

[Week 26:](#) Laundry schedule (Jun. 29)

[Week 27:](#) Personal home inventory (Jul. 6)

[Week 28:](#) Purses and briefcases (Jul. 13)

[Week 29:](#) Books (Jul. 20)

[Week 30:](#) CDs and DVDs (Jul. 27)

[Week 31:](#) Photographs (Aug. 3)

[Week 32:](#) Crafts (Aug. 10)

[Week 33:](#) Vehicles (Aug. 17)

[Week 34:](#) Yard / garden (Aug. 24)

[Week 35:](#) Homework area/launching pad (Aug. 31)

[Week 36:](#) Pets (Sept. 7)

[Week 37:](#) Linen closet (Sept. 14)

[Week 38:](#) Master bedroom closet (Sept. 21)

[Week 39:](#) Seasonal clothing switch (Sept. 28)

[Week 40:](#) Master bedroom (Oct. 5)

[Week 41:](#) Basement (Oct. 12)

[Week 42:](#) Garage (Oct. 19)

[Week 43:](#) Attic (Oct. 26)

[Week 44:](#) Jewelry / accessories (Nov. 2)

[Week 45:](#) Shoes (Nov. 9)

[Week 46:](#) Makeup / cosmetics (Nov. 16)

[Week 47:](#) Kids' closets (Nov. 23)

[Week 48:](#) Kids' bedrooms (Nov. 30)

[Week 49:](#) Toys and games (Dec. 7)

[Week 50:](#) Holiday decorations & [gift wrap](#) (Dec. 14)

[Week 51:](#) Storing china, crystal & [silver](#) (Dec. 21)


[Week 52:](#) Family calendar (Dec. 28)

[Home Storage Solutions 101: A Place For Everything That Matters](#)

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**What You
Need for
Class Today**







University of Idaho

De-Clutter Your Life


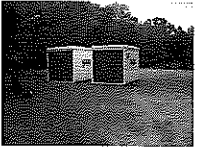
— ❧ —

Reduce Your Stress!!


Did You Know?

— ❧ —

Too Much Stuff

— ❧ —




Clutter Facts

- ❧ Search for space to cut the amount of clutter.
- ❧ Offer guidelines available in DSM of the clutter to help reduce.
- ❧ In the workplace, getting rid of clutter reduces stress and increases productivity.
- ❧ Most Americans have DSM of clutter in their homes. The clutter DSM is made up of clothes and shoes, books, records, CDs, DVDs, and other items.
- ❧ DSM of clutter can keep your bills high because they have clutter.
- ❧ The Clutter-Free Challenge! Clutter and stress are related. Reduce your DSM of clutter and your stress will be reduced.
- ❧ DSM of clutter can keep your bills high because they have clutter.
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- ❧ DSM of clutter can keep your bills high because they have clutter.

Today's Objectives

— ❧ —

- ❧ Help you to determine if you have a challenge with clutter in your home.
- ❧ If you have clutter, identify ways to deal with it.
- ❧ Share ideas on how to eliminate some of your clutter.
- ❧ Restore your balance and peace of mind.



What is Clutter?

— ❧ —

- ❧ "A number of things scattered in disorder; jumble."
 - ❧ Webster's Dictionary
- ❧ "A collection of things lying about in an untidy mass."
 - ❧ Oxford University Press
- ❧ "Anything you own, possess or do that does not enhance your life on a regular basis."

When Clutter becomes a Concern?



Clutter can be a cause for concern if:

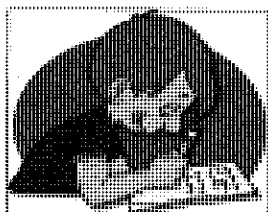
- ☞ Safety is an issue
- ☞ Cleanliness is an issue
- ☞ Our lives become too complicated because of our "stuff"
- ☞ Time and Space Issues
- ☞ Overcommitment
- ☞ Delayed Decisions
- ☞ Fear, Insecurity and Sadness
- ☞ A Lack of System
- ☞ Urge to Buy More



The Clutter Challenge



What's Your Clutter Quotient?



Classify Your Clutter



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ☞ Travel Clutter | ☞ Ambiance Clutter |
| ☞ It Used to Be Important Clutter | ☞ Get-to-it-someday Clutter |
| ☞ Phony Clutter | ☞ Eclectic Clutter |
| ☞ Inheritance Clutter | ☞ Car Clutter |
| ☞ Bequeathed Clutter | ☞ Bob Hope Clutter |
| ☞ Rabbit Clutter | ☞ Snob Clutter |
| ☞ Imposter Clutter | ☞ Mysterious Clutter |

So How To Start...

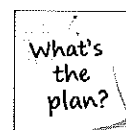


- ☞ Guilt
- ☞ I might need it
- ☞ It's hard to let go
- ☞ There just hasn't been time or I just don't know where to start
- ☞ We're urged to buy things everyday
- ☞ I don't know where to put something, so it's set aside

Time to De-Clutter



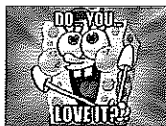
- ☞ Pace yourself and allow plenty of time
- ☞ Make it a challenge
- ☞ Think ahead:
 - ☞ How do I want it organized in the end?
 - ☞ What is my end goal?
 - ☞ Preserve memories?
 - ☞ Maintain privacy?
 - ☞ Share with family and friends?
 - ☞ Earn money to pay for moving, new home, or regular bills?



Time to De-Clutter



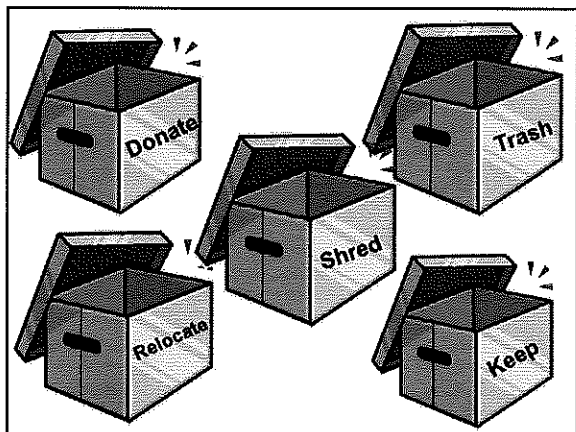
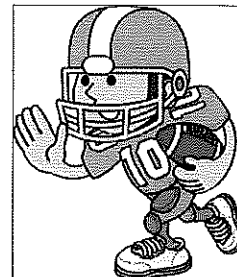
- ☞ Involve a friend
- ☞ Ask yourself:
 - ☞ Do you LOVE it?
 - ☞ What's my style NOW?
 - ☞ Who would enjoy it more?
 - ☞ How would this help someone else out?
 - ☞ When was the last time I used it? Looked at it?
 - ☞ Even remembered I owned it??



Time to De-Clutter



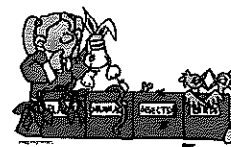
- ☞ Take Control
- ☞ Tackle the Clutter
- ☞ Don't get sidetracked
 - ☞ Use the 4 Box Method
 - ☞ Plus 1



Organizational Strategies



- ☞ Make your system fit your own life
- ☞ Use storage devices to fit your system
- ☞ Keep it simple
- ☞ Decide to decide
- ☞ Ask for help
- ☞ Organize year round



Organizational Strategies



- ☞ More specific suggestions for clutter control include:
 - ☞ Focus on one room
 - ☞ Get tough when you consider objects
 - ☞ Go through your mail daily
 - ☞ Set a limit on saving bags, food containers, or boxes
 - ☞ Get rid of the old when you buy the new
 - ☞ Pare down mementos
 - ☞ Consider making a daily or biweekly uncluttering appointment

More Organizational Tips



- ☞ Make your bed
- ☞ Toss the newspaper
- ☞ Do a chore
- ☞ Beware of "freebies"
- ☞ Broken stuff is garbage
- ☞ Hang up your coat
- ☞ Wash dishes before bed
- ☞ Sort and classify
- ☞ Clean out constantly
- ☞ Label everything
- ☞ Envision your stuff in its new home
- ☞ Resist the urge to "store"
- ☞ Create a daily to-do list
- ☞ Prioritize
- ☞ Assign objects to specific places

Deciding What to Keep



☞ When you are deciding what to keep, think about:

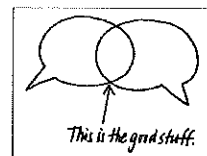
- ☞ What brings you great pleasure
- ☞ What enhances your life
- ☞ What things you regularly use or need



What to do with the Rest of the "Good Stuff"



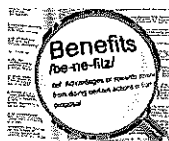
- ☞ Family and friends
- ☞ Consignment shops
- ☞ Yard and garage sales
- ☞ Charitable organizations
- ☞ Craigslist
- ☞ Internet auctions



Benefits of Being Organized



- ☞ You're in control
- ☞ You'll have more time for yourself and loved ones
- ☞ You'll feel good about your environment
- ☞ You're a role model for others
- ☞ You'll be healthier
- ☞ You'll save money
- ☞ You'll be able to set and achieve goals

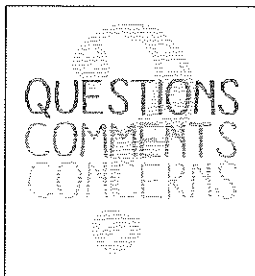


10 Laws of Stuff



- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. The more you have, the more you need. | 6. Over time, you don't see your stuff. |
| 2. Useless stuff crowds out the good stuff. | 7. When you have a lot of stuff, you pay over and over for it. |
| 3. Dirt and bugs love stuff. | 8. Stuff affects your mental health. |
| 4. Stuff stays where you put it. | 9. Stuff is valuable only if you use it. |
| 5. Stuff multiplies to fill the spaces you have. | 10. Stuff can't buy happiness. |

Questions & Contact Information



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WHAT'S YOUR CLUTTER QUOTIENT?

Choose the number that best describes your response to each statement.

1 = rarely/never 2 = sometimes 3 = quite often 4 = almost always

- I get tired just thinking of what it would take to get me organized.
- My friends and family think I'm disorganized.
- I don't have enough time or space to get organized.
- I wish I could be more organized.
- I spend a lot of time looking for things every day.
- I am disorganized.
- I let mail pile up until I have time to deal with it.
- I save things I think I might need someday.
- I feel guilty about throwing away things.
- I have no time for myself.
- I can't bear the thought of parting with anything I own.
- I dread opening one or more closets in my home.
- When it comes to clutter, I think, "Why bother? It will just get cluttered again."
- When the clutter in my home gets to me, I go out.
- If someone stops by unexpectedly, I try to avoid letting them in.

-OVER-

**Add up your score and look below
to see how you handle clutter.**

Scoring

- 48 – 60** Make a commitment to deal with clutter today! Dealing with your clutter will decrease your high level of stress and frustration and free up time and energy.
- 36 – 47** Clutter has been building up for sometime. You can turn things around with the right combination of organizing systems and strategies.
- 24 – 35** You may not consider clutter to be a problem, but dealing with clutter now will keep it under control.
- 15 – 23** You stay on top of things and you derive pleasure from keeping clutter under control. Keep it up.



CLASSIFY YOUR CLUTTER

Travel Clutter: _____

It Used to be Important Clutter: _____

Phony Clutter: _____

Inheritance Clutter: _____

Bequeathed Clutter: _____

Rabbit Clutter: _____

Imposter Clutter: _____

Ambiance Clutter: _____

Get-to-it-someday Clutter: _____

Eclectic Clutter: _____

Car Clutter: _____

Bob Hope Clutter: _____

Snob Clutter: _____

Mysterious Clutter: _____



TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR CLUTTER

Make a list of the cluttered areas around your home.
List everything that drives you crazy.



Cluttered Areas	Supplies Needed to Remedy Situation	Deadline to Conquer Clutter
Ex: Cleaning supplies under kitchen sink	Baskets to keep bottles organized	March 15

Tackling the Clutter

What mess bothers you the most?
Why does it bother you?
What prevents you from tackling the problem?
List those things about this mess that bother you the most.
What would it take to fix it (includes resources such as time, money, space, another person, etc.)?
Timeline (list dates for accomplishing each task).
How would you reward yourself for a job well done?

The "10" Laws of Stuff

1. The more you have, the more you need.
2. Useless stuff crowds out the good stuff.
3. Dirt and bugs love stuff.
4. Stuff stays where you put it.
5. Stuff multiplies to fill the spaces you have.
6. Over time, you don't see your stuff.
7. When you have a lot of stuff, you pay over and over for it.
8. Stuff affects your mental health.
9. Stuff is valuable only if you use it.
10. Stuff can't buy happiness.



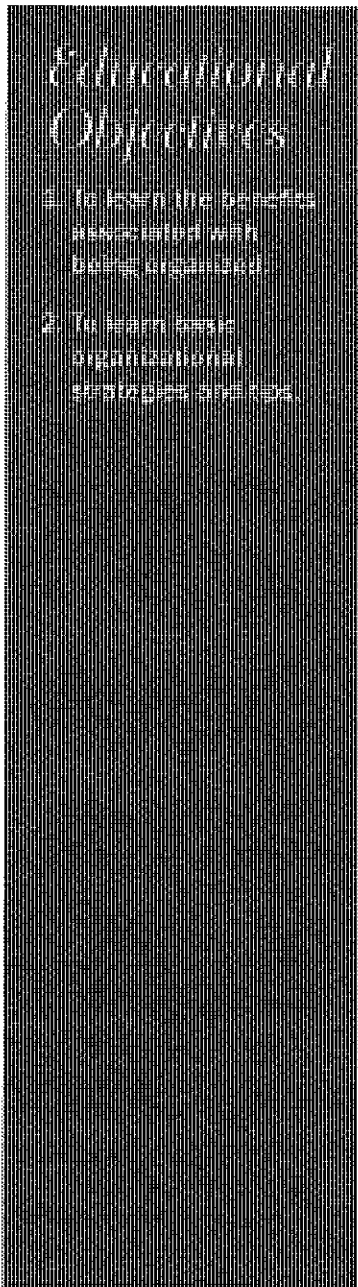
Adapted from: Georgene Lockwood, 10 Laws of Stuff,
The Oaks, Menomonie, Wisconsin



**The “Other
Clutter” -
Helpful
Resources for
Later**

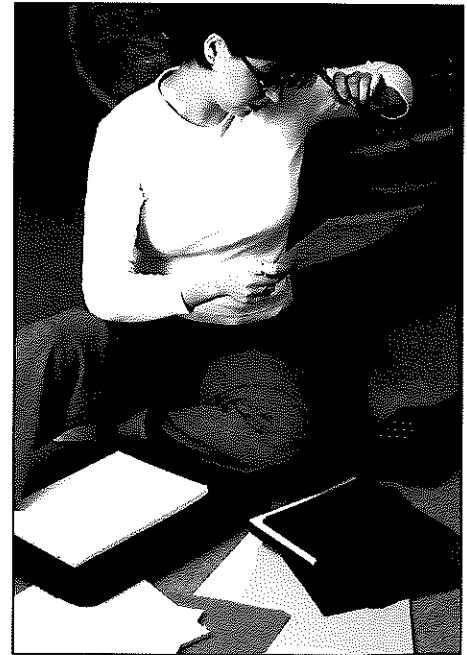
Getting Organized

Stephanie Nestor, WVU Extension Agent, Ritchie County
Zona Hutson, WVU Extension Agent, Doddridge County



Activity: Write the following facts on index cards and distribute to members to read aloud.

- Lack of space is not the cause of clutter. Disorganization results in 80 percent of the clutter in most homes.
- In the average home, getting rid of clutter eliminates 40 percent of housework.
- Most Americans use 20 percent of what we own. The other 80 percent is made up of items we don't use, feel we should use, or think we might use someday.
- 23 percent of adults say they pay bills late because they lose them.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that 80 percent of our medical expenditures are related to stress.
- 25 percent of people with two-car garages don't park any cars in their garage, and 32 percent park only one (source: U.S. Department of Energy).
- 71 percent of polled participants said their quality of life would improve if they were better organized.



(Statistics from the National Association of Professional Organizers)

According to Albert Einstein, "Out of clutter, find simplicity."

These days, we are all looking for ways to simplify our lives. With busy schedules, emotional attachments, and too much "stuff," we can start feeling out of control and stressed. When we're too stressed, we don't always think clearly; sometimes we feel trapped and overwhelmed. Our homes should be a place to relax and escape the daily grind. However, when clutter and disorganization take over a home, it is difficult to find that peaceful retreat.

- continued -

Activity: Have members rate their clutter, using the Clutter Quotient in WL 213.

Ways We Complicate Our Lives

Clutter can take over our homes and workspaces and make it difficult to do everyday tasks. To effectively tackle clutter, we need to understand what causes us to hold on to stuff. Ariane Benefit, expert in chronic disorganization, shared some reasons we complicate our lives and hold onto the clutter.



Time and space. We accumulate more things and information than we have time and energy to take care of, organize, or use. What started out as being useful can become overwhelming.

One space that has grown significantly in the past 10 years is self-storage units. The United States has 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage space – more than 7 square feet for every man, woman, and child.

Storage units initially started out as a place to keep belongings during or after a transition, such as a move or death in the family. However, half of Americans using them today are using them to store extra stuff, even though the average home size has nearly doubled.

Overcommitment. We say yes too often and overcommit our time with too many activities and projects. Instead of doing less, we sleep less and then it takes us longer to do things.

Delayed decisions. Getting and staying organized involves what is essentially an endless stream of decisions: what to keep, what to get rid of, where to store things, etc.

Putting off making these decisions can result in clutter buildup.

Fear, insecurity, and sadness. Sometimes we keep things we don't really want, use, or need because of the fear, insecurity, guilt, and sadness behind the thought of getting rid of them. Almost everyone has keepsakes from relatives. As you start to clear your clutter, you will uncover many emotions. Be prepared to face these feelings and be patient with yourself if you become emotional about keepsakes.

A lack of system. Often, clutter isn't an overwhelming abundance of stuff. It may be a lack of organizing skills or a system that works. Organization systems that work for some people may not work for others. We need to embrace our natural tendencies and work with them. If you are not a naturally routine person, don't set up too many arbitrary time-based routines.

Urge to buy. Every time we watch TV, listen to the radio, or walk into a store, we are urged to purchase more and more. We look for great buys and sales even though we might not need or have the space for the items.

Benefits of Being Organized

Becoming more organized and letting go of clutter can lower stress levels and improve your physical, mental, and emotional health. Organization allows you to have more time and energy for the things that matter most to you, like spending time with family, pursuing hobbies, eating healthy, exercising, or just hanging out with friends. In addition, it creates an environment of serenity and peacefulness.

You're in control. By getting organized, your stress levels will go down, and you'll be able to live a less chaotic, more relaxed life. With "a place for everything and everything in its place," you will be able to find things quickly, thus saving time, money, and hassle.

You'll have more time for yourself and your loved ones. By being more efficient, you'll spend less time "working" and have more time for yourself, your friends and family, and the things you love to do.



You'll feel good about your environment. When your home or office is organized, you will feel good about your surroundings and will not worry about being embarrassed by your clutter.

You're a role model for others. Children will learn to be organized and more productive by following your example. When you are organized, you will be respected by others who can depend on you to be on time and fulfill your commitments.

You'll be healthier. Being organized reduces stress, boosts your motivation, and frees your mind. Most organized people are full of energy because they are taking care of themselves both mentally and physically. You have more mental energy because you are not worrying about forgetting something or procrastinating on an important task.



You'll save money. You know what you have before you buy more. Last-minute purchases or grocery trips can be costly.

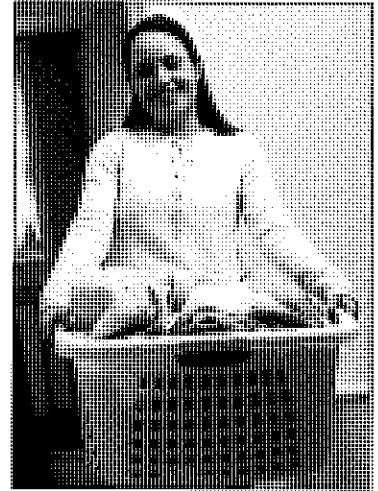
You'll be able to set and achieve goals. When you have an organized plan and list for the next day, week, and year, you'll have a greater ability to accomplish your goals. You can eliminate the barriers and unnecessary tasks, leaving more time to focus on your priorities and goals.

When you are deciding what to keep, think about:

- What brings you great pleasure
- What enhances your life
- What things you regularly use or need

Simple Organizational Strategies and Tips

- Make your bed each morning.
- Throw away the newspaper each night, even if you haven't read it yet.
- Push yourself to do any chore that takes less than one minute. Throw away the junk mail, put your dirty socks in the hamper, hang up your wet towel.
- Beware of "freebies." Never accept anything free unless you're thrilled with it.
- Get rid of things when they break.
- Hang up your coat.
- Before you go to bed, take five minutes to do an "evening tidy-up." Just a few minutes of tidying can make your house look a lot better, and it's a calming thing to do before going to sleep. The same techniques can be used for your desk at the end of the day.
- Make your organizational system fit your life.
- Sort and classify. Things that are used together belong together. Store them in one place.
- Clean out constantly. When you keep things you don't use, they get in the way and create more work.
- Label everything.
- Set a limit on saving bags, food containers, or boxes.
- Make a decision and follow through. Decide to keep, donate, or throw away.
- Identify an organization or person to whom you can give things you no longer need. Envision someone else getting good use from it.

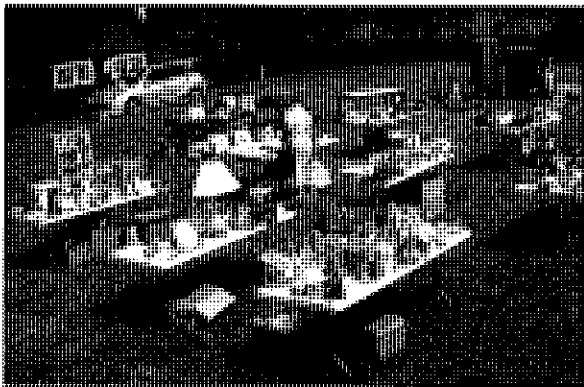


- Pause for a moment before you “store” something. Other than holiday decorations and seasonal clothes, you should strive to “store” as little as possible.
- Create a daily to-do list. This will keep you focused and turn huge, seemingly impossible goals into manageable chunks.
- Prioritize. Decide which tasks are most important to complete and tackle those first. Completing priority tasks can keep you from becoming stressed and overwhelmed.
- Assign objects to specific places. Then you will no longer have to hunt for things because you forgot where you put them.
- Focus on one room at a time.

What You Can Do with Your “Good Stuff”

Now that you’ve identified your clutter and thought about what to eliminate, where does your clutter go? Here are some suggestions:

- Sell or give it away to a family member or someone else who will cherish the item.
- Have a yard or garage sale.



- Donate items to a local charitable organization for its rummage sale or to a local nonprofit thrift shop.
- You can sell larger items directly by placing a classified advertisement in a local newspaper or on an Internet auction site. Or, you may try to sell your unwanted “treasures” at a local consignment shop.
- Look for stores that specialize in buying and selling such valuable items as jewelry, antiques, coin collections, and musical instruments.

Make sure you check references for any business before you decide to use their service. For more information on the risks and how to protect yourself when either buying or selling through an Internet auction, check the Federal Trade Commission’s booklet “Internet Auctions: A Guide for Buyers and Sellers.” Order it on the web (www.ftc.gov).

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2010

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FH10-266



De-Clutter Your Life Member Handout

The popularity of today's reality TV shows how people's lives have gotten out of control and have been taken over by their "stuff." Once too much "stuff" invades your space, you start feeling out-of control.

According to Webster's Dictionary, clutter is defined as a number of things scattered in disorder; jumble. Another definition might be "anything you own, possess or do that does not enhance your life on a regular basis."

The challenge is to take stock of what we have and to simplify and downsize to give ourselves peace of mind and to leave a clutter free legacy to our families.

Organizational Strategies

1 – Make your system fit your own life. You need to examine your own lifestyle and choose a system that fits. There are lots of books and websites available that can help you.

2 – Sort and classify. Things that are used together belong together. Store them in one place.

3 – Clean out constantly. When you keep things you don't use, they get in the way and create more work. Keep on top of things. Get rid of the old as soon as you get new.

4 – Use storage devices to fit your system. Bad containers make things harder to manage. Label everything. Something left unlabeled causes frustration and is likely to disappear.

5 – Keep it simple. Take on only what you can handle and do no more.

6 – Decide to decide. Make a decision and follow-through.

7 – Ask for help. Delegate tasks or hire someone to do the things you can't do yourself.

8 – Organize year round. For example in January mail in warranties for products you received as holiday gifts and purge your files as you prepare your taxes.



Suggestions for clutter control

- Focus on one room – maybe the room where you spend the most time or alternatively the room that contains the most clutter. Start small – go through one drawer, one shelf or one counter per session.
- Get tough – dump the contents on the floor and consider each object.
- Go through your mail daily – toss what you'll never read, file bills for payment, recycle newspapers, magazines and catalogs.
- Set a limit on saving bags, food containers, or boxes.
- Get rid of two old garments every time you buy a new one. This rule also works for kitchen gadgets, shoes, books, videos or CD's, and toys.
- Pare down mementos – keep the Girl Scout badges instead of the whole uniform, the year books instead of everybody's school photos.
- Consider making a daily or biweekly uncluttering appointment. Set a specific date and time. Just 15 minutes a day can help, an hour a day is even better. Set a timer.
- Use labeled boxes or bags and group items into categories. Possible categories might include:
 1. Things you love and/or use – keepers
 2. Things you can give to someone else
 3. Trash
 4. Things you could sell
 5. Things that belong somewhere else

What Can You Do with Your “Good Stuff?”

Now that you've identified your clutter and thought about what to eliminate – where does your clutter go?

If it's hard to let go, ask yourself, “wouldn't you prefer to surround yourself with things you love and use?” If you don't love it - think of someone you know who might enjoy having what you no longer want – it could be a family member or it might mean giving it away or selling it to someone else who will cherish the item.

The primary outlets for secondhand items are consignment shops, classified advertising, internet auction sites, and, of course, yard and garage sales.

Here are some specific suggestions:

- Donate items to a local charitable organization for their rummage sale or to a local non-profit thrift shop. You can deduct this donation from your income taxes as a charitable donation. If you plan to use the donation as a tax deduction then you need to keep a record of the items donated and the value of each item. Make sure you obtain a receipt from the charitable organization for your donation.
- You can sell larger items directly by placing a classified advertisement in one of your local newspapers or through the internet. Items to consider advertising include furniture sets, large appliances or power equipment.
- To sell valuable items, such as jewelry, antiques, coin collections and musical instruments, look for stores that specialize in buying and selling these items. Check your local telephone directory or <http://www.yellowpages.com>. You may want to get more than one estimate to ensure that you are offered a fair price.
- Look into vintage resale/consignment shops to sell items that are more valuable. Check your local telephone directory or <http://www.yellowpages.com>. Use these possible key words – antiques, auction houses, consignment service, resale shops, or second hand dealers. To maximize your earnings, check out a few stores before choosing one and compare their stock and policies. Consignment shops accept all kinds of things, but some specialize in specific items, such as household furnishings, clothing, or sports equipment. Make sure that you check references for any business before you decide to use their services. You may also want to check with the Better Business Bureau, <http://search.bbb.org> or the Oregon Attorney General's Consumer Hotline, 1-877- 877-9392 (toll free) or by email consumer.hotline@doj.state.or.us to find out if a business is reputable.
- List your item on an internet swap/giveaway site.
- Try an online auction through one of the auction sites. There are probably individuals in your community who know how to participate in an online auction and can give you advice or help you set up an auction and an account for receiving the money. There are also businesses that will put your items up for auction on consignment. Again, check your local yellow pages or yellow pages on-line and make sure that you check references before making any business arrangements. You can also check with the Better Business Bureau and Oregon Attorney General to see if any complaints have been filed about a business.



Whether you're a buyer or a seller, understanding how internet auctions work can help you avoid problems. Check out "Tips for Online Auctions" from the Internet Fraud Watch, <http://www.fraud.org/tips/internet/onlineauctions.htm>. For more information on both the risks and how to protect yourself when either buying or selling through an internet auction, the Federal Trade Commission has published the booklet "Internet Auctions: A Guide for Buyers and Sellers." This booklet can be ordered free through the Federal Trade Commission website <http://www.ftc.gov>.

References

There are numerous websites and books available at your local book store on de-cluttering. Here are a few that were used to develop this lesson.

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Paauperfully Organized website, <http://orgcoach.net/> (tips on controlling clutter including a free monthly newsletter).

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Dealing with Clutter

Does this sound like you?

- ◆ I keep every bill, receipt, or financial statement because, I don't know what I can safely toss.
- ◆ I can never find anything after I put it away.
- ◆ My spare bedroom, closets, and basement are full of junk that I don't know how to tackle.
- ◆ I want less clutter, but I just can't figure out how to get started.

If you said "yes" to any of these, then this site is for you!

Too much stuff?

For help with sorting through and getting rid of stuff, learn how to do the [Clear the Clutter](#) strategy.



Need help with organizing and storing what you've got?

Go to [A Home for Every Item](#) and [Storage That Works](#).

Is one type of clutter driving you crazy?

Get specific tips for handling paper of all kinds and paper, your kitchen, clothes, kid's stuff, and keepsakes under **What Do I Do With...**

Thinking of all the reasons why you can't deal with your stuff?

If your mind is resisting by saying things like "I can never decide what to toss," or "I'll never find this if I put it away," visit [I'd Love to Get Organized, But...](#) You'll find suggestions for dealing with these barriers.



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Clear the Clutter

Getting rid of your clutter means throwing it away, recycling it, donating it, or selling it. Try this strategy to tackle a junky room, garage, attic, closet, or basement and sort its contents into four boxes for disposal.

Arm yourself with four large containers (boxes or large garbage bags) - plus one laundry basket.

Have one bag or box to hold items for:

- ◆ Garbage
- ◆ Recycling
- ◆ Give-aways or donations
- ◆ Yard sale or resale/consignment shop (If you're not planning to sell anything, you'll only need three containers.)

Items that you intend to keep but need to return to their correct places in other rooms should go **in the laundry basket**. It's easy to carry, and you can easily see the things in it.



Choose your point of attack—the first item to your left as you enter the room, one corner of the basement, or the floor of a closet, for example. As quickly as possible, pick up items one by one and decide which container they go in.

Give yourself a time limit before you start. When your time is up, pat yourself on the back, toss out the garbage, and make one tour around the house with the laundry basket to return misplaced items to their proper homes. Plan when you will stage your next attack on the clutter in that area, or another one.

Tips for making this approach more effective:

- ◆ Use a timer. If you have only a little time to work, setting a timer will help you keep focused and working efficiently. Don't leave the room at all during that time, especially not to return an item to another room.
- ◆ Use the Clutter Emergency Card. When you're having difficulty deciding what to get rid of, ask yourself the questions on the Clutter Emergency Card.

Clutter Emergency Card

- ◆ How long has it been since I used this?
- ◆ Do I like it?
- ◆ Does it work properly? - Is it broken?
- ◆ Do I have more of this kind of thing? How many do I need?
- ◆ If I keep this, what will I get rid of to make room for it?
- ◆ Can I locate this information somewhere else (probably on the Internet) if I need it?



- ◆ Be realistic about repairing broken items. Many items cost more to repair than to replace; some items cannot be repaired. If you've already replaced the item, it's unlikely you'll ever repair the old one.



- ◆ Have a buddy. This is especially helpful if you're planning to work for a lengthy period of time at one stretch. You will probably run into items that are difficult for you to decide what to do with. And you may reach a point where you feel you can't make decisions any more. Have a good friend, sibling, or your spouse with you. It will make the task less burdensome, and they may help you decide what to do with the tougher items.
- ◆ Shred or tear up documents you intend to toss that contain personal information.



Recycle it.

- ◆ If you have curbside recycling, find out exactly what items are accepted and which are not.
- ◆ Check to see if there are drop-off locations for other recyclable items.
- ◆ Look for hazardous waste pickup locations or events in your area. Items that are typically accepted include mercury thermometers, oil-based paints, tires, pesticides, used motor oil, and used batteries.
- ◆ Search online for special programs to recycle computers or other items that you can't recycle locally.



Recycle unused gifts

- ◆ Think about the groups that you belong to that exchange gifts at the holidays or other occasions (clubs, colleagues at work, family groups). Propose that no one can buy a gift for the next exchange, but that everyone must give something they received as a gift and never used.

- ◆ Keep unused gifts with your "gift inventory"—those things that you purchase ahead of time for gifts. Use them when you need a gift on a moments' notice, or when you know the item is a good choice for a recipient.



Donate it.

You can multiply the benefits of getting organized by donating your unneeded items to help others, and maybe get a tax break at the same time.

- ◆ Identify organizations in your neighborhood that accept donations of clothing and household items. Some charities may only accept certain types of items; call ahead to find out. Some organizations may pick up large items, such as furniture. Other groups, such as Friends of the Library, deal with only one type of item—in this case, used books.
- ◆ If you itemize deductions on your income taxes, you will want to drop off your donations where you can get a receipt. For more information about deducting donations, visit the IRS web site <http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/formspubs/> and download IRS publication 526, Charitable Contributions.
- ◆ Search online for special programs that accept computers or other items for donation to deserving organizations.



Sell it.

Turn some of that former clutter into cash! This can be a great way to motivate yourself and your children to sort through belongings.

- ◆ **Yard sale, swap meet, or flea market** Whether you have a yard sale on your own property, or rent a space at a swap meet or flea market, you will not sell everything. Plan ahead how you will handle the items that are left.
 - ◆ Have ample garbage cans or garbage bags on hand. Much of what is left will truly be trash.

- ◆ Don't bring unsold items back into your house! Or, set a strict rule for deciding what items can be kept. One mom and two adult daughters did a yard sale together. Their rule was that all three had to agree before an item could go back into the house.



- ◆ Identify a place to donate those items that are usable. If you need a receipt for tax purposes, end your yard sale in time to load and deliver your leftovers before they close.

- ◆ **Resale or consignment shop:**

If there is a shop in your community, call to find out their rules and determine if it's worth your time. Check into clothing resale shops, antique malls, and used bookstores.

- ◆ **Internet**

Investigate auction sites or others where you can register and sell used items. Check to see how you are assured of receiving payment and how shipping costs are handled.

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A Home for Every Item

If you want to be organized, every item must have a home. You can't put something away if it doesn't have a home. If you do, you're just stashing stuff, and you'll probably never be able to find it again.

Having a home for an item should mean that there is only one logical place for you to look for it. For example, there should be only one place that you keep your old tax records. There should only be one drawer where you would find your socks, and only one place where your child will find favorite puzzles or stuffed animals.

Look around your home or office. Those items that are lying around adding to your clutter are likely those items for which you've never determined a home.

Here's an approach to help you determine a home for all the groups of items in your home or office.

"Corral" similar items together.

The most essential aspect of organizing is to FIRST group similar or related items together.

- ◆ You'll make one decision about how to store the whole group, rather than making a decision about each item individually.
- ◆ Seeing them as a group helps you visualize how much space they need, and how they should be stored.
- ◆ "Corralling" also makes it easier for you to remember where you put things, since all similar items are in the same place.

The steps are simple:

- ◆ Look for related items and gather them together.
- ◆ Dispose of unneeded or duplicate items.
- ◆ Choose containers for each group of items.
- ◆ Choose a home for each container.

For example, examine the paper clutter on your kitchen table or the "stuff" in your child's room.

- ◆ Look for related items and gather them together.
 - ◆ Categories of items in paper clutter might include coupons for food and household products, business cards, tickets for upcoming travel or events, unpaid bills, or financial statements.
 - ◆ Categories in a child's room might include clothing (further

divided into shirts and tops, sweaters, underwear and socks) as well as toys, school papers, and books.

- ◆ Dispose of unneeded or duplicate items.
 - ◆ Expired coupons and financial statements whose information is duplicated on a quarterly or annual statement can be recycled (shred documents with personal information first).
 - ◆ Clothes that are too small and toys that have been outgrown can be boxed or bagged to donate or store for a younger child.
- ◆ Choose containers.
 - ◆ Paper items generally belong in a file, envelope, or notebook. A file folder or 3-ring binder works well for financial statements or other documents that are generally 8-1/2 by 11 inches. A pocket folder or envelope will work better for a collection of odd-sized items such as coupons.
 - ◆ In a child's room, bulky items such as stuffed animals store best in cargo nets, open shelves, or other large containers. Shelves are the best way to store books without damage and with easy access.
- ◆ Choose a home for each container.
 - ◆ An envelope with fast food coupons might be kept in the car. A file folder containing unpaid bills should be close to your supply of envelopes and stamps.
 - ◆ Containers that a young child needs to reach for himself must be on the floor or low enough for the child to reach. Toys should be stored close to where the child plays. School books and materials should be stored where homework is done.



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Storage That Works

These ideas will help you choose and design more effective ways of storing your belongings.

Go for the simplest, least effort system.

Some organization approaches require extensive lists and indexes, and take a lot of "managing." If you fail to adequately manage the system (i.e., you don't get around to listing the contents of Boxes B and C on the index), the system fails completely.

A more elegant system—one that is simpler and more streamlined—will work well and help you be *more* organized even if you aren't following the system perfectly.

Use product warranties as an example. If you at least throw them all in one box, you'll know where to look when you need one. That takes a lot less effort than categorizing them, or sorting based on expiration date of the warranty. Better to be relatively organized than to attempt a highly detailed system and fail!

Store items close to where they will be used.

Tasks are much easier when everything you need is close at hand. Think about the activities you do in each room, or each area of each room, and gather the tools for each activity together in that area. Here are some examples of storing an item close to where it's used:

- ◆ Keep stamps, envelopes, and a folder for unpaid bills close to the table or desk where you pay bills.
- ◆ Store glasses close to the kitchen sink, pots close to the stove, and silverware close to the table.
- ◆ Store bats, balls, and gloves in the garage or close to the outside door of the house.
- ◆ Keep your calendar by the phone or in your purse or pocket.



Store frequently used items in the most convenient storage area.

Convenient storage is the most valuable and should be used for the most frequently used items. Some examples:

- ◆ The doll your daughter sleeps with every night may belong on her bed during the day; her other dolls and stuffed animals may not deserve that prime space.
- ◆ Files for current projects should be stored in the desk drawer where they are within arm's reach; less frequently used files can go in the file cabinet on the other side of the room.
- ◆ Your alarm clock and the book you are currently reading should have priority for the space on top of your nightstand.
- ◆ Your best china and crystal belong in the dining room, while everyday dishes should be in the cabinet in right above the dishwasher or closest to the kitchen table.
- ◆ The hammer, screw drivers, and wrench that you use most often should be in the top of your tool box or some other convenient location, such as a drawer in the kitchen.



A related concept that can help you decide where to store items is *current/active* storage vs. *dead/inactive* storage. Current storage contains material that you are still using or referring to and should be stored in a convenient location. Dead storage contains items that you must keep but may not need to access for long periods of time. For example, you may need to refer to your tax records from the past couple of years as



you prepare this year's taxes, so those records should be in current storage. On the other hand, tax records from several years ago are items that you will seldom refer to; they should be moved to a more remote location such as the basement.

Subdivide space to make it more usable.

Large, undivided spaces are inefficient storage, and they make it difficult to keep items organized. By dividing the space, you can group and organize items so you can more quickly and easily locate the item you want. For example:

- ◆ By dividing the space in a kitchen drawer where you keep all your cooking utensils, you can group items by size or purpose, making it much easier to quickly find any given item.
- ◆ A filing cabinet drawer is divided by using file folders.
- ◆ Closet organizing systems typically divide your closet space into smaller spaces than just a clothes rack and one shelf, increasing the usefulness of that space.

Look at your storage areas (closets, attics, garage, basement, jewelry boxes) and think about whether adding shelves or other space-dividers will make the area more usable.

Communicate what's inside the container.

Don't depend on your memory to know what's inside each container. Give yourself some clues!

- ◆ Label it: Label the file folder, write a description on the box, tape the label from an item to the outside of a box, or give a computer file a meaningful name.
- ◆ Store only similar or related items together so that the container can be labeled in one or two words or phrases, or so that you can see at a glance what's inside.
- ◆ Keep the contents visible: If you have any doubt as to the value of clear storage containers, think about how often you've discovered a container of spoiled food in the refrigerator that you'd complete forgotten about. Odds are, that food was in an opaque container.



- ◆ Use clear storage containers that let you see right in.
- ◆ Arrange items so you can see all. For example, rolling lingerie and lying side-by-side in the drawer lets you see all of them, instead of folding and stacking which lets you just see the top 1 or 2. Storing socks on end does the same thing.
- ◆ Use open storage, such as shelves, that let you see what's on them.

Choose effective storage containers/systems that you'll really use.

- ◆ Buy storage containers *after* you have grouped items and determined where you want to keep them. Buying the wrong size or type of storage equipment will just add to your clutter.
 - ◆ Before buying anything, visit a store that carries a substantial variety of storage and filing supplies, like a K-Mart, Wal-mart, office supply store, or The Container Store. Just walk around and look for ideas. Then, go home and measure. Also, look around your garage or basement to see what unused boxes or containers you already have on hand.
 - ◆ You can do a trial run with a cheap stand-in for the purchased item, to be sure your ideas will work. For example, if you're thinking of buying magazine holders, first try out your idea with cereal boxes with their sides and top cut away in the same pattern. If your stand-in works and you like using it, you can buy

the storage device with confidence.

- ◆ Characteristics of effective containers:



Standard sizes. Use same size boxes, same size and type of photo albums, etc. It makes stacking, storing, and finding lids that fit so much easier. Think about the freezer boxes your mom or grandmother may have used to store frozen fruits and vegetables in the freezer. If all the boxes were alike, she loved the way they stacked in the freezer. If she bought a number of different kinds, she was forever searching for the right lid and having difficulty getting them to stack on top of each other.

- ◆ **Stackable containers** make good use of floor space by allowing you to store more items vertically, and their lids keep what's inside clean.



- ◆ **Nesting containers.** Containers that nest inside each other when not in use save a lot of space and can make it much easier to find the size you need. Lids that also nest are another plus.

- ◆ **Containers you like.** Pick containers that you like and that you will use. Do you like organizing things in notebooks, but file folders just drive you crazy? Do you enjoy baskets? Or maybe it's neon colors that make you happy. If you enjoy the containers you use, you may be more likely to use them and get more pleasure out of an organized home or office.



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Paper clutter is challenging because of the volume of paper we all seem to accumulate, and because pieces of paper easily stack and hide each other. Filing is both a way of organizing papers and communicating the contents through labels. To file effectively, follow the five steps to "corrall" your paper clutter.

Look for related items and gather them together.

You've done this a million times: sorted through a stack of papers and divided them into small stacks, such as Bills to Pay, Bank Statements, School Papers, To-Do Lists, Ideas You'd Like To Try, Things I Might Buy, and blank yellow pads. But you probably stopped there. Keep going through the next three steps, and you won't end up re-stacking all those papers, only to go through them again later.



Dispose of unneeded or duplicate items.

Did you find duplicates, or old documents you no longer need? Toss!

Examples: Toss expired warranties. Toss magazine articles that you kept but can't remember why. Toss information that you could easily find again, such as printouts from web sites. Toss financial statements whose information is repeated on later statements for that month, quarter, or year. But be sure to shred or destroy properly.

Choose containers for each group of items.

Look at each stack of papers and consider what kind of container will work best. File folders are a natural, but consider other alternatives:

- ◆ Three-ring binders can be stored on shelves, and contents can either be hole-punched or placed in pockets and page protectors.
- ◆ Box-bottom folders handle bulkier items well.
- ◆ Large envelopes can substitute for file folders if you don't have a filing cabinet or if the papers are various sizes and apt to fall out of a file folder.
- ◆ For voluminous stacks, you don't need to organize further, try a box. If you do need to further organize a big stack, think about an accordion file or a notebook with dividers.



Choose a home for each container.

Store frequently-used papers in convenient locations. Files that are organized by related topics are easier to use than alphabetized systems. You'll also locate files easier if you line up all the tabs on hanging file folders in a straight line, rather than alternating from left to right.



As you have new papers that need to be filed, label them with the name of the file where they belong. Also do this when you remove a paper from a file. It makes filing a snap, whether you do it yourself, or have someone else help you.



Reduce the amount of paper you receive.

Become fanatical about stopping as much paper as possible before it comes into your house. Possibilities include:

- ◆ Opting to receive electronic statements and notices.
- ◆ Reducing the number of financial statements by using only one or two credit cards and consolidating multiple financial accounts (such as IRAs, brokerage accounts, etc.) to a single financial institution or manager if you can do that without sacrificing investment choices or service.
- ◆ Asking your credit card company to stop sending you checks to use against the account.
- ◆ Asking anyone who asks for your mailing address how it will be used.

Consider consolidating investments, bank accounts, credit cards, or other services to reduce the number of statements you receive. Or elect to receive the statements via the Internet.

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Privacy issues

Be careful when disposing of financial records. A credit card number or bank account number could be retrieved by a thief and used to make charges against your account. Carefully tear up or shred any financial documents that contain account numbers, Social Security numbers, or other sensitive information before tossing them.



Tax Records

You should keep a copy of income tax returns and the supporting documentation (receipts and worksheets) for several years. The Internal Revenue Service has three years to audit federal income tax returns. However, this limit does not apply in unusual cases. If you failed to report more than 25 percent of your gross income, the government has six years to collect the tax or to start legal proceedings. Also, there are no time limitations if you filed a fraudulent return or if you failed to file a return. That means keeping records for at least three years and probably six years after an expense was incurred or after the final disposition/sale/withdrawal of an asset—or for three to six years after you filed the tax return based on that action, if you filed late.

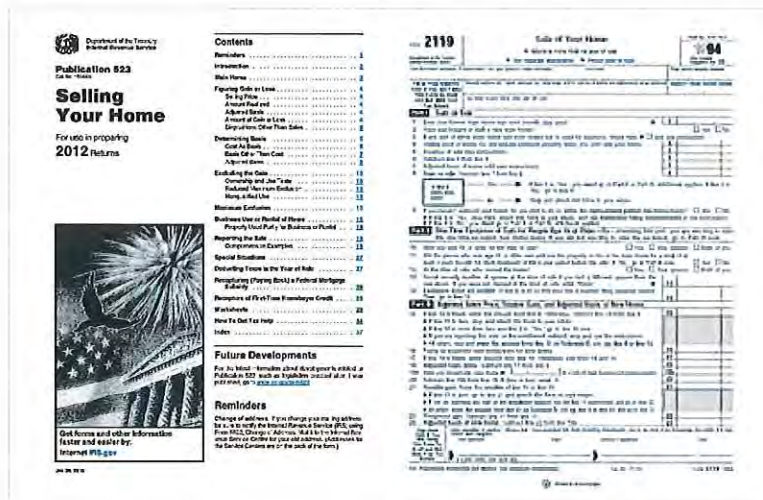
However, there are some situations where you will need to refer back to your older tax returns for much longer than that. Three examples are when you own a home, own investments, or have a Roth IRA or nontaxable amounts in your traditional IRA. Read on for more information.

You can also check IRS Publication 552, *Recordkeeping for Individuals*.



Home purchase, sale, and improvements

Keep records about how much money you have invested in your home. Before May 7, 1997, profit from the sale of one home was usually rolled into the purchase of the next home. If you sold your previous home before May 7, 1997, you will need the tax forms you filed regarding the sale of that home (the old IRS Form 2119, *Sale of Your Home*), and the supporting documentation, to calculate your profit when you sell your current house. If you sold your previous home after May 6, 1997, you only need the records for the purchase of your current home. You will also want to keep receipts for any improvements or additions made to your home, since this increases your investment (basis) in the property and may reduce your profit and tax, if any, when you sell. See *IRS Publication 523, Selling Your Home*.



Investment or brokerage statements, including documentation of purchase of stocks, bonds, mutual funds and other investments

Keep the statements that show what you paid for each investment purchase, including any commissions or fees. If you reinvest dividends (use the dividends to automatically purchase new shares of the investment), you will also need records showing the dollar amount of those dividends. The sum of these items is your basis, or cost, in the investment. You will need these records to calculate your capital gain (profit) or loss when you sell the investment. If you sell only part of an investment (i.e., you own 300 shares of Mutual Fund ABC, and you sell 100 of those) keep records of your basis for that sale, so that you

can calculate your basis and gain when you sell the remaining shares.

Retirement Accounts

Recordkeeping for retirement plans became more important with the introduction of Roth accounts and the ability to roll money from one type of account to another, including conversions of tax-deferred money into Roth (after-tax) funds.

The main recordkeeping responsibility for the individual is to track any money in IRAs that is nontaxable – that is, money on which you have already paid taxes – so that you can avoid paying tax again when the money is distributed. This includes

- ◆ Contributions to a traditional IRA that you did not deduct from income. Contributions to a traditional IRA are nondeductible only if you or your spouse are eligible to participate in an employer retirement plan and your income is above certain limits. (See [IRS Publication 590](#))
- ◆ Contributions to a Roth IRA.
- ◆ Money that was converted from a traditional IRA to a Roth IRA.
- ◆ Roth contributions from an employer plan that were rolled over to a Roth IRA.
- ◆ Traditional (pre-tax) contributions to an employer plan that were converted and deposited into a Roth IRA.

Report these amounts on Form 8606 and track them until you take the last distribution from your IRAs.

The IRS says you'll also need to keep your 1040 from each year that you made a non-deductible contribution, all Forms 8606 that you filed together with their supporting documents, Form 5498 annual statements showing IRA contributions or account value after distributions, plus the 1099-R forms that document your distributions. Keep these papers until you withdraw the last dollar from your last IRA.

In Publication 552, the IRS advises keeping Forms 5498 and 1099-R even if your IRAs contain only deductible contributions and growth on which the taxes have been deferred, which will all be taxed at distribution.

Employer plans could also hold nontaxable amounts, including contributions to

designated Roth accounts and – less commonly – nondeductible contributions. The IRS appears to put the recordkeeping burden for these accounts on the plan administrator, unless distributions are rolled over to an IRA and must then be reported on Form 8606.

Bank Account Records [\[Back to top\]](#)

Cancelled checks, deposit slips, ATM receipts, debit card receipts

For peace of mind, keep all of these items for about a year. But once you've verified that the transactions have been correctly reported on your statement, the only items you need to keep long-term are ones you need for tax records (such as deductible expenses) or important proofs-of-payment, such as major appliances still under warranty. You may find it convenient to use an envelope to hold all these items until you have checked them against your statement.

Account Statements

Some financial experts say you only need to keep bank account statements for a couple of months. But after being audited, the editor of Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine recommended keeping bank statements for seven years. You may be able to obtain statements from your bank if you need them. If so, you may decide to keep only a few months of statements.

Credit Card Documents

Keep all credit card receipts until you have verified that the transactions have been correctly reported on your statement. Keep receipts you need for tax records according to the guidelines for tax records. Keep receipts that are proofs of purchase until the warranty has expired. For convenience, you may want to keep credit card receipts for about a year. If a charge shows up that you believe has already been paid, you can easily check your previous statements.

Receipts [\[Back to top\]](#)

While you don't need to keep most receipts long-term, sorting through them can be a hassle. Try this simple approach that gives you a loosely organized system with little effort.

- ◆ Select a container that will hold a year's worth of receipts to serve as your receipt box. Label it **Receipts** and add the year, for example, **Receipts 2004**.
- ◆ Put your receipts into the box when you bring your purchases home or when you empty your wallet. By default, the receipts are generally in chronological order. If you should need to locate a receipt, you can dive into the part of the stack that covers that time period.



If you REALLY want to be organized, add the following steps:

- ◆ Give special treatment to some receipts.
 - ◆ Label a separate envelope or file for each credit card and debit

card you use. File your receipts in these envelopes until your credit card or bank statement comes. Check the statement against your receipts. Then transfer them to the receipt box.



- ◆ Receipts for items with lengthy warranty periods, such as a major appliance, should be kept longer than most receipts, perhaps stapled to the warranty.
- ◆ File receipts that are documentation of tax-related expenses with your tax records for that year.
- ◆ At the end of the year (Dec. 31), start a new **Receipt 2005** box and move the 2004 box to your dead storage area. That might be a box under the bed or a shelf in the basement.
- ◆ Keep one or two years' worth of receipts in dead storage. When you place the new stack in the dead storage, remove the oldest stack and toss it. You may want to shred receipts that have credit numbers or other sensitive information on them.

Bills (Unpaid and Paid) [\[Back to top\]](#)

Most bills do not need to be kept long term after they're paid unless they represent tax-deductible expenses. Some people only keep utility bills until the next month's bill comes and they have verified that their payment has been credited to the account.

To keep bills organized with a minimum of sorting and managing, follow this simple procedure.

- ◆ Label two envelopes or file folders, one for **Bills to Pay** and one for **Paid Bills** that includes the year, such as **Paid Bills 2004**. Keep them both in your bill paying area.
- ◆ As bills come in, put them in the **Bills to Pay** folder.
- ◆ When you pay a bill, move it to the **Paid Bills** folder--except those that are needed for income tax records. File those with your current year tax information.
- ◆ At the end of the year (Dec. 31), you can either toss most of the paid bills or move the file to your dead records area. That might be a box under the bed or a shelf in the basement. Dead storage doesn't need to be very convenient. Keep one or two years' worth of bills. When you add a new year's bills to the dead storage area, remove the oldest year's bills and either toss it or shred them.



Medical Bills

Medical bills may need to be kept longer than most other bills or receipts. You

and one or more insurance companies pay portions of these bills, making it hard for you and for the healthcare providers to keep accurate records. Many people report receiving bills from a doctor or hospital for an expense that was several years ago, that was never submitted to insurance for payment, or that the patient already paid.

On the medical bill, make a note of when and how you paid (check number or name of credit card), and the amount. You may also want to keep proof of insurance payments. You will have to decide how long to keep these records. If you have had billing problems with a particular healthcare provider in the past, you may want to keep those records for three to five years or more.

Pay stubs

Keep pay stubs until you get your W-2 at the end of the year. Once you've checked that the amounts match, you don't need the pay stubs. If you have direct deposit and your checking account number is on the stub, shred it.

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General Papers: Magazines, Junk Mail, Coupons and Other Papers

Product Warranties

Many warranties are almost generic, and it's difficult to tell exactly which watch, appliance, or tool they are for. Write a description of the item on the cover or first page. Staple the receipt to the warranty, for proof of date of purchase. Just a little organization may be sufficient. Instead of trying to sort your warranties by type of product or location in the house, just keep all your warranties in one place such as a box or pocket folder.



Junk Mail [\[Back to top\]](#)

There are a number of things you can do to reduce junk mail. You'll never eliminate all of your junk mail, but you can reduce it significantly.

- ◆ Read your mail with the recycling bag within reach. Shred pre-approved credit card offers and any other mail with sensitive information.
- ◆ Call 888-5OPTOUT (567-8688) to stop credit bureaus from providing your name for pre-approved credit card offers.
- ◆ Go to <http://opt-out.cdt.org> for help with opting out of various companies and services selling your name to others.
- ◆ Tell magazines not to sell your name. Look through the magazine for a statement similar to this: **"From time to time, we share our subscriber's addresses with companies whose products may be of interest."** You may find it labeled Consumer Information or it may be with the subscription information. Write to the address provided and tell them not to share your information.
- ◆ Call catalogs companies and sources of other unwanted mail to take you off their lists.
- ◆ End your enrollment in frequent-buyer clubs, frequent-flier programs and other programs where you will receive statements and advertisements by mail.
- ◆ Fill out only the pertinent information on registration cards for



purchases.

- ◆ Write the **Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference Service** to request that your name be removed from mailing lists.



Mail Preference Service

Direct Marketing Association
PO Box 643
Carmel, NY 10512

- ◆ Whenever you sign up for anything where you are providing your address, phone number or email address—a free drawing, membership at a movie rental store, or a frequent buyer club—look for boxes that let you “opt out” of receiving mailings from that company or from others. If there isn't any opt out opportunity, consider whether you are willing to take the risk of your name getting on a distribution list.
- ◆ Take advantage of the “opt out” options described in the Privacy Notices you receive from all of your financial institutions, credit cards and other lenders, insurers, and investment companies. You only need to respond to these mailings once from each company. You may want to keep a file labeled “Privacy Notices” to keep these in. Then, when you receive a new notice, you can quickly check whether you have already opted out with that company.

Floating Pieces of Paper/Notes [\[Back to top\]](#)

Eliminate floating pieces of paper by having only one place to write things down, and identifying a home where it will always be kept. You might choose to make your notes in a notebook that stays by the phone, a small notebook or pocket sized planner that you carry in your purse or pocket, or a PDA that you always carry with you.



Never jot something down with the idea that you'll rewrite or type it later. Write it down in its permanent location to start with. If the information eventually needs to be in electronic form, type your original notes or compose your first draft on the computer.

Magazines and Newspapers—Whole Ones and Clippings

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Unread newspapers

If you have stacks of unread newspapers, you have already lost most of their value because what they contain isn't *news* any more.

- ◆ The most sensible approach would be to recycle the entire stack of

them, and consider reducing the number of days a week you receive the paper.

- ◆ If you contend that you are going to read them, give yourself a deadline: If you haven't read at least two old papers per day by the end of the week, admit that you're not going to read them and toss them.
- ◆ If you can't be convinced to get rid of the old papers without reading them, you should cancel your subscription (which will also save you some money) until you get caught up.



Unread magazines

Two possibilities exist: you really aren't that interested in what the magazine covers, or you haven't made the time to read them. In either case, consider canceling the subscription. If you eventually catch up reading the old copies, then you might re-subscribe. If after a few months you still haven't read any of the old copies, toss them and don't even think about subscribing again!

Magazines and magazine articles you've already read

Few magazines other than Consumer Reports are indexed. As a result, you can't access the information in a stack of magazines the way you can the information in books. A stack of articles torn from magazines isn't much easier to use.

Old, intact magazines are generally only useful if you intend to read through them again as you would a new magazine. Retrieving and using the information from them, or from articles you've torn out, requires separating the bits of information and organizing them in such a way that is accessible. That takes time and effort, and most people don't have the time or won't expend the effort to make it work. If you want to give it a try, choose one magazine on a topic that you're extremely interested in. Then, try these suggestions:

- ◆ First, convince yourself that magazines do not need to remain pristine. If turning down page corners, writing notes, or highlighting sentences helps you make use of the information, don't hesitate.
- ◆ As you read the magazine, mark the pages or articles that you either want to save or that contain a fact or piece of information you want to retain. Either turn down the upper corner of the page or use a sticky flag.
- ◆ For facts or figures you want to recall, highlight the info or draw a line along the side of the paragraph.
- ◆ Write at the top of the page the topic that this article or fact will eventually be filed under.



- ◆ For entire articles you selected, tear out, staple together, and file. (Don't have a file yet? Then make one, using the topic you wrote on the article. And if you have files already set up and you have written the topic at the top of each article, someone else could even do your filing!)
- ◆ For individual facts or thoughts you marked, transfer to a central database using one of the following strategies:
 - ◆ Cut out the info, tape to pages in a notebook divided according to topic, or onto a standard-sized piece of paper to file by category.
 - ◆ Write the info in a notebook or log, with sections devoted to various topics.
 - ◆ Type the info into a text file or database on your computer, or PDA (personal digital assistant, such as a Palm). Computer files have the advantage of being searchable.

Small stacks of papers lying around, already grouped into some sort of category, are a sure indicator that some files are needed. But before you create file folders for each of these stacks, ask yourself, "Will I EVER pull out the information and look at it?"

Coupons

Envelopes or accordion files work well for storing and organizing coupons. Separate coupons by purpose or according to where you use them. For instance, coupons you would take to the grocery store should go in one envelope. Coupons for fast food should go in another. Make additional envelopes for other coupons you keep and use, such as dry cleaning and car service. Fast food and take-out coupons might be kept in the car.



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In the Kitchen

An organized kitchen follows **two basic rules** for effective storage: **(1) store items close to where they will be used, and (2) keep frequently used items in the most convenient storage areas.**

Look around your kitchen. Think about the tasks that you do there and apply the two basic rules.

- ◆ **Cooking:** Pots and pans and cooking utensils that you use regularly should be kept close to the range. Pots that you use rarely can go in hard-to-reach corner cabinets, under the often-used pots, or even in the basement.
- ◆ **Eating and clean-up:** Everyday plates, cereal bowls, glasses, and silverware should be close to the sink (or dishwasher), and/or close to where you eat, in easy-to reach shelves of upper cabinets. Special-occasion dishes can be kept on top shelves that are harder to reach, or in the dining room where you tend to serve fancier meals.
- ◆ **Microwave heating:** Dishes or containers that you use in the microwave should be stored close to the microwave or close to the counter area where you fill the dishes to be heated.
- ◆ **Making coffee:** Locate the coffee, creamer, sugar, and the coffee maker in the same area.
- ◆ **Food storage:** In the cabinet or pantry where you keep canned goods and other staples, put those that you use most frequently on the most accessible shelves. If you stock up on, say, spaghetti sauce when it's on sale, and space in the kitchen is tight, you might store the excess in another closet or in the basement.
- ◆ **Lunch preparation:** If you or your child take a bagged lunch to work or school, you'll want to keep those items together: plastic bags for snacks, plastic wrap or containers for sandwiches, plastic forks and spoons, single-serve microwavable containers, or any other items you use in preparing those meals.
- ◆ You probably also do some tasks in the kitchen that aren't food related such as making phone calls or paying the bills. Decide what tools you



need for those tasks, and assign a space to keep them.

Less frequently used items should go in the less convenient storage areas, such as deep corner cabinets, uppermost shelves that are hard to reach, or even outside the kitchen.

Some additional tips may help you organize some of your kitchen challenges:

- ◆ Plastic containers: Whether you have purchased plastic storage containers or if you re-use containers that prepared foods came in, the key to organizing them is to limit the number and type that you keep, so that they take up minimal space and you can find lids and bottoms that match. You might choose to keep just one set of round containers of various sizes that nest, or keep only the containers that one kind of margarine, whipped topping, or other purchased item comes in. Then, keep lids in a clear glass baking dish that you seldom use, or even in a clear plastic bag—anything to keep them together where you can see them.
- ◆ Heavier items should be kept in bottom cabinets.
- ◆ Some easy modifications can make your kitchen storage more usable.
 - ◆ Using dividers in drawers for kitchen utensils, knives, and flat ware.
 - ◆ Moving some storage to the countertop (kitchen utensils in a crock.)
 - ◆ Placing flatware in a multi-compartment basket or container.
 - ◆ Hanging pots from a rack or hooks on a peg board on the wall.

Recipes

What kind of recipe-keeper are you? How many do you have? Corral like items together, then see what kind of storage you need.

For example, you may want to sort recipes by whether you've used them:

- ◆ "Tried and true" recipes that you're likely to use again: a recipe box with dividers might be the ideal container for these, or a photo album that will let you slide the recipe into a plastic sleeve.
- ◆ Recipes you plan to try: grouped by type of dish (main dish, salad, dessert) or by main ingredient (beef, lamb, cheese), and each group placed in a labeled plastic page protector, or plastic zipper bag, or box, depending on the volume you have.



When you save a recipe, try to use the same approach recommended under the section on magazines—labeling the recipe with the category where you will file it, and perhaps highlighting the ingredient or feature that caught your attention.

If your recipe box is overflowing or has papers sticking up out of it, your box may just be too small. If you're using a box that holds 3x5 cards, consider switching to a 4x6 box. Four by six cards are large enough that you can usually tape a magazine clipping directly onto the card, without ragged ends sticking up out of the box. You can even tape your 3x5 cards onto the new 4x6 cards to avoid rewriting them.



If you simply have too many recipes to fit in the box, you may want to cull out some. Alternatively, look for a box that holds more cards, or divide your recipes into two boxes. You might put desserts, snacks, and foods for entertaining in one box, and regular meat, poultry, vegetable, and casserole recipes in the other.

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Clothing

There are just two basic ways to deal with clutter, including clothing: get rid of it, or organize it. Most people need to do some of both when it comes to clothing.



Decide What To Get Rid Of

Prepare by arming yourself with three large boxes or garbage bags plus a laundry basket, using a 3-container variation of the [Clear the Clutter Strategy](#). Designate one bag or box to hold items for each of these means of disposal:

- ◆ Garbage
- ◆ Give away/donate
- ◆ Yard sale or resale/consignment shop (If you're not planning to sell anything, you'll only need two containers.)

Items that belong to someone else or belong in other rooms should go **in the laundry basket**. For example, you discover a pair of your child's socks mixed in with your stuff.

The first step in dealing with clothing should be to place like items together (See [A Home for Every Item](#) for more on this strategy). In this case, group items by type and then by color. For example, gather all your pants or trousers. Then group them by color. Now, apply [Clear the Clutter Strategy](#): Examine and try on each piece of clothing, then make a decision: keep it or not? If not, place it in one of the containers. And what about the clothes that you're keeping? They will go back in your closet or drawer—but not yet. You may need to check which items can be worn together, so leave them out where they will be handy until you've gone through their potential mates.

You may want to leave out only clothing that is in season. You can reduce the clutter in your bedroom closet by storing out-of-season clothes in a box or another closet. When you switch your clothing at the change of the season, it's a perfect time to sort through and dispose of clothing that you no longer want.

Organize What You Keep

Here are tips for organizing different types of clothing.

- ◆ **Hanging clothes**
 Group clothing by type, such as shirts or blouses together, suits and

coordinates, dresses, and slacks.

- ◆ **Drawers**

Use shallow drawers for smaller items such as socks and lingerie or underwear.

- ◆ **Shoes**

If you're considering any sort of shoe organizer (an over-the-door plastic organizer, a wooden shoe rack, etc.) make sure that the organizer will accommodate the size and type of shoes you wear. Some organizers can't accept high heels, others may have slots too narrow for "clunky" styles or men's shoes. Shoes can easily be stored in their original boxes or in purchased clear plastic shoe boxes. Using original boxes is easier if you place a wide white label on the end of each box and write a short description of the shoes inside, such as "Navy loafers" or "brown suede flats." Using a label is especially important if you have stored box-less shoes in a different shoe box.

Prevention

Make a list of clothing items that you need and carry it in your wallet or on your electronic organizer. Refer to it when you're shopping, to help you focus on purchasing planned items rather than spontaneous choices that may not match other items in your wardrobe.

Special Situations

If you have clothing of different sizes that you feel you must keep, you can use a couple of different approaches to keep them separated. Keep only those items in the size you are currently wearing in the most accessible drawers or sections of your closet. Clothing that you can't wear at the moment should be clearly separated from those you are currently wearing. You can designate specific drawers for them, or put a divider of some type in your closet. Or, you can simply store them in a clear plastic box with a label, such as "size 10" or "small clothes."

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Kids' Stuff

Kids can produce tons of school papers, artwork and other materials annually. And it seems that their toys, books, games and clothes just multiply. Here are some ideas for reducing the piles and organizing what is left.

School papers and projects

Collect in a box or other container what comes home during the year. At the end of the school year, have the child select X number to keep, and you also select X; the rest get pitched. The ones you keep can be filed or placed in a large envelope, marked with the child's name, year and grade level. Or you can scan the paper and pitch the originals.

Toys

Store close to where the children play. Place storage containers where children can reach them, if you intend for them to help with putting them away. Rotate some toys, putting some in "inactive" storage for a time. Periodically let the child choose a certain number they want to play with for a while. You might describe it to a child as deciding which toys are "it" for now.

Children's art projects

A box under a bed is a perfect size and place for these wide, flat items. Ask the child to pick X number at the end of the year to keep, and you may choose the same number. The rest get pitched. Make a collage of them after a few years. Or take photos and toss the originals. Or you can scan the art work—one parent even turned them into a poster, and then created a business doing it for other parents. Take photos of dioramas and other large items.



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Keepsakes

Keepsakes may include souvenirs, gifts from friends and loved ones, relics from our past, or other sentimental objects. If keepsakes are cluttering up your home or storage areas, ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ Is there a way I can actually use and enjoy the item? Perhaps a special greeting card is pretty enough to be framed and hung, or a family heirloom quilt can be enjoyed on the bed in a guest room. Souvenir glasses from vacations can be used at family meals, generating memories for everyone.
- ◆ Is there a theme that ties the items together, so that I could display them as a collection? One or two items sitting around looks like clutter, but three or more similar ones can be a collection. Enhance the impression that they are a set by enclosing them in a display case or grouping them on a tray.
- ◆ Is there a way I can preserve the memories while reducing the bulk? Some people have taken small pieces of fabric from garments that held special memories and made patchwork pillow tops or collages. Others take a picture of the actual item, so they can preserve the memory without keeping the real thing. And when it comes to the stacks of photos we often collect, carefully sort through and toss any that are out of focus, too far away from the subject, or that duplicate another shot that tells the same story.
- ◆ Are the items valuable enough that I could donate them to a museum? If so, you might be able to see them when you want to, and others could enjoy them as well.
- ◆ Does it have monetary value? You might consider selling it.
- ◆ Is there someone else for whom this also has meaning? Or, to whom do I plan to leave this when I die? Perhaps you could give the keepsake to someone else now, knowing that it will be enjoyed and appreciated.



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Barriers to Getting Organized, And How To Deal With Them

I'd Love To Get Organized, But...I Can't Decide What to Toss.

If you're having a hard time making decisions, you can try several different approaches.

- ◆ Try using these questions from the [Clutter Emergency Card](#) to help decide what's important and what's not.
 - ◆ How long has it been since I used this?
 - ◆ Do I like it?
 - ◆ Does it work properly - is it broken?
 - ◆ Do I have more of this kind of thing? How many do I need?
 - ◆ If I keep this, what will I get rid of to make room for it?
 - ◆ Can I locate this information somewhere else (probably on the Internet) if I need it?
- ◆ Get a buddy to work with you. A friend can help you think through what's important to keep and provide the moral support you need.
- ◆ Some days, you're just more easily overwhelmed than others. Choose a day when you're calmer, more focused, or feeling more in control.

I don't know where to start. I don't know what to do with *any* of this!

Try these tips when you're trying to attack an out-of-control area with lots of clutter.

- ◆ Force yourself to actually look at individual items, maybe even picking them up one by one to help you focus.
- ◆ Start with the first item you see that you know what to do with. If it's trash and you're going to put it in the garbage box, or it belongs in a certain drawer or file elsewhere in the house, grab it and put it in the box you have for trash or in the laundry basket to be put away later. You are using the Clear the Clutter strategy, right?
- ◆ Spread things out a little. Then force yourself to look at individual items. When you're looking at a pile or stack of stuff, you can be overwhelmed and see the forest rather than the trees.



As you eat away at the mass of stuff, you'll probably find that there are actually very few items that you truly don't know what to do with. Once

you've removed the items that you already know what to do with, you may see groups or categories emerging. It's easier to create a home and store a group of similar items than an assortment of individual, unrelated items.

I'll never get through this stack of papers. I've gone through these papers before, and I just end up putting them back into one big stack.

When sorting papers, don't wait until you are completely finished to set up files or other containers for the categories you sort them into. Have file folders and labels, an accordion file, or envelopes on hand when you start going through the stack. Even if you're only part way through the stack when you have to stop, don't restack the papers you've already sorted. Put each category of papers into a file or envelope and label it. Either store those files, or keep them temporarily with the large stack, so you can continue to sort more papers into those files.

I am afraid I'll need something right after I get rid of it.

Try this "hedge" approach. Put the item(s) in a box. Seal the box with tape, and write a date on it for six months from now. Put the box in the garage or basement, someplace out of the way. When you come across the box and the date has passed, toss it out without opening it.

For paper or pieces of information, ask yourself, "If I need this information again, can I get it from somewhere other than this piece of paper?" The information may easily be accessible on the web.

I have to leave things lying around to remember to do them.

A to-do list is a substitute for the visual reminder of leaving the actual thing lying around. We tend to think "Out of sight, out of mind." But if you leave papers or items lying out in the open as a reminder to yourself, what often happens instead is that it becomes a part of the landscape. Now it's sitting out and adding to your clutter, and you **still** don't remember to do it. Better to put it away and add the task to your to-do list.

I put things on my to-do list and I still don't do them.

Is one item repeatedly left undone, and you continually copy it onto each new to-do list? Ask yourself, Do I really plan to do this? Is there some barrier to my getting this done? Is there an initial step that has to be done before I can actually attack the task? Is there something about this task that makes me anxious or uncomfortable?

I don't know where to put this.

Before you can put something away, it has to have a home. You're just creating clutter *inside* your storage areas when you take a whole stack of unsorted papers and stash it in a drawer. So make a file folder label a box, or identify similar items to put it with so that there is a logical home for this thing.

I can't get rid of this: it's special because...

Maybe someone special gave it to you. Or you bought it on a special trip. Or it was a wedding gift. If the item really holds a lot of sentimental value for you, try to decide how to display or enjoy it in your home. Or, consider preserving the sentiment without preserving the actual item. Some people take

photographs or make collages of these kinds of things so that they can hold onto the special feelings those items evoke while taking up much less space.

I can't get rid of this. It cost too much!

Like hanging onto losing stocks until they are worthless, we hesitate to get rid of unwise purchases because it confirms our poor decision and makes the loss "real." Try to rationalize your way through this decision: Even if you paid a lot for it, hanging onto something that is useless to you just makes you feel worse by reminding you of your mistake every time you see it. Could someone else use it? Can you donate it for a tax deduction? Or could you do something corny with it, like use it as a centerpiece for a dinner party or use it for an oddball conversation piece at your office?

I'm afraid to toss this information - it has my Social Security number, financial accounts, or other personal information on it.

You are right to be concerned. Identity theft and fraudulent financial transactions can result from the wrong person getting their hands on your information. Luckily, the solution here is fairly simple; either rip the documents carefully (some people even throw away different parts of the document in different containers) or get a shredder. Shredders are pretty inexpensive and can make quick work of those documents.



I can't put it away - I'll never find it again.

If you store an item close to other similar things, you should be able to *figure out* where to look for it, even if you don't remember. If you've put things away and later couldn't find them, you may have been "stashing" things to get them out of sight, rather than really deciding where it *should* be stored and identifying a permanent home for it.

I know how to do this, and I should be able to do it. But somehow I just can't make myself do it.

Does logic say, "Get rid of it," but you just can't bring yourself to deal with it?

Instead of focusing on the item, focus on what it means to you or what feelings it evokes when you think about tossing it. Try to identify all the thoughts and feelings you have about the item or how you obtained it. See if these examples will help.

- One woman still had almost all her clothes she had purchased over the years. She said she wanted to get rid of them, but she just couldn't do it. She was frustrated that she couldn't part with clothes she knew she would never wear again.

When she tried to identify her thoughts and feelings about those clothes, she remembered the clothes she had as a child. She never had a new outfit of clothes; all her clothes were hand-me-downs. When she grew up and was on her own, she bought new clothes for herself. Most of those items of clothing were still in her attic. She finally realized why

they felt too valuable to be tossed away even though she knew she would never wear them. This realization could have allowed her to finally dispose of the clothes. Or perhaps it simply helped her understand why it was so difficult to consider getting rid of them. In either case, she would be more comfortable with her decision and less frustrated.

- ◆ Another woman found it difficult to organize anything in her home. After much thought and discussion, she said she felt that, as a child, her parents acted as if things were more important than she was. When she spent time organizing her "things," she felt that she was putting more value on those possessions than on her children.

Once you recognize the emotion that is holding you back, you may be able to toss, give away, or organize the clutter. Or, you may feel less frustrated at your seemingly illogical behavior and be able to stop worrying about it.

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If You Still Can't Get Started

If you're still feeling intimidated at the amount of work in front of you and can't seem to get started, try one of these approaches:

◆ **Find a buddy**

Ask a friend, neighbor, or relative to spend a couple of hours with you when you're working on organizing one thing in your home, just to provide moral support as you try to get started.

◆ **Start small**

Don't tackle the most cluttered area of your home first. Instead, choose a more manageable task for your first one, like a junky drawer or a shelf in one of your closets.

◆ **Start with something you can tackle**

Having a vision of how you want something to turn out will help keep you motivated and give you more purpose. It may be worth spending a little time just thinking about the task before you actually begin it.

Or, you might want to try a totally different approach to dealing with some of your clutter: **ACCEPT IT.**

The clutter may not really be a problem—it's just that you worry about it or feel guilty. Or you may be in a situation where it is not within your control to change the clutter or disorganization that frustrates you. In either case, worrying or feeling bad about the clutter probably makes the situation worse rather than better. *You can decide to stop worrying about it.* Accepting a certain amount of clutter or disorganization may be a wiser way of dealing with it.

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION

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DAY 13

Declutter Your Life

“Simplify, simplify.”
—Henry David Thoreau

The simple life is a manly life. Some of history’s manliest men lived lives of true simplicity, free from unneeded clutter. The Spartans basically had one piece of clothing they wore all year, a spear, a shield, and some farm tools. Because of their simple lifestyle, they were able to focus on learning how to be fighting machines.

Despite being relatively wealthy, [Ben Franklin](#) lived a pretty simple life. Consequently, he was able to spend his time inventing stoves, creating public libraries, discovering electricity, and founding a country.

Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson were evangelists of simplicity. When Thoreau went to Walden Pond he brought with him just a few things. Because he didn’t have crap distracting him, he was able to focus his energies into writing some awesomely deep thoughts.

The simple life is a manly life because a man defines himself not by his possessions but by his character, virtues, relationships, and experiences. These are the things that he invests his time, energy, and emotions in, because these are the things that no natural disaster, no bomb, no prison can ever take away from him. The less stuff we accumulate, the less energy we have to devote to the maintenance of it, and the more energy we can put into becoming better men.

WHY DECLUTTER

- 1. It reduces stress.** I definitely think there's something to the idea that clutter can block the flow of good karma and energy in your life. Whenever I'm in a room filled with crap, I get tense and feel like I'm being buried in stuff. When I clear things out, I feel like a load has been taken off me physically and mentally. I think clearer, I'm more productive, and I have a bit more pep in my step.
- 2. It gives you a fresh start.** If you feel as though you've been [stuck in a rut](#) lately or if you've [gone through a tough break-up](#) or recently been [laid off](#), decluttering your space may be just the thing to kick-start your life and move it out of neutral. You can get rid of stuff that reminds you of a part of your life you want to move on from. Holding onto stuff you associate with bad memories and feelings keeps the bad energy in your home. After you clear out your crap, you'll have a clean canvas on which to create a new life.
- 3. It saves you time.** I don't know how many hours I've wasted in my life looking for something in the boxes and drawers of junk I've accumulated. When you have a house free of clutter, you can spend less time looking for stuff and more time focusing on more important things like [making your bucket list](#) or [reconnecting with nature](#). After all, "[A place for everything, and everything in its place](#)," is one of the manlier mantras you can organize your life around.
- 4. It can save (and make) you some money.** When you have a disorganized mess, important things like bills can get lost in the mix. When that happens, you run the risk of forgetting to pay a bill and being slapped with an overdue fee. You also forget what you have and don't have, and thus end up buying duplicates of things already in your possession. Save yourself money by keeping your place clutter free.

Also, through the process of decluttering, you may run across a few things that you can sell on eBay or Amazon and thus make some cash in the process.

HOW TO DECLUTTER

1. **Set aside a big chunk of time.** How much time you allocate for decluttering will depend on how much crap you've accumulated over the years. Usually when I declutter the house, it takes about four hours of focused work. It may take you longer or shorter. But I would give yourself at least 2 hours this weekend to get started on it.
2. **Get some garbage bags.** You'll either be tossing stuff out, donating it to Goodwill, or selling it. Have one trash bag for each one of these purposes.
3. **Tackle the task one room at a time.** One thing I've noticed when I've done some heavy duty decluttering is that I'll begin in one room, but somehow end up in another. This just makes my job harder because I have to keep track of what's going on in both rooms, and I've made a mess in two rooms instead of one. It's better when I just focus on one room or closet at a time and focus completely on clearing it out until I'm satisfied with the job I've done. So fight the temptation to have several irons in the fire while decluttering. Pick a room in your house and work on it until you're done.

After you've selected a room, work on it section by section. For example, start with your dresser or desk and go through it drawer by drawer. Or start with your closet and look at what's on each hanger. Don't move on to another section until the one you started on is done.

Finally, leave no stone unturned. Go through your underwear drawer and throw out those socks without matches or those boxers with gaping holes in them. Clean out your medicine cabinet and throw away anything that has expired. Go through your desk drawers and chuck



your pens that have run out of ink. Get every last piece of unusable clutter out of your life.

4. Sort through your stuff. As you work through each section, take everything item by item and decide whether you're going to keep it or which bag it goes into: trash, sell, or donate. Here's some advice on how to make that decision:

- **Books.** Go book by book and ask yourself if you're ever going to read it or read it again. Be honest here. Don't keep a book because it makes you feel smart while deep down you know there's no way you're going to read it. Books aren't accessories or decorative pieces. Also, keep in mind that if you get rid of a book and then regret it, you can always check it out from the library or buy it used for \$2 on [Amazon](#) or at a used book store. This is not a life or death decision, so err on the side of uncluttering.

Take the books you don't want and put them for sale on sites like [Amazon](#) or half.com. Or take them to your local used bookstore. If you can't sell them, donate them to the library.

- **Clothes and miscellaneous items.** Go through your clothes and other stuff piece by piece. Ask yourself this question as you hold each item, "Is this something I have used/worn in the past year?"

If you haven't, then get rid of it. We often hold onto stuff because we think we're going to need it "someday." But if you haven't used something in a year, you're probably never going to use it, and it will just end up taking up space in your house. Even if you would end up using it 10 years from now, the cost/benefit analysis of lugging that thing around for the next decade just doesn't make sense.

When you make this decision, be quick. Don't mull over it too much. The more you mull, the more likely you'll hold onto it. Remember, if you hesitate at all, you probably don't need it. You

have to learn to detach feelings and emotions from stuff. Stuff is just stuff, a bunch of atoms and molecules. Unless something is truly irreplaceable, then it's okay to throw it away and keep the memories in your mind and heart.

Put your old clothes, with the exception of your underwear, in the donate bag. As you put stuff in the bag, make a note of what the item is on a piece of paper and give it an approximate value. You can use this to get a receipt from Goodwill and write off the amount you donated on your income taxes.

- **Paper and mail.** If you don't have one now, go out and buy a file box. And then make folders labeled as "Bills," "Instruction Manuals," "Letters," "Receipts," and so on. Then go through your mail and paper piles piece by piece, throwing away what you don't need and filing what you do need.

CHUCK IT OR DONATE IT

When you're done decluttering, take the bags designated for trash to the curb. Drop off the donate bags to Goodwill and make sure to get a receipt from them for your income tax deduction.

PREVENTING CLUTTER FROM RE-ENTERING YOUR LIFE

Once you have successfully decluttered your home, you'll be amazed at how satisfying it feels. The hard part is holding on to that feeling and not letting everything get cluttered up again. So here are a few steps to take to prevent clutter from creeping back into your life:

- Every time you bring home something new, get rid of something. This keeps the balance of clutter in check.
- Every time you go to bed, spend 5 minutes moving from room to room and throwing away junk that's been lying around.

- Each time you get the mail, open it immediately, throwing away what you don't need and filing what you do.

Today's Task:
Declutter Your Place

Just get started. Maybe you have so much crap that you can only get one room done all day. So be it. Just get started.



Declutter Your Life

Leo Babauta

There was a time, about 8 years ago, when my life was cluttered. I had too much stuff, and it kept coming in all the time. I had too much to do, and didn't know how to simplify my schedule.

I was in need of some decluttering, and I knew it.

When I started to change my habits, from smoking to running to being more mindful, simplifying my life was near the top of the list.

The question became, how to go about it? How do you start when you're facing a mountain of clutter, and another mountain of commitments, and piles of files and mail and email and other digital information?

The answer became clear, as I got started: start simply. Keep it simple as you go. Simple, each step of the way.

That said, I found complications that made things harder at every turn. I'd like to help you with some of those here, briefly, in hopes that you'll be inspired to start decluttering.

Start Decluttering

How do you get started? As simply as possible:

- Take just 10 minutes today to sort through a pile, or declutter a shelf or table or countertop.

- Put everything into one pile, and start with the first thing you pick up (no putting things back in the pile).
- Ask yourself: do you really need this? Do you use it regularly? Do you love it? If the answer to any of these is no, then recycle, donate, or give it to someone who might want it. Put it in a box for these purposes.
- Put things back that you need/use/love, with space between things. This is their “home” and you should always put them back there.
- Stop after 10 minutes, continue tomorrow for another 10 minutes, and so on, one small spot in your home at a time.
- If you want to do more than 10 minutes, go ahead, but be careful not to overdo it in the beginning or you’ll think it’s difficult and not want to continue.

Keep Going

Once you’ve gotten the ball rolling, here’s how to keep going:

- Keep decluttering in small bits. Pick an area to focus on each week.
- Don’t worry about perfection. Just get it simpler. You can always declutter it more later.
- Put your box of donation/recycling/giving away in your trunk, to get rid of next time you’re out. Email friends/family to ask if they want things — often you can find a good home for perfectly good things you don’t really use (that workout equipment).
- If you’re on the fence, use a Maybe Box (put things that you think you *might* need in a box, mark it with today’s date, put a reminder on your calendar 6 months from now to check on the Maybe Box. If you haven’t used it in 6 months, you probably don’t need it and can get rid of it.
- Get help. Sometimes you just can’t bear to part with yourself, but if you can get an outside person to make the decision (friend or family member), they are usually much more dispassionate and ruthless.

- Enjoy the space. Once you've decluttered an area, really focus on how much you love the simplified space. Once you're hooked on this simplicity, you're more likely to keep going.

Decluttering Your Calendar & Digital Life

Physical decluttering is only one type of decluttering. You can also simplify your day, and your online/computer life as well.

A few simple tips:

- Decluttering your day is about reducing commitments, and saying no to the non-essential things. So first make a list of your commitments.
- Make a list of what's most important to you (4-5 things) and declutter the rest. Say no to people with a phone call or email, and get out of existing commitments.
- Be very ruthless about saying no to new commitments — and seeing requests as potential commitments. Guard your time.
- Declutter your digital life one step at a time, just like your physical life. Email newsletters, blogs, social networks, online reading and watching, forums, etc. — are they essential? Can you declutter them?

Dealing With Others

Having other people in your life (home or workspace) can make simplifying more complicated. I have a wife and six kids, so I know how it is.

Some tips:

- Talk to them about it early on, when you're just thinking about it (show them this article). Don't force a decision on anyone, but involve them in the decision-making process.

- Focus on the benefits, the why, rather than what they need to do and why what they're doing is wrong. People don't like to be wrong, but they do like benefits.
- Lead by example. Show how you can declutter your space, and how much nicer it is, and how much easier it is to find things, to clean, to be at peace during your day.
- If there's resistance, focus on decluttering your space. Don't get frustrated with them, because that makes it more difficult. Instead, remember that you were a clutter-holic not long ago, so empathize.
- Don't shy away from an opportunity to discuss simplifying, and why you're doing it, in a positive way. Criticizing doesn't help, nor does acting superior. Inspiring helps tremendously.

15 Great Decluttering Tips

Leo Babauta

As with anything, getting rid of clutter can be made incredibly simple: just go through your stuff, one section, closet, drawer, or shelf at a time, and get rid of everything that isn't absolutely essential, that you don't love and use often.

Of course, simplifying a process like that isn't terribly useful to many people who struggle with clutter. So, with that in mind, I present to you 15 fabulous tip for decluttering. These tips aren't mine — they're from you guys, the readers, repackaged into a useful little post.

Recently I asked you guys for your best decluttering tips ... and I pulled some of the best of those (there are many more good ones I wasn't able to use). They're reworded here slightly, and a couple have been modified indiscriminately by me. :)

But they're great tips nonetheless. Enjoy!

1. **Declutter for 15 minutes every day.** It's amazing how much you can get through if you just do it in small increments like this.
2. **Don't allow things into the house in the first place.** Whether you've begun decluttering the living space, or you've just completed it, stop bringing in new stuff NOW. Even if that's ALL you do and don't start decluttering immediately, if you can only establish one habit at a time, establish the no-more-stuff habit first. This way, when you do get to decluttering the existing stuff, you've already stopped making it worse. Think of bailing out a boat with a hole in it. You can bail and bail, but it won't do anything for the leak.

3. **Donate stuff you're decluttering**, so you don't feel bad about wasting it.
4. **Create a Joe's Goals chart with decluttering on it** — either daily, or 3 times a week. Check off the days when you declutter, and you'll feel a great sense of accomplishment.
5. **Start at the corner by the door and move your way around the room**, doing the superficial stuff first – surfaces, empty the bin etc. Repeat, but do more the 2nd time around – ie. open the cupboards.
6. **Whenever you're boiling the kettle for tea, tidy up the kitchen.** If the kitchen is tidy, tidy up the next room – it's only 3 minutes but it keeps you on top of everything (helps if you have an Englishman's obsession with Tea as well!)
7. **Use the "one in, two out" rule.** The rule: whenever you bring in an item, you have to throw away two other items. First you cheat, by throwing out two pieces of paper, but soon you will have to move to big stuff.
8. **Make your storage space smaller** and more minimal. If you have lots of storage, you'll fill it with stuff.
9. **Clothing rule:** If you haven't worn an item in 6 months, sell or donate it.
10. **The One-Year Box.** Take all your items that you are unsure about getting rid of (e.g. "I might need this someday..."), put them in a box, seal it and date it for 1 year in the future. When the date comes, and you still didn't need to open it to get anything, donate the box **WITHOUT OPENING IT**. You probably won't even remember what there was in the box.
11. **Declutter one room** (including any closets, desks, cabinets, etc.) before starting on the next one. Spending time in that room will feel *so* good, and it will be so easy to keep clean, that it will motivate you to do more!
12. **Keep a list in your planner labeled "Don't Need It – Don't Want It."** When you're out shopping and run across some kind of gadget or other item you crave, note it down on the list. This will slow you down long enough to reconsider. Also, seeing the other things on the list that you nearly bought on impulse really helps.

13. **Internalize that your value is not in your “stuff”.** It is just “stuff”. And realize that your value grows when you share your “stuff”. Hoarding is a selfish act.
14. **Have someone else (who you trust!) help you go through things.** They don't have the (sometimes irrational) emotional attachment that you might have, but can still recognize if something should be kept.
15. **Gift everything.** Books you've read immediately get recycled among friends, family or local libraries. If you buy a new gaming system, donate your old one – and all the games.

Toggle menu [#off-screen-nav]

Cut The Crap: 5 Simple Ways to Start Decluttering

[<http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/cut-the-crap-5-ways-to-declutter-199289>]

It can be so hard to keep things tidy and minimal when you're in the midst of a multi-tasking tornado, but clutter doesn't have to get the best of us. There are a few quick and easy ways—that any of us can do—to keep it at bay.

There has been research [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/shannon-kelley/clutter_b_1656670.html] showing that clutter not only affects our physical space, but our mental space as well. It can lead to more stress, depression, and lack of focus. So I say let's make this easy and take quick and effective steps to cut the crap—starting now!

Designated Outbox: Set up a permanent basket, box, or bag by your front door to toss things that need to go. Make it part of your decor so that it's part of your daily life and doesn't just look like a messy cardboard chore lurking in the corner, sending accusing looks at you. Try emptying it once a week or at least twice a month.

Clean As You Cook: Somehow a messy kitchen with a pile of dishes is always the first stop on the ride on the messy train. Never go to bed with a sink full of dishes. Waking up to dirty dishes just sets you starting your day off wrong. Also, try to clean up as you cook so that when dinner is done you don't turn around to more work and can end your night on a good note.

Sort Mail Immediately: I am guilty as charged when it comes to piles of mail in various places that "I'll get to later." My new workflow is: pick up mail; open it over the recycle bin; put bills in a designated bill cubby; and feel good while doing it.

Tidy Up 10 Minutes a Day: You can split this up into two five-minute chunks or a full ten. Quickly shuffle through your house (preferably at the end of the day) and put away all those little things that you took out, opened, or tossed on the couch throughout the day. This way you can reset your home each evening and start fresh each morning.

Refocus Your Energy: A long time ago I heard someone say, 'it takes just as much energy to be messy and it does to be clean' and it always stuck with me. It makes total sense: when you're messy you are just delaying the energy it will take to clean it up instead of doing it immediately. I find that, when I clean as I go, I'm much happier and rest so much better without 'to do's' weighing on my mind, or seeing guilt-ridden piles of stuff.

So, try it out. Take a week and make an effort to really focus on these small decluttering tips throughout the day and see how you feel at the end of it. Good luck!

(Image credits: Julia Brenner [<http://apartmenttherapy.com/authors/juliab>])



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10 Creative Ways to Declutter Your Home

WRITTEN *by* JOSHUA BECKER · [271 COMMENTS](#)



“People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing.” — Dale Carnegie

The idea of living a simplified, uncluttered life with less stuff sounds attractive to many. They have considered the benefits of owning fewer possessions: less to clean, less debt, less to organize, less stress, more money and energy for their greatest passions. They are ready to declutter but some get quickly tripped up by the very next question... where in the world do I begin?

Many begin to feel overwhelmed, anxious, and defeated around the idea of decluttering their homes. That's too bad. The decluttering journey doesn't need to be as painful as some make it out to be. In fact, there are a variety of people who have come up with some pretty fun, creative ways to get started.

Consider this list of 10 creative ways to declutter your home:

1. Give yourself 5 solid minutes. Leo Babauta at Zen Habits recommends 18 different 5-minute decluttering tips. Pick one today that sounds appealing. Or better yet, pick a random number 1-18, read the specific tip, and commit 5 minutes to completing it.

2. Give away one item each day. Colleen Madsen at 365 Less Things gives away one item each day. Over the past several years, she has experienced quite a transformation simply reducing her stuff one day at a time.

3. Fill one trash bag. Early in our journey towards simplicity, one of my favorite decluttering techniques was to grab a simple large trash bag and see how quickly I could fill it. While much of what I collected was trash, this could also be used to fill a bag for Goodwill.

4. Try the Oprah Winfrey Closet Hanger Experiment. While this idea didn't originate with Oprah, she was the one to help give it notoriety. To identify wardrobe pieces to clear out, hang all your clothes with the hangers in the reverse direction. After you wear an item, return it to the closet with the hanger facing the correct direction. After six months, you'll have a clear picture of which clothes you can easily discard. This experiment could also be applied to a number of clutter areas in your home (cleaners, toys, linens, tools, hobbies and craft items).

5. Make a list. Dana Byers recommends creating a list of places/areas in your home to declutter beginning with the easiest... which doesn't sound all that creative until she adds this note, "When you're done with one

area, STOP.” This list could be made as easy or difficult as you desire based upon what areas of your home make up the list (drawers/closets/rooms). And could easily fit into any schedule.

6. Take the 12-12-12 Challenge. A simple task of locating 12 items to throw away, 12 items to donate, and 12 items to be returned to their proper home can be a really fun and exciting way to quickly organize 36 things in your house. On more than one occasion, this challenge actually became a quick competition between my wife and me... and your kids don't have to be too old to participate as well.

7. Change your perspective. Unclutterer offers a powerful approach to decluttering when they offer a number of strategies to help you change your perspective and begin to notice some clutter you may have missed. Among their ideas: take photos of your house, invite over a toddler, or ask the boss to meet in your office. With all of the examples, the hope is to cause you to see your home in a new light.

8. Experiment with numbers. For example, Courtney Carver invented Project 333 to challenge people to wear only 33 articles of clothing for 3 months. If 33 articles of clothing seems too little, adjust the rules as you need by picking a new number. The important thing is to challenge yourself to live with less and see what you learn from the experiment.

9. Use your imagination. Psychology Today recommends using your imagination to help declutter objects that may seem difficult to remove. Try asking yourself unique questions like, “If I was just buying this now, how much would I pay?” These creative techniques may prove to be very helpful for some with difficulties removing unneeded clutter.

10. The Four-Box Method. As we first set out on our journey to minimalism, this was the technique most often used in our home. As I set out to declutter an area, I brought four boxes: trash, give away, keep, or relocate. Each item in every room was placed into one of the four

categories. No item was passed over. Each was considered individually. Some projects took an hour... others took days or weeks. But the technique and principles remained the same.

No matter what you choose to help you get started – whether it be one of these ten or one of countless others – the goal is to take your first step with excitement behind it. There is a beautiful world of freedom and fresh breath hiding behind that clutter. How you remove it is up to you.

*Special thanks to each of you who purchased a copy of **Simplify: 7 Guiding Principles to Help Anyone Declutter Their Home and Life**. We are excited to announce it recently debuted as the #1 Self-Help book on Amazon.*

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About Joshua Becker

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Comments



julie says

March 7, 2015 at 1:12 am

How to Declutter Your Life and Reduce Stress

Lifestyle by Julie McCormick

Excessive clutter is often a symptom and a cause of stress and can affect every facet of your life, from the time it takes you to do things to your finances and your overall enjoyment of life. Clutter can distract you, weigh you down, and in general it invites chaos into your life. Often times, however, tackling the clutter can seem an insurmountable task if you don't know where or how to start. By devoting a little of your time to getting rid of the clutter in your life and maintaining things relatively clutter-free, you'll reap the rewards of pleasing living areas, reduced stress, and a more organized and productive existence.

The best way to tackle the decluttering of your home, your work space, and your life is to take things one small step at a time. Combined, small steps will lead to big improvements that will be easier to maintain over the long-run. Here is a blueprint of how to start tackling that clutter and enjoying a less stressful life:

Your Work Area

If you want to be more productive and focused in your work, getting the clutter out of your work area is essential.

- **Start with your desk.** Clear everything off the top of it and take everything out of the drawers. Assemble the items in piles on the floor. Clean and wipe down your desk, and marvel at how pretty and clean it looks. Sort through all of the "stuff" that was both in and on your desk. Toss out as much as possible a relatively small amount. Once you've weeded things out, it's time to sort through the remains. Set up a basic alphabetical filing system with a folder for each project or client. Keep your office supplies and other items in designated drawers. If you need to, label things, but the main thing you should do is designate a spot for every item you decided to keep and make sure that it stays there, or goes back there when you're done using it. Keep flat surfaces clear, and have an inbox for all incoming papers. When the papers come in, sort them each day – toss, delegate, do immediately, or file simply file all documents, but whatever you do, **DO NOT KEEP THEM ON TOP OF YOUR DESK.** All you want on the surface of your desk is your phone, computer, inbox, and maybe a special photo in addition to the documents you are working with at the moment.
- **Declutter your computer.** Get rid of files and programs on your computer that you don't need. Get rid of most or all of the icons on your desktop. They not only slow down your computer, but they also create visual clutter. There are better ways of accessing your information. Regularly purge old, unused files. If organization is not your thing, utilize a program such as Google Desktop to search for your files when you need them.
- **Then move on to information.** In the digital world of today, there are so many different ways that information creeps into our lives. Information in itself can become overwhelming when you have too much of it, and this is called information clutter. Instead of letting information take over your life, set limits. Reduce the number of things that you read each day and get rid of things from your RSS feed. Chuck those magazine subscriptions, and reduce your consumption of news and television. I'm not suggesting that you cut yourself off from the world, just that setting some boundaries will help. Instead of letting information, even the kind that friends share on Facebook, take over your life, control how and when you receive it by limiting what you read.

Your Home

Outside of work, home is where many of a bulk of our time. So it's no wonder that a messy house can add to daily stress.

- **Simply your rooms.** If your rooms are too cluttered, you'll want to simplify them. Start by clearing off anything that is on the floors. Throw out or donate unused things. After clearing the floor, move to flat surfaces such as countertops, shelves, tops of dressers, etc. Clear them as much as possible, and then

move onto furniture. Consider if you need everything . Sort things in piles – toss, donate, or keep. Organize everything that you’ve decided to keep into drawers, cabinets, and closets, keeping them out of sight, but still neatly organized and uncluttered. Do this one room at a time.

- **Tackle the closets.** Closets are a great place to store things that you don’t want out in the open, and can easily become a place where you shove things just to keep them out of view. Go through your closets – take everything out, clean it, and toss , donate as much as you can. Decided a specific place to store anything you decide to keep. Keep only the things that you love and use frequently. As for your clothes, get rid of anything that you haven’t worn in six months.
- **Clean out your drawers.** Drawers are prime place for things to get shoved into. Empty out your drawers, and sorting them by whether you’re keeping, tossing, or donating them.

Your Life

Decluttering your work area and your home are great ways to start reducing the clutter and stress in your life, but there’s still more than you can do.

- **Reduce your commitments.** Often times, our lives are too cluttered with all of the things that we need to do at home, work, school, in our religious or civic lives, with friends and family, with hobbies, and so on. Take a look at each area of your life and write down all of your commitments. Seeing it all written down can be quite an eye-opening experience, as well as overwhelming. From here, look at each one and decide whether it really brings you joy and value, and if it is worth the amount of time that you invest in it. Another way to reduce your commitments is to identify a few that you truly love, and get rid of the rest. Learn how to say no and decline offers. If you eliminate the things that don’t bring you joy or value, you’ll have more time for the things that you love.
- **Reconsider your routines.** Many of us do not have any set routines in our daily lives, and simply tackle our obligations, chores, and daily tasks haphazardly. Without structure, it can lead to chaotic days and a drop in productivity. Instead, batch tasks together. Instead of doing your laundry several times throughout the week, do it all on one day. It’s helpful to write down all of your weekly and daily obligations, chores, and tasks, and then plan out daily and weekly routines. Hang it up where you can see it and try to follow it. You might find that having a routine brings a new sense of calm and order to your life.

How to Maintain Order Over the Long-Term

Once you’ve successfully decluttered, whether it be one area or all the areas mentioned above, clutter will inevitably begin to creep back into your life. You must be vigilant in weeding it out on a regular basis, or it will just take over your life again.

- **Set up a system to keep clutter in check.** Examine the way that you do things and how things make their way into your life, and consider whether you can put together a simple system for everything, from your laundry to work projects and email. Write down your systems step-by-step and try to follow them as best as you can. Follow your systems and you’ll keep the clutter minimized.
- Don’t slack off. It’s easy to put things off for another day, but it’ll save you headaches in the long-run if you deal with things immediately. Throw it out, donate it, or keep it and put it in a designated area.

<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/how-to-declutter-your-life-and-reduce-stress.html>

Decluttering Tips 2013: "Reduce" Your Way To A Stress-Free Life

Posted: 02/25/2013 10:32 am EST Updated: 02/25/2013 10:32 am EST

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/01/04/decluttering-tips_n_2411901.html

There's no question that we live in a society of "too much." We're drowning in a sea of too much stuff, as evidenced by TV shows like "Hoarders" and "Consumed." We're completely consumed by our addictions to email and social media. We're eating too many calories, which is reflected in our ever-increasing obesity rates. And we're producing too much waste, if our overtaxed dump sites are any indication.

This phenomenon of "too much" is contributing to today's unprecedented stress levels. So what can you do about it? Well, reducing is a good start. Whether you're reducing clutter, reducing waste, reducing screen time or reducing calories, downsizing can leave you feeling like a big weight has been lifted off of your shoulders.

For some effective tips on how to "reduce" your way to a stress-free life, we turned to an expert. Sherry Borsheim, a Vancouver-based productivity & organizing consultant and president of the International Association of Business Organizing, shares some of her proven strategies that will have you reducing life's little stresses in no time.

7 Tips On How To Reduce The Clutter In Your Life

1. Deal With It Now, Not Later. This is Borsheim's number-one advice when it comes to reducing clutter – and it can actually help you reduce your expenses, too. "When you leave things to later, they pile up," she says. "When clutter piles up, I see duplicate or triplicate purchases. If you can't find what you need, the next thing you know you have three cheese graters." She recommends making "do it now" a habit by taking a few minutes each day for everyday tasks like sorting through mail, clearing off your countertops or putting your kitchen accessories away in their designated areas to avoid stress-inducing clutter.

2. Know Your Limits. "People don't set boundaries around how much stuff they allow into their lives," says Borsheim. "I use 'one in, one out' as a general rule. You can't just keep bringing it in and bringing it in." She suggests regularly combing through your closet to find and purge items you don't wear often. If you're planning a shopping spree at the mall, make sure to drop old clothes off at a donation bin first.

3. Put Everything In Its Place. It's easy for important items like unopened mail to get lost if you don't know where they are. "Get a beautiful basket or glass bowl," advises Borsheim. "You've got to contain it somehow."

4. Group Like Items Together. "I create zones in my kitchen," says Borsheim. "When you group like things together, you can clearly see what you have. You can't decide what to purge until you see what you have." As an added bonus, if your kitchen is well-organized and user-friendly, it can be more fun to cook, she points out. That just might help you reduce calories if you eat out and order in less.

5. Establish A Recycling Routine. Make sure you have designated areas for recyclables in your home – and bone up on what shouldn't make its way into the trash in order to reduce your waste. "People should educate themselves about where and what to recycle," says Borsheim, adding that you may be surprised by the variety of specialty recycling facilities that exist. "I can actually go and donate my shreds," she says. Find out where to recycle electronics, furniture and basics like paper and plastic, and make sure to drop them off regularly before they build up.

6. Step Away From The Email. And Social Media. "People are overwhelmed by email in general," says Borsheim. That extends to personal communications, too. Many people are compulsively checking their email and social media throughout the entire day, which can create stress. Borsheim recommends checking personal email and social media just four times per day, and turning off any social media alerts that may unnecessarily clutter your inbox. "Just try it for a week," she suggests.

7. Write Down Your Obligations. "You would be amazed by the number of people who don't use calendars," says Borsheim, adding that she sees this a lot with busy moms who are juggling multiple kids' schedule in addition to their own responsibilities. "If your head is full of all of these things you need to do, it creates an undercurrent of stress." She suggests using an electronic program like [EverNote](#), which can be synced to your computer and smartphone. As a bonus, going digital cuts down on your paper clutter!

Declutter Your Life: 5 Ways to Cut the Crap

August 28, 2013 by [Matt Ragland](#)

We have just moved to Nashville, and what a change it has been. Though the Nashville is much bigger than Asheville, our space has shrunk, along with our available space outside. Areas and rooms we took for granted don't exist any longer, and the stuff we filled the rooms with no longer has a home.

Morgan and I have gone through a lot of things, stuff we didn't really need but didn't really need to throw away. As we packed, we both kept looking at items and wondering "why did we get this?" ([biscuit cutters](#)) or "when did we last use this?"

Comparatively, I think we had less stuff than the average married couple in their late twenties, but then again people normally look on themselves with a kinder eye than we warrant. But there was still a lot.

The stuff I came across whilst unpacking was the most frustrating. Why did I think I needed this stuff twice already?! We have moved in to a little 550 sq ft apartment, and there just isn't enough room for all this stuff! Even stuff I didn't need any longer I had continued holding on to, because I was too proud or because the item reminded of something great I had done or been a part of. I couldn't let go of either past failures or successes.

Why we find it difficult to let go of stuff

Pride and Sentiment. Those are the emotions blocking my ability to unload stuff, and they're probably the same for you as well. I don't want to get rid of something I haven't used because I paid good money for it. So I'll justify keeping it because I'm going to sell it on Ebay, except I never get around to posting it. But I certainly don't just give it away!

Giving it away for nothing means I made a mistake in the past, and I don't like admitting mistakes.

There's the deadly sin. Pride.

I was and still am too proud to unload things which are providing no value to me. Simply recognizing the trait does wonders, and I've improved! Realizing the wastefulness of buying things in the past makes me consider current and future purchases. *Do I need this? Do I already own something that will work? Would I keep this if we moved to a small apartment?*

Sentiment is another reason, we hold on to old things because they remind us of past versions of ourselves, and the good past self to boot. We keep home run balls, not the one we struck out on to lose the game. I have lots of this stuff, and while some has been tossed, a few boxes remain. If they're going to have a place in your life, do yourself a favor and look through them sometimes, get some use out of their memories.

Whether you are downsizing your living space or not, cutting through your clutter can be a great practice to keeping your space manageable and clean. Cleaning our small space has been much easier and quicker, precisely because there's less stuff! Here are five ways you can do the same.

1. Have a yard sale – and keep it cheap

Set up early, because pickers come around by 7:00 am, guaranteed. Keep it simple and cheap with yard sales, most people coming through aren't looking to spend \$50 on a coffee table. This is a good place for old DVDs, CDs, clothes, and other stuff you don't want to ship or sell online.

2. Sell on Craig's List and Ebay

Sell your big, expensive, or unique items here. We sold our bedroom furniture for \$550 on CL, and have racked up \$150 in Ebay items. An example of a unique item was my lacrosse helmet. No one was coming to the yard sale looking for a lax lid, but someone in South Carolina sure was. Use this [helpful guide](#) from Man vs Debt to get your stuff sold online.

3. Hold a friends and family giveaway party

If you don't want to give your stuff away to strangers, give it away to your friends and family! Here's the catch though... give them *nice stuff*. If it's something useful that you're just not using anymore, let it go to someone else! In the past few months, we've given away clothes, small appliances, cutlery, and sporting goods to loved ones who will give the stuff a nice new home and regular use.

4. Take useful stuff to Goodwill

Didn't sell it or give it away to loved ones? Pack it up in bags and take it away to Goodwill or Salvation Army. Don't get all sentimental or proud, just do it! [Freecycle.org](#) is another great resource for getting your stuff to people who will make use of it (see below).

5. Trash it

If none of the above worked, time to trash it. An item making it through the first four steps does NOT mean it's destined to be yours now, but the fact it has survived this long means it should definitely be kick to the curb.

Simplicity isn't just about minimizing your stuff, it's about maximizing your life!

UPDATE: As you see in the comments, Ansley suggested using [freecycle.org](#) as a way to unload your stuff before trashing it. This is such a great point and one I didn't emphasize enough. Trashing is the last resort, and you should look to make good use of your stuff keep the planet uncluttered! I know we're not making it easy on ourselves. The temptation is to blindly accumulate and keep up with the rest of society, except it isn't working. We're slowly waking up to realize that all this stuff isn't making us any happier, and it's not filling any deep need. The answer isn't to go live at a monastery or tucked away in the woods (though that does sound nice at times), but to be mindful of the choices we're making with our time and money.