

Tips for Conquering Information Overload

Offered by Members of the National Association of Professional Organizers, Greater Philadelphia Chapter



PAPER & FILING

*Quick retrieval of information in a filing system, whether paper or electronic, depends on how files are labeled. Take time to select file names that make sense to you, even if they are unconventional.
(Adriane Weinberg www.OrganizedApproach.com)

*The main purpose of a filing system, paper or electronic, is to keep information for future retrieval. When filing, most people ask themselves, "Where should I put this." Wrong question. Ask yourself, "Where would I look to find this."
(Adriane Weinberg www.OrganizedApproach.com)

*Buy an A to Z letter-size accordion file without a flap to file your manuals inside a file cabinet. Put your manuals into the file alphabetically by the manufacturer of the item. When an item is new, you may want to keep the manual handy, but when you are confident you know how to work that item, you can then file it.
(Anna Sicalides, CPO® www.AnnaOrganizesU.com)

*Keep dated items in a separate basket, in-box or file so you never have to search for the document. Dated items include bills to pay, party invitations, event tickets, etc. Keep them in date order with the earliest date at the front so you can see what's due next.
(Annette Reyman www.AllRightOrganizing.com)

*If you don't already have a fireproof box or safety deposit box for your vital documents, get one! Birth certificates, passports, Social Security cards, marriage licenses, deeds and wills should all be kept in this.
(Annette Reyman www.AllRightOrganizing.com)

*Keep a recycling bin and calendar near where your children do their homework, so when they pull out the numerous school papers for you to read, you can jot down important school dates/information on the calendar, pull out papers to save, and recycle all of the rest. Be sure to transfer important dates to your personal calendar!
(Cindy Eddy www.OrganizingTeam.com)

*When your children bring home their artwork from school, take the special one you want to display, date it on the back and replace the one that was already hanging with the new artwork. Take the old one, and save it in an archival box. Send the remaining artwork to relatives in the mail or recycle it.
(Cindy Eddy www.OrganizingTeam.com)

*When you receive an invitation, a form that needs to be filled out, or some other document that requires your response, write a reminder to yourself on your calendar a few days before the deadline.
(Crystal Sabalaska www.ClutterShrink.com)

*Set up a tax file at the beginning of each new year. Create subcategories within the file for tax-deductible receipts, donation receipts, and any other papers you receive throughout the year that you will need to complete your taxes. Once tax time rolls around, everything you need will be in one place!
(Dawn George, CPO® www.SimpleOrganizedConsulting.com)

*Use a small desktop file box to store "to do" or "actionable" papers that you don't want to forget about. These file boxes accommodate hanging files, can sit on a desk or countertop, and can be transported anywhere you may need them. Create action file labels so you can easily drop papers in by category.
(Dawn George, CPO® www.SimpleOrganizedConsulting.com)

According to a study conducted by a Boston marketing firm, the average American burns 55 minutes a day looking for things they know they own but cannot find.

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*Make sure to photo copy your sales receipt if your item comes with a warranty. Most receipts are on thermal paper and will fade in as little as a few months to one year. The more the receipt is exposed to light, the faster it will fade. (Diane Albright, CPO® www.DianeAlbright.com)

*Depression-era thinking coupled with information age availability is a recipe for disaster. If you read everything you could read, did everything you could do, and kept everything you could keep, life would be overwhelming. Enjoy life more by saying *no* to the unimportant things. (Ellen Faye, CPO® www.EllenFaye.com)

*Do you really need that piece of paper? 80% of filed papers are never looked at again! What's the worst thing that would happen if you didn't keep it? Can you get the information elsewhere? If you keep it, will you ever look for it? (Ellen Faye, CPO® www.EllenFaye.com)

*Create a File Index or Table of Contents of your files and revamp your physical files according to the new system, eliminating outdated papers as you go. Use this index format in your computer so all file names and hierarchy are similar for physical files, electronic files, email folders and internet bookmarks/favorites. (Ellen Tozzi www.NaturalOrderDesign.com)

*Each year, about 100 million households receive 16.6 billion catalogs.
-Direct Mail Association*

*Touch it once. Take care of today's things today. If it takes two minutes or less to complete a task, do it immediately. (Ellen Tozzi www.NaturalOrderDesign.com)

*Paper systems must be visible, versatile and accessible. Smead Viewables is a tabbing system easily created through your computer that will give you tabs on your hanging files that you can read from the top, front and back. No more bending to the floor to read only the front of the tab. (Karen Jessee www.NowSimplyOrganized.com)

*When deciding what to keep and what to toss, ask yourself, "Do I use this?" or "Does this make me smile?" (Kathleen Luskus www.OMOrganizing.com)

*Constantly clarify what incoming information means to you and how you might want to use it. This skill is pivotal in simplifying organization and increasing productivity. (Nadine Nemec www.OrderedLiving.com)

*Break the habit of putting papers for other people in any old place "for now" by setting up a designated place to put incoming paper for people that you live with. This can be a basket, a bin or a folder, and it can be wherever seems most practical, for example, their desk, a dresser or the hall table. (Suzanne R. Kuhn www.ACEOrganizing.com)

BUSINESS INFORMATION

*Don't go it alone. If record keeping isn't your strong suit, talk to your accountant about paying your kids or other family members to organize your receipts, bills, client files, or other information throughout the year, especially if you own a business. It could not only save you headaches, but also money at tax time, as well. (Darla DeMorrow, CPO® www.HeartWorkOrg.com)

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*A desk-top hanging file holder with 12 files for each month of the year will keep all those dated theatre tickets, pending papers, upcoming events, and reminders neatly organized. Use this instead of piles of things that were mentally labeled "put in a safe place" and "keep this."
(Karen Jessee www.NowSimplyOrganized.com)

*Business information (electronic and paper) is either an asset or liability. Creating a plan for records management is critical. The plan must include an organizational structure and someone to oversee proper use and maintenance.
(Leslie Robison www.MasteryConsulting.net)

The Small Business Administration (SBA) estimates that 80 percent of paper filed away is never looked at again.

*Use clipboards hung in a row to help organize important business papers, such as employee mail, time sheets or communications. In a home office, assign clipboards to a mail category, such as bills, invitations or letters.
(Pamela Kenney www.DreamHouseEnterprises.com)

*Consider different ways of filing your papers: alphabetically, by major category or by color. Use whichever method or combination of methods that helps you quickly find your papers.
(Rie Brosco www.RieOrganize.com)

MAIL HANDLING

*Place your recycling box near your mailbox or by the door where you bring in your mail. Every time you go to pick up your mail drop the junk mail into the box. Don't ever let anything remain in your home that you don't love or will not use.
(Danielle O'Brien DanielleOrganizes@msn.com)

*Be smart, not paranoid, about your identity. Don't bother shredding mail that only has your name and address on it, which is information anyone can get from the phone book or an online search. But definitely review your credit and bank statements each month, even if you don't reconcile them, so you can catch fraud or errors right away.
(Darla DeMorrow, CPO® www.HeartWorkOrg.com)

*Set up five different colored folders labeled To Do; Contacts & Schedules; Bills & Business; To Read/Review; To File and keep them accessible. Every day when you retrieve your postal mail, go through it over the paper recycling bin to get rid of all the inessential junk immediately. Then sort what's left into these folders, and work from there.
(Suzanne R. Kuhn www.ACEOrganizing.com)

*Open and go through your mail every day. Sort into three categories: TO DO, TO READ, and TO FILE. Everything else can be shredded or recycled. Then move the piles to where you will handle them.
(Kathleen Luskus www.OMOrganizing.com)

*Use the TAFT™ system - Toss - about fifty percent doesn't get past the trash can. Act - if it can be completed in five minutes or less, or include longer tasks in a task list/calendar. File - only what you will need. And lastly, do it Today.
(Sue Frost www.OrganizeMyLife.net)

Harris Interactive reports that 23% of adults say they pay bills late (and thus incur late fees) because they can't find them.

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E-MAIL, ELECTRONIC FILES & MEDIA

*Every time you buy a new gadget, place the accompanying items (like cords and discs) that you won't be using into a baggie, label it with the name of the gadget and place the baggie in storage. Also label the cords each time you buy a new item so that when you come across them, you will know what they belong to.

(Anna Sicalides, CPO® www.AnnaOrganizesU.com)

*Are DVD and CD cases taking up too much space? Ditch the cases and store your discs in a CD/DVD binder from the office supply store.

(Brenda Kenny www.BusyBeeOS.com)

*Once or twice a month, sort your e-mail messages by sender. Unsubscribe from any newsletter or updates you receive frequently that you rarely, if ever, read. You can always go directly to the website for the most up-to-date information.

(Crystal Sabalaska www.ClutterShrink.com)

*Treat your email just like your US mail. Check it every day and first get rid of the junk. Delete or "mark as spam" the email you do not want. Then read everything and decide what needs to be done with it: Delete it, file it in an electronic folder if you need to reference it later or leave it in your inbox as a "to do".

(Debbie Lillard www.SpaceToSpare.com)

*Don't have your Internet browser open to an enticing page to read, like a page with news stories or celebrity gossip. Instead change the settings for your Internet Browser so it opens to a site you most frequently use, like your email log in or some other site without stories to read or games to play.

(Diane Albright, CPO® www.DianeAlbright.com)

*If you store your large photograph albums vertically, you can keep them from leaning/falling over by using tension rods. Place a pair of rods (one near the back of the shelf, one near the front) then slide your photo albums in between the rods.

(Gen Wallace-Roe www.HelpingHandsPro.com)

According to a survey of PC owners conducted by Harris Interactive, three out of five people report losing a file they thought they had "sufficiently stored."

*Avoid the clutter of sticky notes and use a labeler to attach this single, powerful question to the top of your monitor: "What has to happen next with this piece of information?" Refer to it until you develop the habit of asking the question like second nature, and watch your information processing time shrink significantly.

(Nadine Nemeč www.OrderedLiving.com)

*If you use an electronic calendar system, back it up onto your computer, and then back up your computer to an off-site location using an online company.

(Rie Brosco www.RieOrganize.com)

*Organize Excel and Word files into electronic file folders to cut down on wasting time trying to find a file. Try to avoid a desktop full of icons--this is clutter! Clean out unused files often or put them on a separate zip drive or CD.

(Vali G. Heist www.TheClutterCrew.com)

*Narrow down your decisions for incoming paper or electronic mail to five decisions: 1. discard (get better at throwing away!), 2. delegate (give away what you can), 3. take immediate action (if it will take less than 60 seconds, do it!), 4. 'to be filed' basket (for filing later), and 5. needs follow-up (prioritize the remaining projects).

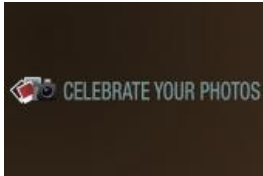
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thanks the following businesses for their support of the
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