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Organized Corner

Say Goodbye to Paper Clutter

BY SARAH BUCKWALTER

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Between mail, school notices, newspapers and magazines, it's easy to feel like you're drowning in paper. Ignoring the barrage for even a week can lead to overwhelming piles. The solution is to set up a workable paper management system.



Getting Started:

- Take a good look around your home. Where does paper usually land? It tends to gather in specific areas, and pinpointing them will help you create a better plan of attack. Envision your coffee table, desk or kitchen counter clean and clutter-free.
- Be realistic about how many hours the initial set up will require. It will depend on how well you're currently managing paper and how quickly you can make decisions about filing and discarding specific items. If the task seems overwhelming, set aside 15-30 minutes a day to chip away at it.
- Assemble the proper supplies in a box or basket and keep it nearby: a letter opener, stapler, paper clips, highlighter, envelopes, stamps, and file folders.

Define a Location:

- Decide on a convenient place in your home to establish a permanent paper sorting station--a spot with a flat work surface (desk or counter top) and ample space for files, storage containers, and supplies. This should become the only place in your home where you deal with incoming and outgoing paper.
- Purchase or repurpose containers to organize paperwork. You can use a file drawer, decorative baskets, stacking trays or a desktop organizer with either separate slots or hanging files.
- Keep necessary office supplies (listed above) within easy reach.
- Place a wastebasket, paper shredder and recycling bin close by as well.

Maintaining the System:

The key to keeping papers in check is regular maintenance. If you spend at least fifteen minutes a day sorting and filing, you'll stay on top of it.

- Open and read the mail daily. When you retrieve the mail, take it directly to the sorting station--even if you don't time to deal with it right away, it won't be cluttering up the coffee table.
- Immediately recycle or shred all unwanted solicitations, inserts, and catalogs (do not put these aside or stack them into piles).
- Sort school notices, homework, current magazines, bills, and financial statements into the following categories: to pay, to do, to file, to read. Establish regular times to attend to these files (i.e. pay bills and take care of to-dos).
- Decide how you'll organize kids' homework and notebooks. You may want to assign each child a couple of files, or purchase individual accordion folders for them. Teach your kids how the system works, so they can find their math study guide when they need it.
- Purge your filing system once a year. The best time to do this is in April, when you're assembling papers for tax time, or in January, to give yourself a fresh start for the new year.
- When possible, pay bills online and request electronic statements for investments, bank accounts, and other financial paperwork.

Keeping Records:



return. Dates may be extended, however, in unusual cases, so it is wise to keep your tax records for six years. Many individuals store unnecessary files, so visit [Organizing Boston](#) for a helpful checklist.

Sarah Buckwalter - *Sarah Buckwalter is a professional organizer with over ten years experience and the owner of Organizing Boston. Learn more at [organizingboston.com](#).*