

Getting It Together—Three Steps to Organizing Your Space



PURGE



PLAN



PLACE

Organizing your space is a powerful way to manage time.

Step 1: Purge—One secret for organizing almost any space (desk, closet, garage, or house) is to have fewer things lying around. It's easier to organize a few objects than many objects. Start by getting rid of the stuff you don't need. Just wander into that overflowing closet or room and ask yourself: Do I need this? Will I ever use this or refer to it again? Can I toss it, recycle it, sell it, or give it away? Or play a mental game. Imagine that you are moving tomorrow and everything has to fit into one small trailer hitched to your car. What would you take along, and what would you leave behind?

Purging can be an ongoing practice. Periodically purge your possessions. Even if this is the only step you take toward getting organized, you'll notice a difference.

Step 2: Plan—This is the step where you get to sit back and think—no need to move boxes yet. The aim of organizing anything is to feel more at peace and in control. The point is to do what works for you. Your organizing scheme can be as unique as your fingerprints and as wide-ranging as your interests.

For example, people who frequently use the telephone might keep a telephone on top of their desks. Others prefer not to be interrupted as they study or work. They choose to turn on an answering machine or work in

a room that's removed from the phone. These two kinds of people will organize their workspaces in different—and equally valid—ways.

As you plan how to organize your space, ask two questions: What activities do I perform most often? What materials or machines do I use most? With the answers in mind, you'll soon come up with a blueprint for arranging things. To make your plan even more powerful, write it down. Sketch out how you want to arrange the objects in your study or the papers on your desk.

A key part of your plan is managing paper. See if you can organize files in a way that allows you to find any document you need in 30 seconds. To do so, set up separate files for important papers. Examples are birth certificates, rental agreements, insurance policies, income tax information, and owner's manuals for stereos, cars, and appliances. All you need is a cabinet or desk drawer and some manila envelopes or folders. The payoff is saving hours of frustration and confusion.

You can also use a computer to help organize your information. Some software, for example, allows you to list all your books, documents, or file folders. When you want to find a particular fact, you can consult your computerized directory before hacking through stacks of paper.

Step 3: Place—Now comes the actual task of moving things around. If you've completed the first two steps, this one will be a breeze. Many people start with this step, however, and that can lead to problems. You can spend hours organizing a stack of books only to decide later that you don't need any of them. It is more effective to purge and sort books before putting them on the shelf.

Getting it together can be painless—even fun. Do it in small steps. In five minutes you can file some papers or clean out a drawer. Within a few months, people will be commenting on the sleek, new, organized you.