

organize today!

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

Organize Your Home Office

This issue of *Organize Today* is dedicated to those of you who go to work in your jammies.

Working from a home office offers many wonderful benefits — like being able to wear comfortable clothes, avoid traffic-jammed commutes, and enjoy a more flexible schedule and pace. But with these perks come some drawbacks, too: It's hard to distinguish office hours from personal hours; the solitude of an empty house can be daunting; and the paperwork and clutter that spill forth can cause frustration and waste time.

If you work out of your home office, keep reading for valuable tips to organize your space and time. And for those of you who actually have to get dressed to go to work, don't worry. Nearly all of these tips cross over to those who work outside the home, too!

Setting up shop

Your guide to creating a great space



Whether your home office consists of a spacious basement suite or a miniscule bedroom corner, making the best of your space is so important. Location, furniture placement, and ambience will impact the ease and enjoyability with which you function.

First, identify your home office location. Will you be working when others are at home? If noise and distractions are a concern, consider finding the most secluded spot in your home. Any spare room — bedroom, attic, or basement — where you can shut the door is great. If you don't have an entire room to work with, get creative. If you can give up a closet, consider emptying one and installing a simple work surface inside. Add shelving above for supplies and reference materials. Pull up a desk chair, and voila, instant mini office! When the work day is done, simply shut the closet door and the office disappears. If you can't give up the closet space, try sectioning off a corner of any room with a fold-out decorative screen.

Next, arrange your office furniture carefully. Consider whether you'll need lots of surface space and where you plan to put your desk and computer. Other items, such as filing drawers and book cases, can be placed next. Make sure to have good lighting, both indirect and direct.

And finally, take the time to add a little "you" to the room. Paint the walls a color you love. Add artwork — whether expensive originals or a child's framed finger paintings. And add a little greenery in the form of a potted plant or fresh flowers. Now it feels like home (office)!

Fighting interruptions: when your home office is invaded

A day working from your home office can be filled with interruptions from spouses, kids, roommates — even the cat. To maximize your time, consider these tips:

- Establish regular office hours and make sure everyone knows and respects them. If necessary, find quiet time by getting up early or staying up late.
- For parents working at home with small children, you already know that nap time is your savior. For the waking hours, set up a small play area in your office. Set aside a bucket of special toys to be taken out only when you're on the phone and need extra special quiet.

The average North American will be interrupted 73 times a day.

- Resist the urge to continually check email or voicemail. Ignore the doorbell. Use caller ID to direct your energies toward work-related calls, rather than chatty friends and pesky telemarketers.
- Make a to-do list at the beginning of each day or the evening before. Schedule your time so the most important tasks get done first. That way, if you do get interrupted, at least your most urgent needs have been met.

Statistic Source: National Association of Professional Organizers

The right stuff

Choose the proper supplies to make your office run smoothly

Finding that perfect balance of office supplies can be difficult. You don't want to be left empty-handed, yet your storage space is limited. Here are some top picks for the key supplies:

- A telephone headset: When you're talking on the phone, it's essential to have your hands free to take notes. Headsets also help minimize family interruptions as family members will never know when you're on a call and when you're just enjoying the silence.
- Printer cartridges: If you run out of printer ink, you're sunk. Nothing interrupts a day more quickly than having to stop everything and get to the office supply store. Keep extras on hand at all times.
- File folders and hanging files: Possibly the most fundamental supplies you'll need. They'll keep your work documents out of sight yet easy to retrieve, leaving you with a clear work surface. Consider purchasing colored file folders to make this chore a little more fun.
- A step file rack: Great for keeping current projects out and in front of your eyes, yet neatly in folders.
- Magazine holders: They are helpful for grouping reference materials such as catalogs, trade magazines, newsletters, etc. They come in a variety of colors and designs to match your office.
- Clipboards: They come in a variety of colors and sizes, and they hold everything from your current project to reading material. Take them on the road with you!
- A drawer organizer: Essential to corral pens, paper clips, rubber bands, Post-it notes, and more.
- Lidded cardboard storage boxes: If your filing cabinets are running out of room (and you've already purged all you can), consider boxing up inactive files and storing them off-site.



Your office organizing dilemmas solved



My office looks like it exploded! I have papers, supplies, and equipment everywhere. How can I get this under control?

First, divide your office into zones. Think kindergarten-style: Walk into a classroom, and it will be divided into

different areas to do crafts, eat, take a nap, listen to music, and read. What types of zones should be in your office? You might have a main work zone (usually your desk area); a reference zone of bookcases or shelves; a creative work zone for drawing or writing; a computer zone for manuals, CDs, printer paper, and the actual computer/printer; and a calling zone, including the phone, headset, and phone book.

After discovering your zones, sort through your current supplies and papers. Get rid of outdated materials and equipment and move inactive files to off-site storage. Put remaining items into the appropriate zones. The key here is that if something is in a logical place, it will be easy to put away and find.



I have very limited space. How can I make the most of it?

Try to think vertically, rather than just horizontally. Use your wall space to mount a bulletin board to hang your to-do list and phone numbers. Install pegboard or a wire grid on the wall to hang supplies up and off your desk. Install shelving over your desk to hold books and reference materials. Mount your computer monitor on a swing arm from the wall. Visit your local office supply store for hanging organizing equipment, such as wall-mounted file pockets, to keep important files in plain view. Look beneath for hidden space: Fill an office chest on wheels (they come in a variety of drawer sizes) with supplies or promotional literature. Then roll it away under your desk or table. Don't forget to use the space behind your door — hang a shoe bag, and fill it with office supplies.



I find I jump from project to project, never really able to complete one thing. I tend to procrastinate on the big things because they seem so overwhelming.

Make a list of all your overdue projects.

Try to determine why you haven't yet completed them. Are you missing information? Do you need assistance from a coworker? If you are simply overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, break it down into small steps. Assign each step to a different day on your calendar and make yourself accountable. If you find you are putting off the big tasks to handle other small things that pop up during the day, try setting aside specific times for those. For example, set aside 30 minutes each morning and afternoon to check email; avoid logging in throughout the day. The same goes for checking voicemail and reviewing the daily mail.



Any tips for setting up a filing system?

A good filing system starts with a great filing cabinet. Find one that opens easily and has plenty of usable space. Try not to cram too much in a cabinet or you'll never use it because retrieving and refiling will be physically impossible. Keep up with your filing on a daily or weekly basis, tossing what you can. As you touch a piece of paper, ask yourself, "How am I going to use this?" Is it for a current project? File it in the appropriate folder in your desktop step file. Is it historical or for future reference? File it in your cabinet. Is it something that needs action, such as something that needs to be copied, faxed, or mailed? Designate a clipboard for each of these tasks. Is it something to be read? Start a folder or basket for reading material. Just make sure to keep up with it weekly! If setting up a system overwhelms you, consider getting help from an office assistant or professional organizer.

When your office is on the run

When your office is mobile, it has to be efficient. Use these simple organizing tips to keep your papers at your fingertips and your mode of transportation neat as a pin!



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- Use clear cosmetic bags or small Ziploc bags to store supplies such as pens, pencils, Post-its, paper clips, scissors, and a glue stick.
- Always have a box of thank-you notes and envelopes on hand to write on the go. Also include postage stamps and return address labels.
- Use a portable file box, filled with your current project and client files, to keep papers corralled. Or, if traveling by air or train, invest in an expandable briefcase. Make sure to have extra folders and labels so you can create new files on the run. Always bring company promotional materials, including extra business cards, just in case.
- Keep an envelope or expandable wallet file to gather expense receipts.
- If you have a laptop computer, store as much information on it as you can, e.g., phone numbers, calendars, and client information. This will limit the hard copy materials you'll need to lug around.
- Always pack your supplies in the same area of your box or bag. Before you leave, give it a once-over to make sure it's well stocked.
- Keep reading material together in one file. When you find yourself waiting for an appointment, take that opportunity to catch up on the latest industry news. Or, clean out your briefcase while waiting for the train or plane.