Obsessive- Compulsive's Guide: Top 12 Organizing Tips, Plus Resources

Is your life in disarray? Do you have trouble finding things? Do you constantly forget stuff? If so, don't worry — you're like most of the human population.

Disorganization is a natural state of order. It takes an obsessive-compulsive (like myself) to get the chaos of the universe into some form of organization.

Photo by *sleepy sparrow*

If you have a desire to get organized, here are my favorite organization tips … stuff I've learned along the way, from other sources and from experimentation. And a list of some useful articles at the end, for those who need more. :)

1. Everything in its place. If you just followed one tip on this list, this would be it. Practice this, and you can skip the rest of the tips and articles listed in this post. Seriously.

So how do you do it? It's simple. For everything that you own, designate a place for it. You can even label some of those places, to make it easier to remember. Find something that doesn't have a place? Designate a place for it. Then simply put things back where they belong when you're done using them. It sounds simple, but it actually takes a lot of practice to get this habit down. Read this article for more.

2. Start small. If your life and your home and your office are all incredibly disorganized, don't try to conquer all of it at once. Choose a small chunk (maybe the top of your desk, or at least one part of it?) and organize that. Then come up with a simple system to keep it organize, and try to practice that system until it becomes habit. Now expand your "zone of organization" further, to a new area. One chunk at a time, you can get organized.

3. Create routines. One of the best ways to keep your life organized is to make routines for everything — for errands, laundry, finances, etc. And if you do this one at a time, and make it a habit, you can optimize your life this way.

4. Clean as you go. This is a great habit … instead of having big cleaning binges, clean things as you go. Done using some dishes? Wash them right away. Clean the toilet when you finish using it, so it never gets dirty. Read more.

5. All info in one place. Use a text document, a wiki, or some other type of system to keep all the information you regularly use and need in one place. You'll never look for it again. Read more and also see how to organize your family with a binder.

6. Put it away now. Done using something? Most people will put it down somewhere nearby, with the intention of putting it away later. But messy houses and offices are full of these intentions. Instead of letting things pile up, put them away immediately. Right now, no exceptions.

7. Use an inbox, and empty it. Instead of having papers all over the place, have one inbox for all incoming papers. Well, one for your office, and one for your home. Now you'll never lose a piece of paper again. Empty it regularly (at whatever regular intervals work for you — daily, weekly, every other day, etc.). Here's how to process your inbox.

8. Keep a simple filing system. If your filing system is too complicated, chances are you won't use it. Use this simple system to keep your files in order.

9. Google Calendar. It really doesn't matter what calendar system you use, but I've found that Gcal works best for me. It's so simple and fast, and as an online calendar I can access it from anywhere (as can my wife). We share a Google Calendar, and we put everything on it: work stuff, personal stuff, our kid's school and extracurricular events, birthdays, family gatherings, reminders to follow up on things, school holidays, and much more. It keeps all our scheduling in one place, and we never have to worry about remembering again. Other good calendar options: 30 Boxes and Outlook are also popular.

10. A simple system for pending items. One reader recently wrote to ask me how she should organize her pending items, such as plane or theater tickets. I suggested she create a "Pending" folder to hold those items, and make a note of each item on her calendar. For those that are attached to a specific date, she could note the item on that date ("Theater tickets for 8 p.m., in Pending folder"). For items that she wants to remember periodically, she could make a note on the first of each month (for example) … so on the first of next month, there is a "Pending items" notation on her calendar, with a list of items in the Pending folder she wants to reminder herself about. If she doesn't need to remember them yet, she can move that item to the first of the next month.

11. Make your system usable. If you're having problems with your organization system, take a careful look at what's tripping you up. Sometimes there's a difficulty or complication that makes the system too difficult to use. If it's too difficult, you won't use it. Keep it simple and usable — if possible, even fun — and you'll be more likely to stick to the system.

12. Create a landing strip. When I get home, I empty my pockets and put everything onto a tray near my doorway. My wife does the same. Keys, purse, my ID and cash, cell phone, anything. This way it doesn't get tossed on our counter or table, and we never have to look for it or forget it when we leave. See Unclutterer's article on The landing strip.

Other Resources

eHow.com: How to become organized, one minute at a time

Wikihow: How to be organized

About.com: Organize your home

Organized Home: Tap the power of planners

MyGoal.com: How to be organized

suite101.com: How to help your child become organized

Associated Content: Top 8 Ways to Become Organized Financially

ezine articles: How to finally become organized