

The Minimalist's Guide to Fighting (and Beating) Clutter Entropy

"Three Rules of Work: Out of clutter find simplicity; From discord find harmony; In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." - **Albert Einstein**

Recently I published the [Four Laws of Simplicity](#), which talked in part about decluttering your home and office ... and it seemed to strike a chord with many of you.



Photo courtesy of [Noe](#)

Clutter, apparently, has invaded all of our lives.

And the inevitable fact is that, no matter how much we simplify our lives, even after a huge decluttering session and after a vow not to buy anything ever ever ever again ... entropy always always sets in.

It starts out as one item on the floor. Just a simple box, or a toy, or a piece of clothing. Such a little thing, nothing to worry about. But that one little thing will attract a second, and then a third, and soon clutter will grow insidiously in our homes until it overwhelms us. And then we're back to square one.

Don't let it happen. Be vigilant.

Here are my favorite tips for beating clutter entropy, for the minimalists among you.

1. One in, two out. Make it a rule: for every new item that comes into your life, you need to remove two. That means gifts, clothes, shoes, books, magazines, anything. It's great to have a place where you put things you're going to get rid of ... whether to give to other people or to donate to charity or to take to a used book store. Then you can just grab the stuff on your way out to do errands.

2. Limited storage. I like this rule because it fits in with my philosophy of self-set limitations: don't allow yourself to have tons of storage space. The more storage you have, the more stuff you'll keep. Instead, have limited storage and if stuff doesn't fit in there, get rid of it. That forces you to make choices. The key is making those choices ... if you don't, you'll end up with clutter.

3. Clear floors and flat surfaces. Keep them clear. A room looks so much cleaner if all flat surfaces, from the floor to tabletops to countertops, are clear of clutter. Remove everything from these surfaces except perhaps one or two decorative items (don't clutter with knick knacks). If you find stuff making its way here, clear it out. Clearing surfaces once a day or every couple days is a good routine.

4. Designate a home for everything, and be fanatic. When you find stuff on flat surfaces, or draping over a chair, it might be because you don't have a designated spot for that kind of thing. If you don't, designate a spot for

it immediately. If stuff doesn't have a home in your home, you need to get rid of it, or it will forever wander around the house. The other problem might be that you have already designated a spot for it, but you're just not good at putting it away. In that case, take a month to build up the habit of putting things where they belong immediately. It'll make a huge difference.

5. Regular decluttering sessions. Put in your calendar. Even the best of us need to declutter regularly. If you've decluttered your home, things might be great now, but you'll need to do clutter maintenance. Put it in your calendar: perhaps once a month, once a week, or once every few months. Experiment to see what interval works for your life.

Be content with what you have, rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you. - **Lao Tzu**

6. Reduce your desires for more. If clutter is coming into your life at a rate that's too great for you to handle, you might need to look at your buying habits. Do you go shopping for clothes or gadgets or shoes or books every week (or more)? Are you always buying stuff online? If so, is it out of real necessity, or do you just like to buy stuff? It's important that you take a look at these desires, and see if you can address them. Reducing your desires will go a long way to reducing your need to fight clutter.

7. 30-day list. This is really a way to control the desires I mentioned in No. 6 above. Make a list: anytime you want to buy something (other than absolute necessities), put it on the list with the date you added it. Then, don't allow yourself to buy something until it's been on the list for 30 days. By then, your desire for that item might have passed. It's a great way to control that impulse to buy. (A cool alternative: the [Want book](#).)

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." - **Albert Einstein**

8. Change your habits. Clutter didn't create itself. It's there because you put it there. What habits do you have that created the clutter? There may be many of them, some of them already mentioned above: you buy a lot, you don't designate a home for things, you don't put things away, you buy but don't remove things ... you may have other habits that create clutter. Change those habits, one at a time. Take 30 days and focus on a clutter habit, and see if you can create a new habit that will reduce your clutter.

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