

organize today!

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

Spring 2007

Stop Procrastinating — Get Organized!

Procrastinate: to put off intentionally and habitually; to put off intentionally the doing of something that should be done.

An overflowing in-basket that needs attention. A disorganized hall closet bursting at the seams. A kitchen counter covered in papers and junk. A to-do list that never seems to get done. If any of these things is stressing you out, keep reading.

This issue of *Organize Today* is full of procrastination information and solutions! You'll learn why you do it and how to conquer it. Plus, you'll discover quick tips to start the organizing process in just about every area of your life. So don't delay — read, resolve, and organize your life today!

Why we delay

Frozen. That's how we feel when we have a daunting task in front of us. We know we need to do it, but we don't know where or how to start. So we put it off. We'll get to it tomorrow, right? Then tomorrow comes, and we feel just as frozen, and even more panicked because another day has passed with no results or action. Why do we act like this, and how do we break this cycle?



The first step is to learn a bit about procrastination. First off, realize you're not alone. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, 20 percent of American adults consider themselves procrastinators. And even the do-it-now go-getters occasionally delay. There are many reasons people put things off.

- **Perfectionism:** Many procrastinators feel that if they can't do something perfectly, then why bother. These thoughts will stall you out indefinitely because as hard as you try, you'll never be perfect.
- **Unpleasantness:** Do you put off eating ice cream or reading your favorite magazine? Of course not. Those are pleasurable things. But writing that 50-page report, organizing your tax receipts, or cleaning out the garage? Those things can be unpleasant. Recognize that while some tasks are lousy, they must be done.
- **Overwhelm:** If your to-do list is ten pages long (or worse yet, not written down but cluttering your brain), it's hard to figure out where to start. When the finish line is nowhere in sight, it's often hard to find the beginning.

Now that you know *why* you put things off, keep reading to learn how to manage your procrastinating ways.

Conquer procrastination

The word procrastinate comes from the Latin *procrastinatus*, which means, literally, “forward tomorrow.” If you’ve been putting off till tomorrow what you could — and should — do today, then recognize that procrastination is a habit that *can* be broken. But it won’t happen overnight. It takes 21 days to form a new habit. So set a date, (Mondays work well, because they feel like a fresh start) and track 21 days to stay the course.

To start, give yourself a reason to stop procrastinating. Maybe you’ll improve your financial situation because you’ll pay your bills on time. Or you’ll impress your family, friends, and coworkers because you’ll appear productive and efficient. Or you’ll be less stressed because you are on top of your to-do list and arrive on time. Whatever the goal, keep it in mind throughout the first 21 habit-forming days.

To get a handle on procrastination, start writing. Use a spiral notebook or planner to capture all your tasks. Do *not* use scraps of paper or sticky notes. You’ll want everything in one place. Keep a running master list of tasks that need to be done. (It might be really long.) But then, each evening, make a smaller “to do today” list for the upcoming day, either on a separate page in your notebook, or on the next day’s planner page. List only the most important things you need to accomplish that day, and keep the number of tasks realistic and attainable. (About five things usually works well.) The next morning, you’ll know exactly what needs to be done, and you can concentrate on those above all else. That evening, evaluate your list. Anything not completed moves forward to the following day’s task list, and a few more items are added. And take a moment to permanently remove tasks from your list that no longer contribute to your goals or happiness.



As you’re writing your to-do list, make sure to break tasks down into realistic-sized chunks.

If your goal is to organize your messy kitchen, the enormity of it will seem daunting. Instead, break it down into one-hour tasks: toss out all expired foods in pantry; clean out refrigerator; organize junk drawer; set up mini-filing system for kitchen. Completion dates are important, so assign specific tasks to specific days. You won’t organize a kitchen in a day, but over the course of a week, you can do it! And each day’s successes will give you the drive to keep going.



For truly unpleasant tasks, set a timer for 15 minutes, and just do it. Nearly anything is palatable for a quarter of an hour. It’s also helpful to see that most unpleasant things don’t take nearly as long as we think they will. You may hate going through your in-basket at work. But just 15 minutes each morning and evening is enough to review, sort, do the quickie tasks, and assign the longer ones to your planner. If you’re feeling sluggish, complete an easy job first, to get your momentum going. Also, do the toughest tasks when your body is most alert — some people function better first thing in the morning, while others perk up later in the day.

Treat time like a precious gift. Are you a people-pleaser? If you’re truly behind in your own tasks, don’t add any more optional to-do items until you’re caught up. It’s okay to say no. It’s okay to delegate. It’s okay to take some time for yourself. And stop saying, “If I can’t do it perfectly, I won’t do it at all.” Limit choices, let good enough be okay, and move forward. Perfection is not realistic or required in life.

Reward yourself. After 21 days of “just do it” action, treat yourself to something nice... lunch with a friend, a luxurious nap or bubble bath, a hot-fudge sundae, a concert, or an afternoon with a favorite book or movie. You’ve earned it!



Quick tips to start the organizing process

These tips will help you stop procrastinating and get organized today! Inspire and motivate yourself with the “Quick Start” projects. Each of these should take no longer than 30 minutes. Next, try the “Keep Going” tips to really put clutter and chaos in its place!

KITCHEN

Quick Start: Take everything out of the refrigerator. Toss anything expired or mysteriously fuzzy. Clean the shelves. Then replace food items, grouping similar things together.

Keep Going: Tackle each kitchen cupboard and drawer the same way. Remove everything, clean, and toss anything not fresh or useful. Give most-used items your prime, easiest-to-reach space. Put infrequently used items up high or way in the back.

CLUTTER

Quick Start: Set a timer for 15 minutes. Grab a garbage bag, walk through your home, and quickly remove ten things you no longer use or love. Also, recycle newspapers older than one week and magazines older than 12 months, plus expired coupons and junk mail. Dispose of the bags immediately.

Keep Going: From here on out, put things in their proper places right away. Before buying something new, ask yourself if you *really* need it. If you decide to purchase, get rid of two similar items to make room.

PAPERWORK

Quick Start: With the exception of bills to be paid and *truly* important documents, grab all the paperwork you can find into one big pile. Plop it in a big box, seal it, and write today’s date on it. If you haven’t missed any of it two months from now, recycle the entire box without opening it.

Keep Going: Set up a new, easy filing system starting with paperwork you receive *from today forward*. Think of broad categories of papers you receive on a frequent basis: bills to pay, people to call, medical, school, etc. Get a desktop filing box, keep it in the kitchen, and file *only* what you’ll truly need to reference later. Be ruthless in your paper disposal. (Shred sensitive documents.) Review filebox contents weekly. Touch paperwork only once: Open mail, and immediately act on it and recycle the paper, or file it in the appropriate spot.

KIDS’ STUFF

Quick Start: Every evening, set a timer and have the family do the “Ten Minute Tidy-Up.” Holding an empty laundry basket, each person grabs anything out of place, and returns it to its correct home.

Keep Going: Limit clutter with the “new item in, old item out” rule. If you buy a new toy or clothing, get rid of at least one old one. Limit school art and paperwork. Save only the best, and keep them in an underbed storage box or portfolio.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Quick Start: Set your watch ten minutes ahead. You’ll have a built-in buffer for running late.

Keep Going: Any task that can be completed in five minutes or less should be completed right away. Schedule a chunk of time *each day* to handle paperwork. Don’t schedule appointments too close together.

EMAIL

Quick Start: Move everything more than two weeks old from your email inbox to a file marked “Holding.” Keep it for two months. Then, delete everything you haven’t needed in that time.

Keep Going: Treat your inbox like a real mail box. You’d never leave old mail sitting in there! Take the time to set up files where you can immediately move new emails. As emails arrive, either read and delete, file appropriately, or put in a “to do this week” file.

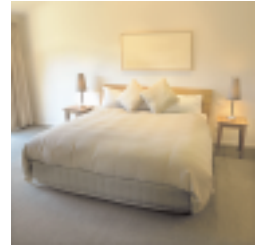
GARAGE/ATTIC/BASEMENT

Quick Start: Set a timer for 30 minutes and toss/recycle dried out paint and chemicals, and anything broken, musty, or moldy.

Keep Going: Sort the space into zones. For example, a garage might have areas for sports, tools, gardening, and recycling/garbage. Group like items in those zones. Use appropriate storage containers and label clearly.

Super-quick, feel-good, get-organized-now tips

Take these small and easy steps to make your home look good. You'll love how it feels! Then, let the momentum carry you to try larger organizing projects.



- **Make your bed — first thing — every day.** Start your day on the right foot, and you're sure to continue putting things in their proper spots all day.
- **Clean your kitchen sink.** Sprinkle baking soda and lemon juice, and scrub with a damp sponge or cloth. Rinse and dry. Polish the faucet to a shine. Now, throughout the day, immediately put dirty dishes in the dishwasher or wash them by hand so you can continue to admire your sparkly sink!
- **Assess your cups and bowls.** How many mugs and cups do you really need? Pull them all out of the cupboard, pick your top 20, and donate the rest. You'll never miss them. Do the same with your Tupperware. Match the lids with bottoms and toss anything missing its mate.
- **Create an errand box.** Put a crate or basket by the front door. Deposit into it anything needing to go out. You can add items that need to be returned to stores, library books and movies ready for return, and borrowed items that need to find their rightful owners. Take the box with you each morning and see what you can get rid of that day.
- **Give your purse or bag a makeover.** Dump everything out, and toss expired coupons, old receipts, scraps of paper, and used tissues. Then, use a small see-through pouch or zip-top bag to hold personal items (lip balm, comb, bandages, dental floss, etc.) Keep an envelope for current coupons and receipts. And keep your wallet, checkbook, and keys in a handy, easy-to-reach spot.