

Tips on Organizing and Decluttering Your Home and Life

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Introduction

Clutter seems to have a mind of its own. Without us even noticing, it can grow and grow until our home feels like a tangled mess of stuff. We soon become immobilized and feel like hiding instead of dealing with the clutter.

But you can get control of your clutter. It's a matter of changing your mindset and setting up systems that help you develop new habits.

Although this might seem overwhelming, you can take it one small step at time. The tips in this eBook can help you do that.

Look at the tips in the Table of Contents. Find one that tugs at your heart to get started. You'll know which one because it will address the area that bothers you the most.

Some of the tips will help you address your current clutter. Others will help prevent or reduce future clutter from coming into your home. And others will help you set up systems to get organized in specific areas. It doesn't matter which you choose to work on first. All of them will help in the long run. The important thing is to get started!

Set a timer for 15 to 30 minutes. Don't worry if you don't complete a tip in one session. Some will take longer. After all, you didn't get buried under the clutter in a day. You won't dig out of out in a day either.

Once you start making a little progress, you'll find it becomes easier and easier to come out from hiding behind your clutter. You'll feel more in control of your home and life instead of the clutter controlling you.

So, get started today. For more tips be sure to check out my website at <https://cutclutterwithscissors.com>. I also share tips on my [Facebook page](#). If you have any questions regarding any of the tips in this eBook, please contact me at janice@cutclutterwithscissors.com.

Section One—Paper Clutter

Tip 1: Reduce Paper Clutter Using a Computer

In the age of digital information, a computer is the best tool to help control the paper clutter. A large portion of the papers we save, especially financial and household papers, are rarely if ever looked at again. When saved in digital form you still have access to them. Here are a few ways to reduce the amount of file drawer space you need.

- Set up to receive most, if not all, your bills electronically. Store a copy of the bill on your computer.
- Sign up to have as many bills as possible to be auto paid electronically. Most utilities, mortgage companies, and credit cards are happy to set up your account this way.
- Scan as many papers as you can that aren't required to be kept in their original form. Recycle or shred the originals.
- Set up online accounts with your bank, credit cards, utilities, etc. That way you can check any information you may need, pay online, or download bills or statements.

When you store any important information on the computer, it's best to make a backup copy at that time. There are plenty of options to do this: an external hard drive, CD, flash drive, or cloud storage service. Computers do crash, but a backup will give you peace of mind.

Sometimes it's best to have a paper copy around. Think about which papers you've had to retrieve in the last couple years for emergencies or other important issues:

- Social Security card
- Birth certificate
- Insurance papers: home, car, health
- Medical records
- Phone numbers and other information needed in case of emergency or power outage

If you only keep paper copies of the most important records, you will find them much easier when they are needed.

Tip 2: Decluttering Children's School Papers

If you have young school age children, you know how those school papers can pile up throughout the year.

Going through their papers with your children on a regular basis during the year can help teach them about decluttering. They can feel attached to some, if not all their papers. This is especially true for younger children. However, those piles grow fast if not taken care of regularly.

These questions will help you decide whether to keep it or let it go:

1. Is the paper a creative work such as a story or drawing? You probably want to keep these.
2. Is the paper a special report or test with a high grade on it? You only want to keep the positive papers.
3. Is the paper a routine paper or worksheet that was used for practice? These are the papers that need to go.
4. Is the paper needed to study for a test or make a report? You can throw these away after the test or report is finished.

Don't wait until the end of the semester or school year to deal with the papers. Going through them weekly is best. Using different color folders makes it easier to organize the papers you're keeping. These are good habits to teach your children to help them stay organized and decluttered throughout their school years and beyond.

Tip 3: How to Reduce Junk Mail

Even if you change to online billing for most or all your bills, you can still get a lot of mail in your physical mailbox. Most of it is junk mail that wastes your time even if it all ends up in the recycling bin.

It's easy to reduce most of that junk mail by signing up at the following three sites. I signed up with these sites a few years ago and it made a huge difference in the amount of junk mail I get. One word of warning—charities and political mail is exempt. There are ways to reduce the charities ([read here](#)) but I haven't figured out how to stop the political junk mail.

- Reduce most junk mail: <https://www.dmachoice.org>
- Reduce catalogs: <http://www.catalogchoice.org/>
- Reduce credit card applications: <https://www.optoutprescreen.com>

Tip 4: Declutter Magazines and Newspapers

I like getting magazines and newspapers delivered to my home. It's convenient and cheaper than going to the store to buy them. When I join an organization, I may also get their magazines or newsletters in the mail. Before I know it, there are piles of these periodicals all over the house waiting to be read. If this sounds like you, it's time to take control!

1. Write down all your subscriptions, both free and paid.
2. Look at your list and evaluate each item.
 - a. Do you enjoy reading it?
 - b. Do you really read it? Be honest with yourself.
 - c. Would you miss it if you no longer received it?
 - d. Do you read the whole magazine or newspaper or just a small part?
 - e. Do you read it only because it came in your mailbox?
 - f. Would you pay full price for it in the store?
 - g. Would you enjoy reading a digital copy instead?
3. Decide which magazines and newspapers are worth keeping and which ones to discontinue.
4. Unsubscribe.
 - a. Write to the company to have your name removed from online or regular mailing lists, or to stop auto-renewal.
 - b. Or let the subscription run out. Throw away the renewal notices.

Section Two—Clothes

Tip 5: Seasonal Clothes

After a long cold winter, I'm more than ready for the warm weather of spring to come. Then in the fall, after a long hot summer, the cooler weather is a nice change. Along with the change of weather also comes a change in the clothes I wear.

Here are some questions I ask when it's time to change out my clothes. You might want to ask yourself these same questions to help you decide if there are some clothes you can let go of.

- Did I wear the item this past season (fall/winter or spring/summer)?
- If not, then why?
 - no opportunity (dressy clothes?)
 - didn't fit
 - don't like the color or style anymore
 - doesn't flatter my figure
 - it needs mending

If your answers fit any of the reasons under the second question, it's time to let go of some or all those items. If you rarely wear dressy clothes, you might want to rethink owning them. Maybe you can get an outfit or two that can be semi-causal or dressy depending on the accessories you use. If something needs mending, either make it a priority or get rid of it.

Section Three—Travel Tips

Tip 7: Airline Travel

Traveling by airplane used to be an exciting part of the vacation. Now most people see it as a necessary but dreaded mode of transportation.

With so many restrictions for carry-on luggage and many airlines charging to check luggage, just packing a suitcase has become a chore. You want to travel as light as possible yet pack everything you need. Not an easy thing to do!

Below is a list of how to pack your carry-on luggage. Check the [TSA website](#) for current restrictions (sometimes they change) and items not mentioned below.

Make sure all liquid or gels are in containers of 3 ounces or less. Then put these containers in a clear 1-quart Ziploc plastic bag. You'll need to put this bag in the screening bin in the security line.

You can have one carry-on luggage plus one personal item such as a purse, backpack, brief case, or tote bag. A tote bag or backpack that fits under the seat can hold a small purse, book, tablet, snacks, or other items to keep you busy. It's easy to access during the flight.

If you're carrying on any gifts (must be in the personal bag or luggage piece) wait to wrap them until you get to your destination. If security has any questions as to the contents the gifts may have to be unwrapped.

Pack neatly. Messy bags can prevent the inspectors from seeing everything in the bag with the x-ray machines. If the bags must be pulled aside and searched by hand, you'll need more time to get through security.

Keep electronic devices organized with wires coiled and tied. Put these items in small plastic bags.

Fold clothes neatly. To make more room in the suitcase, you can put the clothes in two-gallon Ziploc bags with the air squeezed out.

Tip 6: Traveling by Car

Traveling by car is in many ways easier than traveling by plane, train, or bus. It's also much easier to over pack because no one is weighing or measuring the size of your suitcase. Even if the trunk is full, you can always throw a small suitcase, backpack, or grocery bag of things on the floor of the back seat.

To avoid having an overstuffed car, which makes the passengers uncomfortable, ask yourself these questions before you pack:

- How many changes of clothes do you really need?
- Can you wash something out in a sink if necessary?
- How many items are you taking "just in case"?
- Will you be near a store to purchase that item if it's needed?
- How many snacks/drinks do you really need?
- Will you be able to restock the car for the trip back?
- How many different toys/entertainment items do you need?

The goal is to keep the car as clutter-free as possible. Take only the essentials and leave the rest at home. Your vacation will be a lot simpler this way.

Section Four—Divide and Conquer

Tip 8: Divide and Conquer System

One of the first tips you hear from organizing experts is to handle a piece of paper or another object as little as possible. They tell you to start at the top of the pile and work your way down.

But when that pile is huge, the mind starts to panic and think it will never get to the bottom. The excuses start kicking in:

- This will take forever. Why bother?
- There is not enough time to even make a dent.
- How do I decide where each thing goes?

On and on it goes. Procrastination takes over and nothing gets done.

"Yard by yard, it's very hard. But inch by inch, it's a cinch."—Anon

Over the years I have devised a small tactic I use when the panic and overwhelmed feeling immobilizes me. I call it "Divide and Conquer."

It started back when my boys were young and I had a large basket of socks and underwear to fold. Of course, each boy, my husband, and I would have different kinds of socks. So instead of taking one sock at a time and looking for a match I quickly separated each person's socks into different piles. These small piles were more doable.

This divide and conquer tactic also worked great on that huge pile of papers on my desk. It's easy to do and more manageable than starting at the top of the pile and handling each piece of paper only once. In the long run it probably saves time because it allows you to take action to move forward.

1. Find a space where you can spread out and separate the papers into piles. I've used the floor many times.
2. Quickly go through each paper and put it in its designated pile:
 - Bills
 - Priority or immediate action
 - To be looked at later
 - Filing
 - Misc.—doesn't fit into the above piles

Once you have separate piles, start working on what you feel is the most important pile.

The next time you're faced with a mountain of work and don't know where to start, tell yourself to divide and conquer. It will put you in the frame of mind of breaking down the big job into smaller and more doable little jobs.

"Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs."—Henry Ford

Section Five—Holidays

Tip 9: Holiday Gift Giving Tips

Throughout the year there are holidays where gift giving is a huge part. There's Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, plus Christmas and Chanukah. Think about how many of the gifts you've received over the years that are cluttering up your closet shelves. Now think about how many of the gifts you've given to others that may have ended up the same way.

If you don't know what someone really wants for a gift, you have two choices, either ask them or give gifts that are less likely to add to their clutter. If you don't want gifts that add to your clutter be sure to speak up about it. They can't read your mind!

This list of gift ideas won't create a lot of clutter.

- For women: give flowers. They last about a week and bring a smile to her face.
- Treat men and women to a special meal at their favorite restaurant or a special one they wouldn't normally go to.
- Give gifts that get used up such as bubble bath, candles, or lotion for women or cologne or after shave for men. Try to find out the kind they like.
- Find candy or a special food or drink for both women and men.
- Buy a gift card or tickets for a play or movie. Go with them and give the gift of your time along with the tickets.
- Print gift certificates for services you can do for the person. It may be for washing their car, cleaning their home, babysitting to give them some free time, and some other idea.

The least clutter-free gift of all is a gift of your time. In the long run, it will probably be the gift that's cherished the most.

Tip 10: Holiday Baking and Cooking

As the days get shorter and the weather starts cooling down, the thought of home baked cookies, cakes, and breads comes to mind. So does that Thanksgiving or Christmas turkey, dressing, and sweet potatoes.

But if you haven't done much of this kind of baking or cooking since last year, you may have left over ingredients that are no longer good to use. It's time to declutter the old stuff.

Make sure your ingredients are fresh. Most have “best used by” dates on the packages. If you put some of your ingredients into canisters, do you remember when you bought that last bag of flour? Flour gets rancid over time. Baking soda and baking powder get old and won’t leaven your baked goods. Spices and herbs lose their punch.

If there isn’t a date on the package and you don’t remember when you bought the item, buy new ingredients. Your recipes deserve it!

Certain items can be kept past their expiration date if they are stored in the freezer. These include flours, nuts, and other ingredients. If you freeze these items right away, you’ll get a much longer storage life. They still can get bad over time, though, so don’t keep them forever.

A good habit is to mark the date on everything you put in the freezer. You should also put a date on everything you open in the pantry or put in the refrigerator. This will help you keep track of how old something is.

Now that you have cleaned out all the old stuff from the freezer, refrigerator, and pantry, it’s time to get out the holiday recipes and start stocking up on what you’ll need. Then when you get a cold rainy day that’s perfect for baking, you’ll have fresh ingredients waiting for you. After all, you put your time and love into baking and cooking those special holiday recipes, so make sure you have the freshest ingredients to make them taste their best.

Tip 11: Holiday Decorations

The holidays seem to come around faster every year. Are you ready when they arrive? Do you have your decorations set up? Does it feel like there are just too many of them and you don’t know where to put them all?

As you pull those decorations out of the boxes, think about decluttering some of them. Fewer, but more meaningful ones can decorate your home yet keep it simple at the same time.

These questions can help you decide if an item is worth keeping:

- Do you enjoy this decoration anymore?
- Are you keeping it just because it is there?
- If you got rid of this decoration would you miss it?
- Does this item look old and tired? Would you enjoy a new version of it?
- Is this decoration broken? Can it be fixed and is it worth it?

Throw away any broken items. Give away any that are in good condition so someone else can be blessed with “new” decorations they might not otherwise be able to afford.

The more decorations you get rid of now, the fewer you will have to pack away after the holidays.

Tip 12: Holiday Traditions

As we go about our holiday traditions, we’ll be making memories for our families and ourselves. Most traditions we enjoy doing. However, sometimes a tradition becomes clutter for us.

We may continue to put out tons of decorations each year because our parents and grandparents did that. Yet, each year we don’t enjoy the task and feel we can never do it as well as they did. The pressure to keep the tradition overwhelms us.

Maybe it’s time to create new traditions. According to the dictionary, a tradition is a belief and/or custom that is handed down from one generation to another. When we create a new tradition, we are handing it down from our generation to our children’s generation.

Yes, we want to honor the generations before us by keeping many of their traditions alive. But it’s just as important to honor the generations following us by passing on traditions we enjoy and we know they will enjoy.

Section Six—Disaster Clutter

Tip 13: Flood or Fire-Damaged Clutter

A lot of natural disasters have occurred around the world the last couple of years. The pictures and videos of destroyed homes have shown us how easy it is to lose all your belongings at one time. Maybe it's time to look at your own things from a new perspective.

If you have never been a victim of a home disaster such as a flood or fire, it's hard to image the destructive force of either one. If you have a basement, even a sewer backup can cause a lot of damage.

These questions will help you look at what you own from a different perspective:

- How many things would be damaged?
- How many things are worth replacing?
- How many things are irreplaceable?
- How many things are clutter?
- How many things are usable items that someone else could be using?

Wouldn't it be better to donate those usable items instead of storing them in your closets or basement? If they were damaged by flood or fire, they would end up in the dumpster. Nobody could use those items again.