



# Organize This

IF IT'S A DIGITAL WORLD, WHY IS THERE STILL SO MUCH PAPER PILING UP? STREAMLINE YOUR FILING SYSTEM WITH THESE EXPERT-APPROVED TIPS.

By Sierra Guardiola

## 1 ARRANGE PILES

Start by sorting your paperwork into categories (household, school, pets). Shred outdated or unneeded documents that contain personal information, like your name, address, and especially Social Security or credit card number. Less sensitive documents can just be recycled.

## 2 SORT WITH EASE

Create labels with big-picture categories listed first, followed by narrower descriptions ("Medical: Julie" or "Taxes: 2017"). Use manila folders with all right- or left-hand tabs—they're faster to flip through than assorted-position tabs—and alphabetize.

## 3 SIZE APPROPRIATELY

Determine how much storage space you need. If you maintain most of your files digitally, for example, don't use a large filing cabinet. It's a waste of space, and you may be tempted to fill it with files you don't need or items that don't belong in a filing cabinet. Instead, opt for a desktop file box.

## 4 CONSIDER FREQUENCY

Out-of-the-way storage spots (think high shelves in less-used closets) are perfect places to archive files like tax returns and bank statements. Reserve easy-access locations for items you need more regularly, like school forms and recipes.

## 5 CREATE A LANDING PAD

Set up a daily drop zone in a high-traffic area, such as the kitchen, for incoming mail and paperwork. Designating a single spot will prevent piles from accumulating throughout the house. An inbox or wall-mounted basket will conserve space and make it obvious when items are overflowing and need to be dealt with. Filter out junk mail and filler paper before adding anything to the drop zone. Address the items that land here at least twice a week, then file or recycle them.

## 6 KEEP IT NEAT

Do a big sweep of your regularly accessed files every three to six months. Archive or shred documents that are no longer relevant. Tax returns and documents pertaining to household repairs should be kept for at least three years.

## GO PAPERLESS

Organizing documents digitally obviously poses fewer space challenges, and your computer's search tool can help you find exactly what you're looking for. Follow the same guidelines for digital labels as for physical ones. Back up files onto an external hard drive, or use a cloud storage service, like Google Drive. The Evernote Scannable app (free; iOS) helps you quickly convert paper files into digital ones.

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