

Organizing Tips...

Nine tips for filing papers and emails

- By Lorena Prime -



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Rarely does anyone like to file. We file because we have to, or else we'd never find anything! Did you know, however, that you only look at about 20 percent of what you file? This means that 80 percent of what we painstakingly find a home for will never see the light of day again. So stop and consider... do you really need to file that item? Remember, the trash can or recycling bin is just as important as the file cabinet – i.e. throw it away!

If you really do need to file that paper or email, the following helpful tips will keep you organized:

1. **Make sure you can find it.** A filing system is a "finding" system, so if you cannot find it after you've filed it, don't bother! Remember that you won't look at 80 percent of what you store. Storing unread, unneeded pieces of paper costs your company thousands of dollars every year. (Your company has to rent a space big enough to hold you and your filing cabinets, yes?)
2. **Is it available elsewhere?** If the information can be found on the Internet (or your company's Intranet), don't bother to file it. You'll be able to find the information again online, so why take time and energy to file it? Besides, the items online will be more up-to-date than your printed copy. (Need more convincing? See Tip #1.)
3. **Would you miss it?** Before filing something, ask yourself, "If that paper or email disappeared, would I miss it?" If the answer is "no," then why would you take time to file it?
4. **Choose a meaningful name.** In order to find things easily, the file folder needs to have a good name. Before filing the paper or email think to yourself, "Where would I look to find this again? What name or category would I look under?" If more than one name comes to mind, choose the one you're most likely to remember.
5. **Write legibly.** When labeling folders, use large, easy-to-read BLOCK lettering because it is much easier to scan file names and find what you need quickly. If you are using label holders, make certain that they are clear in color because colored holders make it difficult to read the writing underneath. By the way, you don't need a labeler – handwritten tabs are perfectly acceptable.
6. **Don't use "miscellaneous."** What will you find in this file? When I ask my customers, I get a blank stare or they say, "random stuff." Nobody knows what this file really contains, so that is why you shouldn't file things there!
7. **Designate a place to store files.** Whether it's in a file cabinet, cardboard box, rolling cart or some other contraption, you need to have a separate place to store papers. Don't forget that files aren't just for the workplace; you need to create a filing system at home as well. How many of you have piles of paper lying around your house? Having a home filing cabinet will help you pay bills faster and more easily, find important papers when needed, and keep the peace with your spouse. (By the way, emails need file folders as well. Every email program has the ability to create folders for your messages.)
8. **Make it easy.** You need to be able to access your files effortlessly, so don't have anything blocking the drawer from opening. Also, it is better not to purchase fancy file furniture where the top lifts up when you file rather than having a drawer that opens. You'll never be able to lift the top because something will always be sitting on it since it's hard to leave a blank surface empty. In addition, the file folders inside the drawer need to be roomy enough so you can insert new papers.
9. **Purge.** Yes, you'll need to purge every so often. You won't have room for new things unless you periodically clean out the old stuff. For home files, I clean mine every one to two years (usually the last week in December). Make sure to follow your company's retention policy for your workplace papers. Better yet, if you don't file something in the first place then you never have to purge it! **Z**

Lorena Prime, owner of Clearly Organized, speaks at companies and organizations on Time Management and other productivity topics. She uses a methodology that helps people shorten routine office work and save one or two hours every day. What could you do with an extra one or two hours? For more information, visit www.ClearlyOrganizedLife.com or call 617-633-2199.