

Learn the Secrets of the Super-Organized

If you want to get more organized, there are simple habits that you can develop over time that will get you to where you want to be. These are habits that you can apply to your work, your home, your hobbies, your life.

If your life is a mess, start with the first habit, and work your way down. Do it a little at a time, one area of your life at a time, one area of your home or office at a time. Work on a habit for a month or so, then move on to the next one.

1. **Reduce before organizing.** The mistake most people make when trying to organize is that it's too complicated. If you have a closet crammed full of stuff, you can buy a bunch of closet organizers, but in the end, you'll still have a closet crammed full of stuff. The solution: reduce, eliminate, simplify. If you take your closet full of 100 things and throw out all but the 10 things you love and use, now you don't need a fancy closet organizer.
2. **Write it down now, always.** Instead of using your mind as storage for things you need to remember, write it down. Carry a small pocket notebook wherever you go and write things down immediately. Then you can process the ideas and tasks later into a calendar or to-do list, so you don't forget.
3. **Have one inbox & process.** You actually need two inboxes -- one for home and one for work. But many people have many more than that; paper comes to their desk and lands in any number of places, phone messages get placed everywhere, notes to self are posted all over the place. Instead, have one inbox, and put all incoming stuff in there. Then, once a day (or once a week at home if that works better for you), process the inbox to empty.
4. **A place for everything.** Related to the above tip is to have a place for each item in your life. Where do your car keys go? You should have one place for them, and you'll never lose them again. Where do your pens go? How about your magazines? The same concept applies to information: do you have one place where you put all your information? If not, try a personal wiki -- it's accessible from work and home, and you can create pages for each type of information in your life.
5. **Put it away now.** Most people have a habit of putting something on a table or counter top or on their desk with the intention of "putting it away later". Well, this is how things get messy and disorganized. Instead, put it away now -- in its home. It only takes a few seconds, and this one habit will save you a lot of cleaning and sorting and organizing later.
6. **Clean as you go.** Closely related to Habit 5, this habit is effective because it's much easier to clean things as you work or as you move through your day than to let them pile up and do a big cleaning session later. So, if you're cooking, try to wash your dishes as you use them, and wipe the counter, instead of leaving a huge mess.
7. **Develop routines & systems.** If you've gotten everything uncluttered and organized, you might sit back and enjoy the pleasantness of it. Being organized and having a simplified working environment or home is tremendously satisfying. But the problem is that after a little while, things tend to start to get disorganized and cluttered again. You need to develop systems to keep your organization in place. All systems follow the same guidelines -- specific procedures and a routine that is done at a set interval. Once those systems are in place, you need to be vigilant about keeping them going, and then things will stay organized.