

lesson 2 the paper organizing process: collect + decide

WELCOME BACK!

Welcome to Lesson 2 of Organize Your Paper Clutter. I hope you enjoyed Lesson 1, and that you've set some compelling goals for organizing your paper. Just think how great it's going to feel when all your paper clutter is transformed into paper *order*—you'll know exactly where to put a piece of paper when it comes into your home, and you'll know just where to look when it comes time to retrieve it again! Ah...that is going to feel so good! That is the ultimate goal of this workshop, and during Lesson 2 you'll be taking the next step towards that goal by learning a decision-making process for your paper.

As you read through this lesson, I want you to keep this in mind:

“Sorting paper is a decision-making process.”

Paper becomes a source of clutter for many reasons, but here is a biggie: When you pick up a piece of paper, you neglect to make a *decision* about what to do with it! Your piles of paper are in essence piles of indecision. The key to eliminating paper clutter is to become aware of the decisions that need to be made about each piece of paper that comes into your home. Sometimes paper requires action, and you have to decide what action needs to be taken and when. You also have to decide how you'll remember to take action on the paper and you have to decide how and where to store it in the meantime. No wonder your first impulse is to set aside your paper for later!

In this lesson you'll learn the decision-making process for paper. Then, in upcoming lessons, you'll learn about the final two steps of the paper organizing process—acting on your paper and storing it. You'll also set up permanent storage systems for each category of paper. This decision-making process, coupled with your new paper storage systems, will be key factors in eliminating your paper clutter.

When you sort your paper your focus should be on decision-making, using a series of questions which you'll learn in this lesson. The primary goal when you sort your paper is to decide (there's that *decide* word again) which category your paper

belongs in. In the last lesson we categorized paper as welcome or unwelcome, and necessary or unnecessary. In this lesson, we will categorize paper a just bit differently—as unprocessed, action, reference, archive, recycle and shred. Each of these categories tells you what you need to do with a piece of paper and where it belongs. But first, you have to *decide* which category each piece of paper belongs in.

During this lesson you'll also start taking action. First, you'll choose an area in which to handle your paper, and set up temporary containers for each category of paper—unprocessed, action, reference, archive, recycle and shred. (Your shred container can be the shredder itself if it's practical for you to shred as you go.) In future lessons you'll set up permanent homes for each of these categories, but in this lesson I want you to focus on sorting and understanding the decision-making process. Containers are fun, for certain, but we don't want them to become a distraction. ;) So, in the spirit of bite-sizing the lesson concepts so they really sink in, use temporary systems during this lesson. Rest assured that by the end of this workshop, you'll have permanent systems (and fun containers!) in place to hold each category of paper.

All right—without further adieu, let's get sorting!

THE PAPER ORGANIZING PROCESS

Get Ready to Organize Your Paper

Getting ready to organize your paper involves two steps: clarifying your goals, and setting up a well-stocked area to handle your paper. We covered the first step in Lesson 1—just remember to keep that goal statement and the results you're after at the forefront of your mind while organizing your paper. When you connect with how good it is going to feel to have clutter-free surfaces and be in control of your paper, it will help you stay focused on the journey ahead.

The next preparation step is to set up a well-stocked area to handle your paper. You may already have a designated spot for handling your paper, such as a desk in your kitchen or a home office. On the other hand, part of your paper trouble could be that you *don't* have a place set up to handle your paper. The focus of this workshop is to organize your paper, rather than teach you how to set up a home office. With that said, it is essential that you gather together some basic supplies to aid in the paper

sorting process and decide where you will sort your paper—both the new paper that comes into your home on a daily basis and the backlog that you need to go through.

In future lessons we'll talk about setting up your paper storage systems and the importance of selecting the right location for each of these systems. For now, simply gather together a few basic supplies, temporary sorting containers, and select a location to do your sorting.

WORK AREA

To effectively sort paper, you'll need a flat surface such as a table, desk or countertop. Select a comfortable chair, unless you prefer to sort while standing at a counter height surface (as I do).

everyday example:

I handle paper in a variety of places in my home. I do a preliminary sort of mail in my laundry room. School papers are sorted on the kitchen counter. Mail and other personal paper is sorted and handled in my home office. Select a location (or locations) for sorting your paper that makes sense based on how paper flows into your home and where it naturally lands.

TEMPORARY SORTING CONTAINERS

You will need up to seven empty containers for sorting your paper. If you have quite a bit of paper to sort through, use cardboard boxes or plastic bins. If you have less paper backlog, you might be able to get by using file folders instead of boxes. Label the first five containers or file folders as follows: collection, action: date-specific, action: time-flexible, reference, and archive. (The last two containers can be used for papers to recycle or shred as discussed below.)



RECYCLE BIN

Keeping a paper recycle bin inside your home makes it simple to recycle unneeded paper. This doesn't have to be a conspicuous green bin, but can be any container designated just for recycling. Keep this as close as possible to your sorting area. If you don't have a permanent container suitable for recycling, add another temporary box or folder and label it "recycle." If recycling isn't an option for you, then use a trash can in lieu of a recycle bin.



SHREDDER

If you don't already own a shredder, I encourage you to invest in one for safe disposal of sensitive personal documents. A shredder is a relatively small investment that can save you hours of hassle if your personal information were to get into the wrong hands. I recommend using a cross-cut shredder. Be sure to keep and use your shredder away from young children.

If you don't yet have a shredder, use your seventh empty sorting container to collect your sensitive documents until you purchase a shredder.

☞ If there is no way to place a shredder near your sorting area, consider establishing a shredding container and label it "shred." When your container gets full, have a little shred fest complete with happy music and a refreshing drink. If you don't enjoy the act of shredding, use a small container so you are reminded to shred smaller batches more frequently. ☞

Use your shredder for safe disposal of any paper that contains personal information. Due to identity theft concerns, it is important that you shred any paper that contains identifying information such as your name, address, signature, account numbers of any kind (bank, investment, credit card, etc.), medical information, legal information, credit card offers, and of course your Social Security number. For a complete listing of documents to shred, see the download called "What do I need to shred?" included with the lesson downloads.

BASIC OFFICE SUPPLIES

In addition to the supplies listed above, gather together the following items:

- * File folders
- * Labeling supplies to label your temporary file folders or sorting containers
- * Pen or pencil
- * Paper for jotting down notes and to-dos (yes, you're going to be fighting fire with fire, or rather, paper with paper!)
- * Your calendar
- * Stapler, staple remover and staples
- * Post-it notes
- * Paper clips and binder clips

TAKE ACTION!

Your first action step for this lesson is to set up your sorting area. Decide on a location to sort. Then, gather together your temporary sorting containers and other supplies listed above. Remember, the collection containers you are implementing at this point are temporary, so there's no need to go out and buy sorting containers or



labeling supplies. If you don't already have a shredder, I do recommend purchasing a cross cut shredder as soon as possible. While you're at the store, consider picking up a permanent container for your recycling, too (if you don't already have one).

Once you have your supplies collected and a work area set up, it's time to sort!

“The handout “paper organizing process at a glance” gives you a quick summary of the paper sorting process and questions to ask while sorting.”



“The single pile rule works

great any time you're faced with a messy surface like a cluttered desk or counter-top.

Simply collect all the papers into a single pile, place them in your collection container, and then decide what to do with one piece of paper at a time.”

Step 1: Collect

One of the first things I do when sorting paper—my own or my clients'—is corral together all the paper from an area into a single pile. So, if I'm organizing a kitchen counter cluttered with papers, I will collect all the papers off the counter and place them into a single pile. As you sort, gather your papers into your container labeled “collection.”



Why is it preferable to have your paper in a single pile? Well...paper becomes overwhelming, as we have discussed extensively. The simple act of putting your paper into a single pile creates an instant sense of order, calm and breathing room. Immediately things don't look so bad, so it doesn't feel so bad. This is a big step in the right direction.

The other reason for a single pile is that it will allow you to focus on one piece of paper at a time while sorting. You can't pick and choose your favorite piece of paper from the bunch. Instead, you simply start at the top of the pile and work your way down to the bottom. This helps you avoid “selective selection”—picking the “good” (or easy) papers to deal with first, leaving you with a pile of icky stuff at the end, when your energy is at its lowest.

Step 2: Decide

The next step in the process is to decide which category each piece of paper belongs in: action, reference, archive, recycle, or shred. Before we go further, let's define each of these categories.

UNPROCESSED

The first type of paper is paper that you haven't sorted through yet—it is unprocessed so you aren't really sure what it is, where it belongs, or what you need to do with it.



You do, however, need to establish a designated spot and container for this type of paper. The system that supports your unprocessed paper is called your collection system. The most traditional collection system is an in-box.

ACTION

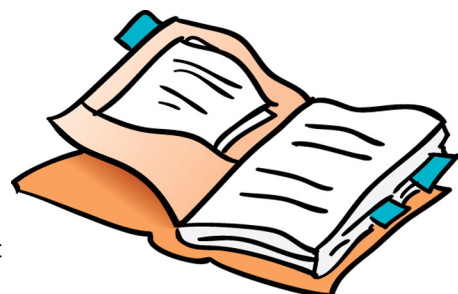
Your "action" pile contains paper that has an action associated with it. You need to do something as a result of getting this piece of paper. Bills, permission slips, continuing education catalogs, grocery lists, and coupons can all be examples of actionable paper. Bills need to be paid. Permission slips need to be filled out and returned to school. Your action paper is the most critical to gain control over because it has a task associated with it, often a task with a deadline. Within the action category are time-specific action papers—those with a deadline, and time-flexible actions—those that can be dealt with anytime you please. Bills are an example of time-specific action papers, while reading materials such as magazines are an example of time-flexible action papers.



“As you put this process into action during this lesson, sort your paper into the temporary containers set up in “Take Action” above. By the end of this workshop you will create permanent storage solutions for each category of paper.”

REFERENCE

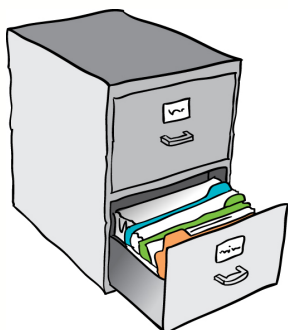
Your reference paper is something you may want or need to refer to at a later date. This type of paper doesn't require your action at the moment and some external event will tell you if and when you need to refer to or take action on that paper in the future. Examples of



reference paper include telephone directories, your voter ID card, sports schedules (after its dates have been entered on the calendar), papers for a current home decorating project, and carry out menus. Think of your reference paper as things you will want to get your hands on quickly, easily and relatively frequently.

ARCHIVE

Your archive paper is similar to your reference paper, but the holding period is longer. Also, you won't need (or want) to retrieve your archive paper as frequently as you will need and want to retrieve your reference paper. Examples of archive paper include old tax returns, legal documents, memorabilia, art projects and school papers you're keeping for your children. As with reference papers, there is no immediate action associated with these papers, and the paper itself will not trigger an action.



“There is no one-size-fits-all solution for organizing paper, even in the house of an organizer! Jay’s filing system is by category; Aby’s is by month. Set up systems that work for you, and then help anyone in your home who also is responsible for paper to set up systems that work for them.”

RECYCLE

Use this category for any paper you don’t need. There’s no action associated with it and there’s no need to refer to it later.



SHRED

As discussed above, your shred category is for any piece of paper you don’t need that contains personal information.

Okay...now that you understand the different categories, let’s talk about how to decide which category each piece of paper belongs in.

QUESTION 1: IS THIS PAPER MY RESPONSIBILITY?

For each piece of paper you come across, first decide if it is your responsibility or the responsibility of someone else in your home. Place paper that you are not responsible for into a separate collection container—a collection container set up for the person responsible for that piece of paper.

Keep in mind that during this workshop you will be setting up systems for each category of paper—unprocessed, action, reference, and archive. If someone else in your household is responsible for handling some of the paper that comes into your home, you may need to set up duplicate systems, one for you and one for him (or her). Keep in mind that the systems that work for you may not be the best systems for the other people in your home. Once you get your systems set up, use what you learn in this workshop to help the other members in your household create systems that work for them.

everyday example:

If you are sorting paper and come across a bill and your spouse is responsible for paying the bills—the bill should go into your spouse’s collection bin and ultimately into his/her paper organizing system.



For household managers it’s often that case that even though a piece of paper and any action associated with it isn’t your responsibility, you are ultimately responsible for overseeing the task’s completion. In this case, even though the paper isn’t yours, you may want to incorporate the paper into your paper systems as if it were your responsibility.

Remember, every piece of paper in your midst is an obligation. Make it your goal to eliminate all the easy obligations by sending them straight to the recycle bins. Or better yet, remove your name from the mailing list altogether.

everyday example:

School papers are a mixed bag, responsibility-wise. Some paper is your responsibility, and some is your child's. When your child and his backpack arrive home from school, have your child place the papers into your collection container. Then separate the papers based on responsibility. Homework is your child's responsibility; items like permission slips to sign and newsletters to read are your responsibility. Deciding which completed work and artwork to keep can be a joint responsibility.

QUESTION 2: DO I NEED OR WANT THIS PAPER?

This question is such a simple little question, but often, it's really hard to answer. Do I need this paper? Hmmm....what do I need to keep? How long do I need to keep it? Let's bring some coherence, once and for all, to these questions.

The easy "no"

First, let's start with your low hanging fruit, those things that are easy to know you don't need, or easy to say "no" to. Consider "no" the expressway to Recycle-ville; send your low hanging fruit straight to the recycle bin whenever possible, remembering to shred anything that contains personal information.

Paper you don't need to keep:

- * **Catalogs.** With catalogs, ask yourself if you need something from this particular store right now. Had you been planning on making a purchase from Pottery Barn before the catalog arrived in your mailbox? If the answer is no, send your catalogs straight to the recycle bin (especially while you're in the process of digging yourself out of a paper backlog).
- * **Store coupons.** As with catalogs, store coupons are useful if you'll be purchasing something from that store before the coupon expiration date. When you get a coupon, find the expiration date and then ask yourself if you need to buy something from this store before that date. If the answer is no—recycle, recycle, recycle!
- * **Event notices.** Quickly scan the notice—is this an event you're likely to attend? If so, check your calendar. Are you available that day? If you're not, send the notice to your recycle bin.

- * **Credit card offers.** Do you need another credit card? Shred credit card offers on the spot unless you have been shopping around for a new and better credit card.
- * **Receipts.** Receipts for everyday, low-ticket items do not need to be kept, unless you are using them for budgeting purposes or to reconcile your bank statements. Recycle receipts for groceries or your treats from Starbucks.

The troubling “I don’t knows”

Frankly, it can be a bit confusing to know if you need to keep much of the paper that comes into your home, or not. As if that weren’t bothersome enough, once you decide you do need to keep something, you’re faced with one of life’s great mysteries: how long do I need to keep it?

If you’ve ever done research to figure out how long you need to keep various paper records, you may find yourself even more confused after doing the research than you were before you started. There is a lot of contradictory information about what to keep and for how long.

Below are the guidelines I use, along with my rationale about what to keep and for what length of time. As a general rule of thumb, I recommend that if you have space to store documents, err on the side of caution. Save documents that could be needed for tax purposes for a full seven years. If you work with a tax preparer or an attorney, seek their advice on your particular situation. These advisors will be your partners in an audit, so they should have a voice as to which records are being kept. This is particularly important if there are unique circumstances that complicate your paperwork—such as running a home-based business or being involved in a lawsuit. Above all, do what feels right and comfortable to you.

- * **Tax documents.** The simple rule for tax documents is this: For seven years, keep any document or receipt that was (or will be) used in the calculation of your tax return.

Throughout the year, you need to collect the documents that will be needed to file your tax returns. This includes receipts for tax-deductible purchases as well as receipts for charitable donations you make throughout the year. At the end of the year, documents such as your W-2, bank statements and investments statements should also be added to your tax documents file.

For tax returns from prior years, keep the return itself, as well as the documents you used to put together the return, such as receipts for charitable donations, W-2s, bank statements, investment statements, and so on. The simplest thing to do is to store your filed returns with the documents that verify your numbers. If you sold stock and claimed resulting income (or loss) on your tax returns, the documents from your stockbroker that record the basis of the profit or loss should be kept with your tax returns.

Which leads me to the next question: “How long do I need to keep it?” The general rule of thumb is to hold on to tax-related items for seven years. Some sources even recommend you keep your tax returns indefinitely. Here’s the rationale: The IRS can randomly select you for an audit any time during the first three years after you file your returns. The IRS can also raise questions about your tax returns for up to six years from the filing date if they suspect underreported income. However, in a case where the IRS suspects fraud, they can raise questions about your tax returns indefinitely. So, in most cases, if you keep your tax returns, and all the documents used to create those returns for a period of seven years—you’re covered.

So, why do some sources recommend you hold onto your returns indefinitely? Your tax returns are your proof that you paid your taxes.

The tax documents you are collecting for next year’s tax returns are reference items. The approaching tax deadline of April 15th will remind you to access these documents and file your tax returns. Tax returns and the supporting documents from prior years are part of your archive system.

- * **Legal documents.** Keep legal documents indefinitely. Your legal documents include birth certificates, marriage certificates, divorce decrees, wills, death certificates and your passport.
- * **Financial documents.** Keep records to show the cost basis, or value, of any asset you purchase that, when sold, will become part of your taxable income. This includes assets such as your home, stocks, bonds, etc. Hold on to records that show the purchase price of your home and any improvements you make to your home over the years. Together, these documents prove the cost basis of your home, or its value, at the time of sale. You also want to hold on to documents that show the purchase price, sale price and commissions paid on

“ If you get a piece of paper and you aren't sure if you want it or need it, consider it a keeper for now and continue along with the rest of the decision-making process. ”

stocks, bonds and mutual funds. Since these items will be used for tax returns in the year they are sold, you will want to hold on to these documents for seven years after the sale of the asset.

Why is this? Essentially, the IRS taxes you on your income less your expenses. In the event that you sell an asset such as your home or another investment such as stocks or bonds, you need documents to support your claim as to the value of that asset at the time of purchase and at the time of sale.

✱ **Warranty items.** It is a good idea to keep receipts for major purchases such as new appliances and of course, your vehicles. Also hold on to receipts for maintenance work done on your vehicles. In the event that you need warranty work done on your vehicle, you will be able to prove you've done the necessary maintenance. These receipts can also be helpful if you sell your vehicle, demonstrating to the dealer or potential buyer that you've taken good care of the vehicle.

✱ **Items that require more time to decide.** There's one last category of paper that falls under the umbrella of troubling I-don't-knows. These are items that you *might* want, but you're not absolutely sure at the moment—frankly, you need more time to decide. For these items, if you can't say “no” in the instant, then the default answer is “yes.” If at the moment a piece of paper lands in your home you can't definitively say “no” to it, then you must say yes for now, and follow along with the rest of the decision-making process.

everyday example:

A child's backpack is often stuffed with paper that requires more time to decide if you want it or need it. Let's say a summer camp sign-up form comes home from school in March, but you haven't even begun thinking about summer plans yet. It's impossible to decide right then if you need this piece of paper, because you haven't a clue if you'll be signing up your child for summer camp. You simply need more time to decide. Your child's artwork is another example, but for completely different reasons. Frankly, it can be hard to throw away a piece of artwork the minute it walks through the door, especially if the beaming artist is attached to it. With time and the accumulation of more artwork, this decision becomes easier.





Regardless of the reason, if paper comes through the door and it isn't a definite no because you need more time to decide—say yes for now.

QUESTION 3: IS THIS PAPER ACTIONABLE?

Quite simply, actionable paper has a to-do associated with it, such as paying a bill, registering for a class, or calling to RSVP. Actionable paper is often the cause of piles: you want to keep your paper out in the open so you remember to do the action associated with it. You attempt to use the paper as your reminder to perform the action.

If you have piles and piles of paper, you have piles and piles of proof that using a piece of paper to remind yourself to take action isn't terribly effective. To-do lists and calendars are much better reminder and task management systems.

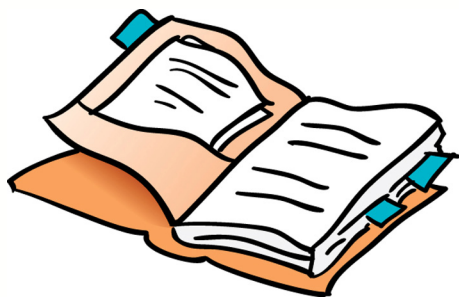
“ In Lesson 3 we will cover the “act” and “store” steps of the paper organizing process. For now put your actionable paper into either your “action: date-specific” or “action: time-flexible” containers. Also, be sure to take action on anything that needs your immediate attention! ”

The solution to action paper clutter is two fold. First, you need to create an action system to store your actionable papers. We'll take care of that one in the next lesson. For now place your actionable items in the appropriate action container. Second, for each actionable piece of paper you encounter while sorting, you need to put in place a trigger—or a reminder—to perform the associated action at the right time. Your calendar and to-do list are the perfect tools for this.

everyday examples:

- * Bills are an obvious example of actionable paper. The to-do is to pay the bill.
- * A birthday party invitation is another example. The required actions include: make a phone call to RSVP, buy and wrap a present, and attend the party. With this example, it's easy to see why the invitation isn't a good reminder to take action. There are too many actions involved. Adding “buy gift” on an errands list, and recording the party on the calendar, is a much more effective approach.

For each actionable piece of paper, ask yourself if it is time-specific with a concrete deadline, or time-flexible. Then, place it into the appropriate container.



QUESTION 4: HOW OFTEN WILL I WANT TO OR NEED TO REFER TO THIS PAPER?

Some of the paper that comes into your home doesn't have an immediate action associated with it, but the paper contains information that you may want to refer to later. With your action paper, the paper itself is your trigger to perform an action. With non-actionable paper, something external to the paper will trigger your need to access it. This paper falls into either your reference or archive categories. Which one? Well, that depends. Think of your reference paper as things you will want to get your hands on quickly, easily and relatively frequently. Some of it you may only need to keep for a short period of time, such as the school lunch menu for the month it is active (after which you replace it with next month's menu).

You will access your archive paper less frequently, and therefore it doesn't need to be kept as easily accessible as your reference paper. Also, you will be holding on to the majority of your archive paper for years, if not indefinitely. Items such as tax returns that you must hold on to for seven years, your children's birth certificates, and sentimental papers, are all archive.

As you sort your papers, you will come across some items that are clearly reference, like the Chinese carry out menu you use every Thursday night. You will also come across items that are definitely archive, like your marriage license and the letters your Grandma sent you when you were a little girl. But you'll also come across items that could go either way. Sometimes the boundary between the reference and archive categories can be a bit fuzzy—and that is okay. Don't lose sleep over this one. When we set up the storage systems for each category of paper, you may mix categories in the same storage system anyway based on how readily available you need certain papers to be.

As you sort, trust your gut decision about which category to put something in. If you aren't sure if it's reference or archive, just think in terms of how readily available it needs to be. If you don't need it to be too easy to get to, archive it. If you'd like to keep it relatively handy, put it in reference.

everyday examples:

- ✱ Bills begin as action items. Once the bill is paid, you may wish to hold on to it for future reference for budgeting, proof of payment for insurance purposes, and so on.

- * When sports schedules come into your home, the schedule starts as an action item—you need to record game dates and times on your calendar. Once this action is performed, however, you may want to hold on to the schedule for future reference. There may be details you don't want to record on your calendar, such as which team you're playing, but you may want to look them up at a future date.

“As you go through the decision-making process, always look for reasons to send a piece of paper to the recycle bin or shredder. Make it a goal to keep only essential paper and your life with paper will become much, much simpler!”

Before you make the final decision to keep something in your reference or archive system, let me challenge you with one last question: Is the information available elsewhere? If so, is there a real benefit in keeping it? Let's say you come across an article about how to keep mosquitoes away at a summer barbeque — information which is useful to have when you're planning a summer barbeque. But if you were planning a summer barbeque and were concerned about keeping mosquitoes away, would you look through your papers to find this info, or would you be more likely to search online for similar info? If you're tempted to save something obscure, like a secret formula for keeping mosquitoes away from a summer barbeque, but there's very little chance you'll remember you've collected that info—let it go.

Pulling It All Together

Whew! That's a lot to take in at once, isn't it? Remember, these questions are really about teaching you a thought process so you can decide what to do with each piece of paper that makes its way into your home. In time, this thought process will become automatic, and deciding what to do with the majority of the paper that comes into your home will become intuitive—you'll pick up the paper and instantly know what to do with it. In the meantime, keep the handout “paper organizing process at a glance” in front of you to guide you through the decision-making process. (And remember, will pick up with the final two steps of the process in the next lesson.)

All right, before you dive into sorting your paper, take this quick quiz to test your paper sorting knowledge. Let's say you're sorting through your collection box and come across the following items. Can you decide how to categorize each piece of paper? Write your answer next to each item, and then, turn to the next page to see the rationale for each item.

1. A utility bill.
2. A wedding invitation.
3. Your son's soccer schedule.
4. A monthly bank statement.

5. Your child's artwork from school.
6. Your favorite restaurant's carry out menu.
7. The receipt for your last gas purchase.
8. Your new passport.
9. A paint swatch for the bathroom that you plan to paint this weekend.
10. A coupon for 40% off one item at Borders, this weekend only.

1. Utility bill. If the utility bill still needs to be paid, it goes in the action: date-specific category—there is a to-do associated with it and that to-do has a deadline. If the bill has already been paid, and there is no action associated with it, it goes to the archive.

2. Wedding invitation. Whether you know if you can attend the wedding or not, a wedding invitation is action. The action may be to RSVP and say no, followed with another action to buy and send a gift. Or the action may be to decide if you will be attending the wedding or not. Either way, the invitation requires action.

3. Soccer schedule. A soccer schedule starts out as an action item—you need to record the individual game dates and times in your planning system. After you do that, keep the schedule in your reference system. For now, it's off to your action box!

4. Monthly bank statement. If you want to balance your bank account, the bank statement is an action item. If you aren't going to balance your account, this item goes in reference or archive, depending on if it will be used for putting together your tax returns this year.

5. Artwork. "Ah, this has a sentimental feeling to it. I really want this, but I can't keep everything, right?" Sound familiar? If you aren't sure if you need yet another piece of artwork, put this in your action: time-flexible bin. You'll decide the fate of this piece of artwork once time has passed and you've accumulated more art.

6. Carry out menu. Since you'll likely be calling this restaurant many times in the next few months, put this in reference.

7. Gas receipt. If you are tracking fuel purchases for personal budgeting, the receipt should go in your action bin. If you don't track expenses, or need this receipt for tax reasons, say hello to the recycle bin! (Before pitching, check the receipt for personal information.)

8. Passport. Your passport is an archive item. You will hold on to this indefinitely.

9. Paint swatch. This is an action item, since you will use the swatch to purchase paint for your weekend painting project.

10. Borders coupon. Okay...it's a good coupon, 40% is compelling. But do you need a new book? And will you have time to shop this weekend, with all that painting going on? If the answer to either of these questions is no, recycle the coupon. If you do need a book and have time to shop for one this weekend, add "Borders" to your errands list and put the coupon in your purse.



TAKE ACTION! SORT YOUR DAILY PAPER

One of the essential habits I'd like to encourage you to create during this workshop is to deal with today's paper *today*! Now don't get me wrong, this isn't a "touch it once" type of rule that will have you fearing your paper. Instead, the idea is to create a habit of processing your paper or making decisions on it, on a regular basis. Continue to spend fifteen minutes a day moving forward on your paper organizing projects, giving your primary focus to the paper that makes its way into your home today.

Sort your paper using your temporary sorting containers and the decision-making process outlined in this lesson. Remember: decide first, take action second. Just be sure to take that second step if you uncover any time-specific action papers during your sorting.

THE TAKEAWAY

We have covered a lot of ground in this lesson. Here are the key points I'd like you to take away and keep in mind as you begin to take action on these concepts. Remember that sorting paper is a decision-making process. First decide which category your paper belongs in, then take action. This decision-making process, understanding which category each piece of paper belongs in, is the first step in organizing your paper clutter. The concepts in this workshop are like building

blocks—properly categorizing your paper lays the foundation for setting up systems that will work.

Also remember the importance of taking action on the workshop concepts. Make it a goal, during the course of this workshop, to take action on your paper each and every day. Allocate fifteen minutes for this task—you may find it takes even less time to stay on top of your daily paper. But if you reinforce the class concepts by dealing with your paper each and every day, you'll find the concepts will really sink in by the end of the class. The decision-making process covered in this lesson will start to become second nature—you'll pick up a piece of paper and know right away what to do with it, leaving you with clear and clutter-free surfaces! Won't that feel great?

Let's look ahead to the next lesson, where we'll continue to build on the foundation you've laid in the first two lessons. During Lesson 3 you'll learn about the next steps in the paper organizing process—acting on your paper and storing it. You'll learn about the various storage solutions available for your paper, plus how to select what is best for you. You'll also set up your collection and action systems, creating permanent homes for these essential paper systems.

Until next lesson, happy organizing!

