

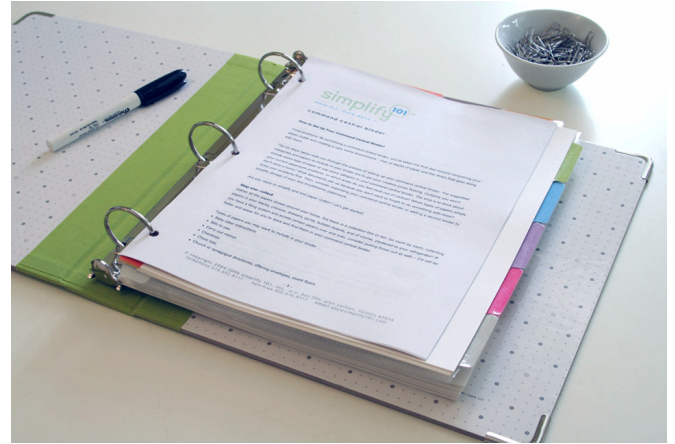
how to create a command central binder



by aby garvey

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When it comes to getting more organized, getting started can be the hardest part. At simplify 101 we believe in the power of action—taking small steps in the direction of a more organized home and life. You don't have to have it all figured out before you begin, and you don't have to organize your whole home (or even an entire room) all at once. Remember, it didn't get disorganized in a day—so it doesn't have to get organized in a day either. The key is to pick one small project, and simply get started! Once you start taking action the rest of the details will fall into place.



This mini class is designed to help you get started taking action and making progress on your goal to get more organized! Through my work as a professional organizer and online workshop instructor, I've helped thousands of people get more organized and create positive change in their lives. And one thing I've noticed is this: Just about everyone seems to be plagued by paper clutter of one type or another! So much for the notion of a paperless society!

If you're feeling overwhelmed by paper clutter, too, then you've come to the right place. This mini class gives you step-by-step instructions to tackle one of the biggest sources of household paper clutter—your reference paper. This is the paper you need to refer to again, likely in the very near future. So it doesn't make sense to file it away. But, if it isn't filed away, where should it go? Often, the answer is "Oh, I'll just stack it here..." which ultimately creates multiple, unwieldy and disconcerting piles of paper...and a whole lot of stress.

At simplify 101 we believe that there isn't a one-size-fits all organizing solution. And this mini class reflects that philosophy. This class contains a straightforward project to help you put an end to reference paper clutter by setting up a **customized command central binder** based on your paper and your organizing needs. Best of all, you can start— *and finish*—this project in just a few hours.

Ahead are two options for setting up your command central binder. Track one shows you how to build your binder from the ground up. You'll start by corralling your paperwork, then you'll create categories, and ultimately you'll set up your customized command central binder. Track two is the fast track. With this process you'll build your binder over the course of short organizing sessions, and then add to it as you go along. If you're short on time, or simply feel overwhelmed by your paper clutter, follow track two. Instructions for track two begin on page 8.

Whether you choose to follow track one or track two, once you're finished with this project, you'll see clearer flat surfaces and feel a whole lot lighter! Plus, you'll save a whole lot of time—all that time you used to spend digging through stacks and stacks of paper in search of that one piece of paper you must get your hands on now! Even better, you'll have a sense of accomplishment that will motivate you to keep going and make even more progress on your organizing goals. So let's get started creating a command central binder.

WHAT IS A COMMAND CENTRAL BINDER?

Call it what you will—a household binder, the family binder, mom's notebook or a command central binder—but at the end of the day, the binder you'll be putting together will be like your family's command central. This binder will become your household's ultimate quick-reference book. It will be the home for a whole bunch of paper like carry-out menus, school schedules, business cards, etc., that are currently plastered to the refrigerator or cluttering up flat surfaces like the kitchen counter or dining room table.



This system is one I use in my own home, and everyone—including my husband and kids—uses and loves our command central binder. We knew we had a winning idea when one day I was out running an errand and the phone rang. Jay, my husband, answered the call. It was a neighbor in search of a baby sitter. “Do you have any recommendations?” the neighbor asked. And Jay did. But best of all, he was able to put his finger on the baby sitter's phone number and share it with our neighbor. You can bet he felt pretty darn organized.

Now you may be tempted to run out and buy a pre-made filing or binder system for your reference paper. (You may even have one sitting around somewhere.) At Simplify 101 we believe that the best organizing solutions are the ones that work for you and the way you

naturally do things. In the case of paper clutter, this means setting up a binder that reflects the nature of your paperwork and your life, using categories in your words that make sense to you. This means you'll be putting together a customized reference binder that works for you and how you think. Just follow the steps ahead, and sooner than you think, you'll be feeling tremendous relief in the form of clearer surfaces and much less paper clutter. Are you ready? Set? Let's go!

Track 1: Build your system from the ground up

The first track shows you how to build your command central binder from the ground up. This is a great project to do in an afternoon—or even better—have a paper organizing party with a few of your friends. At simplify 101 we believe getting organized is more fun with a friend along for the journey. Plus, you can share the cost of supplies. ☺ Speaking of supplies...collecting your supplies is the first thing to do when setting up your command central binder.



STEP 1: COLLECT YOUR SUPPLIES

Below is a checklist of items needed to create your command central binder. For a list of resources and retailers that carry these items, visit <http://www.simplify101.com/ccbrp>.

- * One 3-ring binder
- * Binder tabs
- * Binder pockets
- * 3-hole punch
- * Page protectors
- * Divided page protectors sized to hold business cards
- * Post-it® tabs or Post-it® notes
- * Label maker or fine point marker
- * Magazine holder for 3-ring binder
- * A bin or box for collecting your paper

STEP 2: CORRAL YOUR REFERENCE PAPER

So...what is reference paper? Well, your reference papers are those documents that you refer to on a regular basis. It's the paper that really isn't at home in the file cabinet in your home office, because just as soon as you get it filed away, you need to dig it out again. Instinctively, you know that the file cabinet isn't the right place for this kind of paper—because your current solution is most likely to keep it out in stacks on the nearest flat surface. Trouble is, *that* isn't the solution either. Unsorted piles of paper add up to stress, clutter and wasted time, as you repeatedly sift through the same stacks of paper over and over again in search of the missing document du jour. But the good news is this: If your reference paper is out in a stack or pile, this project will be that much easier. All the paper you need to set up your reference binder is out in the open, so corralling it together will be easy work.

The suggested types of paper and suggested categories are designed to get your creative juices flowing. Certainly you won't include every type of paper or use every category in *your* command central binder. The trick is to think about your current paperwork problems. Which types of papers simply don't have a home? What documents pile up because you know you're going to need them again soon? Which papers do you want to be able to access quickly and easily? This is what you want to put in your command central binder.

Pull out your collection box and gather the types of documents listed below, as well as any other type of document that's currently on your flat surfaces or plastered to your refrigerator because you need to refer to it again soon. Corral these papers into your collection box:

- * Business cards
- * Carry-out menus
- * Community calendars or YMCA schedules
- * Emergency information and phone numbers
- * Health insurance information
- * Personal advisor information
- * Pet care or pet sitting instructions
- * Phone directories / phone numbers
- * Reference papers from school such as school policies, teacher policies, schedules, lunch menus, etc.
- * Sports schedules

“Your command central binder is designed to house your reference papers—those papers you access on a regular basis. If you need ideas for setting up effective systems for your other papers, check out simplify 101’s online workshop “Organize Your Paper Clutter.””

STEP 3: SORT + EDIT

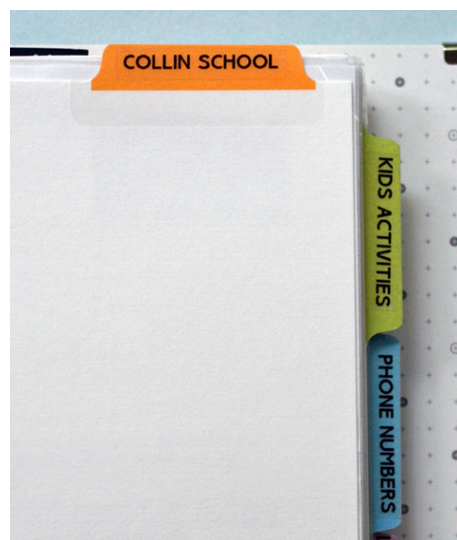
The next step is to sort like papers together. Put all phone numbers in one pile, all carry-out menus in a second pile, your child’s school information in a third pile and so on. Group the papers into categories that make sense to you and your life. Don’t over-think this step, just trust your gut and move onto the next piece of paper.

Your command central binder will work best for you if it houses papers you search for and use regularly—or—need to get your hands on quickly (emergency contact information, insurance guidelines for medical treatment, doctor’s phone numbers, etc.). So cull out papers that are dated or irrelevant to your current life. Pitch any piece of paper you no longer need, taking care to shred any document that contains personal information. Set aside papers that require your action—such as bills to pay—and make a note to take action on those to-dos as soon as your binder project is finished. If any long-term reference documents made their way into your collection bin, place those in a “to file” stack. Once you’re finished sorting, move on to the next step.

STEP 4: CREATE CATEGORIES

Now, using your binder tabs and a permanent marker or label maker, create categories for your binder tabs. Below are potential categories to use for your binder. Keep in mind that everyone’s paper work—like their life—is unique. So, use the ideas below as a springboard for creating categories that best reflect your paperwork.

- * **Activities** — Papers and schedules for kids’ activities, church, clubs, volunteer work, the brochure for the zoo, summer programs, camp information and the bike trail map will be right at home in your command central binder. (See also entertainment/leisure.)



- * **Child Care** — Include information and instructions for sitters, your daycare's policy manual, car pool schedules, etc. Why not create a form with all the routines, rules and schedules of your household instead of reinventing the wheel each time a new sitter comes over? Remember to include your contact info!
- * **Emergency Information** — Have easy access to all your emergency information by keeping it in a section of your binder. Include the following: your contact information, street address and directions to your home, cell phone and/or beepers for your family members, first-aid instructions, and traditional emergency numbers such as police, fire, ambulance, poison control, doctors, repairmen, pharmacy, dentist, veterinarian/pet hospital, etc.
- * **Entertainment/Leisure** — Here are some ideas: lists of books you'd like to read, web sites to check out, movies to rent, parks and recreation schedules, and community college course catalogs.
- * **Family Members** — Consider making a section for each family member and storing all papers relevant to their activities, school, work, etc. in one centralized place.
- * **Important Numbers** — Contact information for your daycare provider, schools, neighbors, your trainer, masseuse, yoga instructor and therapist are right at home in your command central binder, along with numbers to your favorite pizza place or carry-out restaurant. Use business card holders to make getting your numbers into your binder a breeze.
- * **Insurance and Medical Coverage** — When faced with a medical emergency, you need to know right away which hospitals or clinics are covered by your plan, if you need to call your doctor for pre-approval and so on. Keep this critical information at your fingertips – and save precious time when it counts most.
- * **Menus** — Keep carry-out menus handy in their own dedicated section of your binder, or group them into a category called "local businesses" – those you patronize or want to try based on referrals from friends and colleagues.
- * **School Information** — Store school handouts you reference regularly in a section of your binder. Include menus, calendars, school phone numbers, teacher contact information, snow schedules, bus routes and information about after-school programs.
- * **Upcoming Events** — Once you add the date and time for an upcoming event to your calendar, the supporting information such as the flyer with directions to the event clutters up your flat surfaces until the event occurs. Instead, why not use a binder pocket to stash these items out of sight until the day of the event?

simple tips: If you aren't sure which categories will work best for you and your family's information, use sticky notes to create temporary categories and labels for your binder tabs. This will allow you to give your binder a test drive for a few weeks and see how it's working for you. Tweak the categories if needed. Once you've got categories that work, create permanent binder labels.

Keep your categories generic so they'll work as your needs change. For example, instead of Day Care information – make a category called “kid stuff” or a section for each child.

STEP 5: ASSEMBLE

Once your categories are decided on and your binder tabs are labeled, all that's left to do is set up your binder. Slide your papers into sheet protectors or paper pockets, or hole-punch papers and place them into the rings. Store your command central binder in a convenient location, close to where the action happens (and the papers land!) in your home. For example, my command central binder is stored on my kitchen counter. Then, just sit back and relax, knowing the next time you need to refer to a piece of paper you'll know exactly where it is—and you won't have to dig through a stack (or two!) to put your fingers on it.

STEP 6: MAINTAIN

Organizing is a combination of projects and habits. Once you have your command central binder set up and ready for use, you've completed the project phase. Next up is the habits phase where you use and maintain your binder. Here are some strategies for keeping your command central binder current and organized going forward.

- * **Maintain as you go.** Any time you get into your binder, keep your eyes open for out-of-date items, and pull out anything you don't need any more. Or, when you add a new version of something, such as this month's lunch menu, recycle the old one right away.
- * **Schedule routine maintenance.** No, your binder isn't a car, but when set up effectively, you may come to rely on it just as much! Because of this it makes sense to keep your binder in peak performing order. A routine time of year to go through your binder and remove out-dated items will do just that. Consider tying this to other activities such as making it part of your back-to-school routine or your spring cleaning checklist.

When you keep your binder fresh and current, you'll have no trouble finding exactly what you need when you need it!



TAKE ACTION!

If you will be using track 1, set up your command central binder following the steps outlined above.

Track 2: The fast track — build your binder as you go

The following steps outline the fast track for setting up your command central binder. With this track, instead of corralling together your reference papers and sorting and categorizing them ahead of time, you set up your binder first, and then gradually add papers and determine your categories.

ORGANIZING SESSION 1: GET READY TO SET UP YOUR COMMAND CENTRAL BINDER.

For your first session, read through the entire class handout to get a feel for where you're going with this project. You don't need to decide categories or anything like that, just read through the material to get a feel for how you will use your command central binder. Then, take a few minutes to check out the resources listed here <http://www.simplify101.com/ccbrp> and make a list of items you'll need for your binder.

ORGANIZING SESSION 2: PURCHASE YOUR SUPPLIES, OR SHOP AT HOME!

For your second organizing session, your goal is to get the supplies you need to set up your binder. Head to your favorite office supply store, shop at one of the stores listed in the resource section, or best yet, shop at home. You may already have some (or all) of the products necessary to set up your command central binder. Using supplies you already have on hand is a great way to *try before you buy*. Once you've used your binder for a while—and see how great it works for you—then you can invest in inspiring and fun organizing products to spruce up your binder later.

ORGANIZING SESSION 3: SET UP YOUR BINDER

For your next organizing session, your goal is to simply set up your binder by filling it with sheet protectors, divider tabs and the other items you picked up for your binder. Once you've set up your binder, store it in a handy location with a pen and sticky notes close by. (You'll use these for adding categories to your binder.)

FILL 'ER UP AS YOU GO

Now is where you see the true beauty of the fast track method for setting up your command central binder. As you go about living your life and handling your paperwork, fill up your binder. Whenever you find yourself searching for a piece of paper that you need to refer to (and know you'll need to refer to again soon), add it to your binder. When new paper comes into your home and you have the sense that putting it in the file cabinet is too inconvenient (because you'll need to refer to it again soon), add it to your binder. Simply fill up your binder with paper as you search for it, find it or recognize it as something you need to refer to often.

LIVE WITH IT FOR A WHILE...AND THEN ADD CATEGORIES

Storing your reference paper together in a binder will save you a bunch of time hunting and searching, even if you don't categorize the items in your binder. Over time, though, you may see patterns emerging, or in other words, you may find that you have similar types of paper in your binder—a bunch of menus, phone numbers or sports schedules. As you see these categories emerge, put your divider tabs to use and add some categories. If you aren't sure what you want to call a particular category, use a sticky note and live with it for a while. When you're sure of your categories, pull out your label maker (or a permanent marker) and call it done for now.

simple tip: At simplify 101 we believe it's more fun to get organized with friends along for the ride! So, why not invite your friends over for a command central binder party! Not only will it be more fun doing this project with a friend or two, but you could also share expenses with your friends. Buying sheet protectors in bulk saves money if you have someone to split the package with you!

**TAKE ACTION!**

If you decided to follow track 2, begin the process of setting up your command central binder using the steps outlined above. Remember to keep taking action and refining your system as you go!

Thank you!

Thank you so much for signing up for this mini class. I hope you enjoyed the lesson materials and are excited about putting together your very own command central binder. Remember, action creates change—so go get busy taking action on your command central binder. Happy organizing!