



# Make Peace with Paper, Even If You Hate Filing

by Kacy Paide

**Three words that make me cringe as a professional office organizer are “File, don’t pile.”**

This is a certainly a good idea, but it’s just that: an idea, not to be mistaken for solid, specific advice. How many times have you read those words and screamed inside, “I know I should file, I just don’t know how!”

Organizing advice should motivate and inspire, leaving you anxious to try something new, not guilty that you haven’t yet been able to execute something so seemingly simple. An organized space cannot arise from feelings of inadequacy or a list of “shoulds.” The best of intentions get buried when you don’t know how to do something, and paper organizing is no exception.

Look around your office. Do you see piles, stashes, overflowing inboxes, bags of paper, half-executed systems and remnants of good ideas? If so, you are not alone. My clients are sometimes surprised (and always relieved) that I encourage them to ditch the filing cabinet and think way outside of the box.

Your goal needn’t be to keep a clear desk. In fact, it should be the opposite: Cover your surfaces, just cover them with systems, not clutter. How do you file when you hate file folders and filing cabinets? How do you keep a clear desk when you lose anything that is in a cabinet or drawer? Here’s how:

## **1. Use clipboards for active projects.**

There are two types of information: information to be stored and information to be acted upon. Clipboards are a wonderfully visual way to organize active projects. They allow you to be splashy—within boundaries. These are especially helpful in organizing writing projects, upcoming trips and events, bills to pay, and more. Use them also as idea buckets, assigning one per project, collecting all related media—be it note scraps, stickies, tear-outs, or printouts. An added benefit is that clipboards are



mobile, not married to the wall. Carry them to another part of the home or take them to work. Just remember to return them to their station on the wall.

## 2. Fill the desk with file boxes.

Who said files have to be hidden in drawers? If you're out-of-sight-out-of-mind, the only hope your folders have for seeing the light of day is to keep them at eye level and not hidden under a lid. I'd rather see empty file drawers and a desk full of file boxes than orderly drawers that are useless and forgotten. This works especially well for paper-heavy current projects that you pull from or add to frequently.

## 3. Turn your bookcase into an open filing system.

Who said bookcases are just for books? If you've covered your desk as prescribed in tip #2, or if your desk is too small for your document collection, fill the bookshelves with file boxes. Boxes encourage you to create tight categories, drawing lines in the sand in a way that a deep file drawer can't do. Shelves allow you to see all categories at quick glance, taking the mystery out of "what lurks in my file drawers."

## 4. File on the wall.

Have no room on your desk for rows of boxes? Look to the most underutilized part of your office: the wall. Use wall pockets just as you would file boxes. If one works, five or ten might work even better. Better to have pockets than art if that means your desk and head are clear as a trade-off!

## 5. Ditch folders for magazine boxes.

I once had a client who not only refused file cabinets, but refused file folders too. Up for the challenge, we converted her bookshelf into a tower of magazine files, each assigned a category such as NYC Trip, Marketing Ideas, and Add to Mailing List. She was a busy realtor with no time to retrieve fussy folders. A "stuffer" by nature, and she was allowed to be as eclectic as she wanted within these boxes. Categories were created and piles were eliminated. The stashes made her feel at home, not boxed in.

An organized office should be a reflection of your best version of you. Sure, you may feel unfocused and scattered at times. This is not a complete picture though. At your best, you are creative, fast-thinking and expressive. Any of these suggestions, multiplied across the surfaces in your office will allow you to simultaneously thrive and live outside the lines.

Life will inevitably shake itself out all over your desk, but everything now has a home. You can see these places without opening a drawer or recalling a complicated file index. Revisiting order will take minutes, not months, and peace of mind will return just as quickly. 📌

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