

# Study and Office Decluttering

**Getting started!** Studies and desks are notorious dumping grounds for all things that need mending or cannot find a home elsewhere in the house. Before you even start to think about your filing and storage, have a general declutter of your study.

Clear the room of anything broken, unused, abandoned, unwanted, or out of place (ie. It lives elsewhere in the house)

**Incoming post and paperwork:** as you receive post or paperwork sort it straight away into one of 3 piles:

- **Shred** - paperwork with private or personal content that you want to throw away.
- **Recycle**
- **Action** - paperwork that needs action, whether this is an actual task, filing of the paperwork, or a reminder of something to do such as an invitation.

Have a container or in-tray of some kind for each of these 3 groups and use them.

**The one-week rule:** Make it a rule never to leave something in your action in-tray for longer than a week before moving it on to a new home (filing or binning), or actioning it. Date the paperwork if that helps to remember when it first arrived in the house.

**Filing for beginners:** have a filing system that works for you whether this is a cardboard box full of A4 brown envelopes with their contents written on the front, or an all-singing, all-dancing filing cabinet.

Make sure you use it! You may have the greatest filing system in the world but if there is nothing in it you will still waste time trying to track down that essential piece of paperwork that is in one of the heaps of paper somewhere in the house.

Before filing anything ask yourself if you really need it as hard copy...or at all.

## Document management:

- **Make a date** to file your paperwork. On a regular basis go through filed documents and paperwork and dispose of paperwork that is no longer needed, or has become out of date. For example, when filing annual insurance paperwork dispose of the previous year's documents.

- **Beyond the first date!** Make a regular date to clear through your filed paperwork. You may chose to do one section a month, or have an annual blitz. Chose what suits you and stick with it, that way excess paper will not build up and you will find it quicker and easier to track down any paperwork that you need when you need it.

**Filing options** (or, so many ways to beautifully convince yourself you are on top of things, when really there is nothing in any of them...)

Storage idea	Advantage	Disadvantage
Clear, plastic, A4 envelopes with a popper to close	Contents are visible through the plastic They come in a range of colours for ease of distinguishing	Don't hold a great deal of paperwork before they are full
Expanding document wallets	Includes a number of labelled individual sections	Have you ever imagined how hard it is the play the accordion? Then add paperwork to the image
Lever arch files	Stores a whole load of paper	Can become unstable if not stored vertically. Plus, anything that requires a hole punch means more work, albeit fairly quick work (assuming you can find the hole punch!).
Storage boxes	Excellent if you need to store larger amounts of paper work or articles for longer periods of time. Make sure you label the box for ease in finding things when you come to look for them later.	Take up a lot of room. May encourage unnecessary hoarding of paperwork. Much harder to motivate yourself to give them an annual clear out due to their size...daunting!
Magazine files	I think these are great as half the container is cut away so that you can easily see and access the contents They line up neatly along a shelf. They allow more storage than a folder or document wallet.	They may encourage the accumulation of paper beyond the point when you actually need to retain it.
Box files	Similar in use to magazine files but the contents are hidden.	Out of sight, out of mind...
Brown A4 envelopes in a cardboard box	Cheap Doesn't take up much room	Paperwork and letters can be fiddly to access Limited space per envelope Tempting to simply shove recently received post into the box

## Storage Options:

If you don't have appropriate or sufficient storage your study will pretty much always end up looking a mess. Belongings need a place to go. If you don't have anywhere easy to put them, you and your family will end up putting them wherever comes first to hand. Equally, mess generates more mess as people find it easy to simply dump something on a pile that is already present.

- **Bookcases or shelves** – either ensure that you have enough of them or dispose of books and files until what you have fits.
- If you use your study for **hobbies and crafts** ensure you have appropriate storage containers and a unit in which to put them. Be ruthless, if you haven't touched things for a couple of years you probably never will.
- **Hooks** on the wall or behind the door are a great way of taking advantage of otherwise unused space. Some sports equipment, eg rackets can be hung up, or you may be other items that would suitably go in a pull top fabric bags and hung up.
- **Easy access** - Ensure that storage boxes, baskets or containers are easily accessible. If you have to move 3 boxes to put something away in the bottom box it's less likely the object will 'make it home'.
- Try storing **rolls of wrapping paper** vertically in suitable containers such as walking stick or umbrella holders.
- **Imaginative storage** - Don't necessarily go for utilitarian storage. If you thrive on the aesthetics of things then chose storage that will feed this rather than stifle it. A colourful charity shop jug or vase is as good a storage container for pens and rulers as a plastic desk top tidy or black metal pen holder.

## ...and a few final tips

- Sort out **computer/printer cabling** so that it either doesn't show or is tied together neatly in a bundle – cable ties are wonderful things!
- **Clean** - Once a week wipe down your work surfaces, keyboard and phone. Anything that looks clean is more attractive to use, and less likely to make you linger over one more coffee in the kitchen.
- **Clear** - At the end of each day clear your desk; pens back in pen holder, paper work stacked neatly, empty mugs removed.
- **Be realistic** about what suits you and the others in your household who use the space. Achieving a 'zen' space with nothing in it is all very well but if you need a bit of artistic muddle in order to work well and generate the buzz to spark off your ideas and imagination then find ways to achieve this without allowing things to descend into chaos.