

As seen in the "Ask the Organizing Expert" Column in the Lake Oswego Review and the West Linn Tidings

Organizing Your Home Office – Part 2

Question: I've decided to set up a home office. How should I organize this process?

A functional office is so important to most homes today that we decided to cover it in two columns. Last time we asked and answered four key questions: How will I use it? What are my location options? What furniture do I need? What equipment do I need? Hopefully you have ascertained how the office will be used, chosen an appropriate location, and assembled furniture and needed equipment. Now it's time to move in and get to work!

Like many rooms, a home office operates best when organized in *zones* – spaces with clearly identified purposes. The following zones work well in any office:

Paper Zone: Keep a basket or bin on top of your desk for incoming paper. Make it large enough to capture mail, bills, statements, flyers, notes, newspapers, and receipts. Consider your desk a conveyor belt where paper is "processed" – it begins with the inbox, is then opened, read, noted, acted upon, filed and eventually tossed.

Rubbish Zone: Believe it or not, up to 80% of your "inbox" paper is destined for the trash. Keep three cans nearby – one for trash, one for recycling and one for shredding. Alternately, you can keep a shredder next to your desk and shred-as-you-go.

Project Zone: Papers that still require action – like bills to pay, calls to make, or things you are currently working on, can be kept on your desktop. If you're running a business from home, these files might be "current clients" or "unpaid invoices." I recommend a vertical desktop filer – it will keep your papers tidy but close at hand.

File Zone: Papers kept for reference can be filed. Hanging files are a must, internal file folders are handy, and a label maker creates neat and clean tabs. For optimal use, choose categories that make sense to you. Purge your files at least once a year. Wondering what to keep and for how long? Go to <http://tiny.cc/be3rj> for retention guidelines set by the IRS. One more tip: avoid a "to be filed" pile – instead, simply file as you go.

Planning Zone: Your calendars, notes, to-do lists, and frequently referenced phone numbers make up the planning zone. Post these on a large bulletin or magnetic board; the tech-savvy will prefer most of this in their smart phone.

Supply Zone: Ink cartridges, reams of paper, staples, pens, extra files and all things supply-related can be stored in a cabinet or large drawer. If space is at a premium, a closet elsewhere in the house will suffice. It is fine to keep a small supply of paper near your printer or some pens on your desk; housing the rest in one place will ensure you know what you have and where to find it.

Electronics Zone: Your computer, printer, phone, router and modem create a zone of their own. A USB hub can manage all those connections to your computer, and a charging station is convenient for juicing up your handhelds while you sleep. Electronics collect dust and emit heat, so choose a location with plenty of air flow and which is easy to clean. Make it a food and beverage free zone. Use cord clips and power strips to manage the spider-web of cables beneath your desk.

Library Zone: Most home offices will have reference materials such as books, magazines and binders. Open shelves or bookcase work well for your "library" and will also provide a nice place for displaying personal items like pictures or artwork.

A home office, once considered a luxury, is now a necessity. Whether you're running a company, working from home, or simply needing a convenient place to pay bills, setting up these home office zones will surely give you an organized work space. Enjoy this project, and reap the rewards by staying on top of the "business" of your home.

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