wikiHow

How to Be Organized at Work

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We all know being organized at work is important, but it's an ongoing struggle for many people. Believe it or not, staying organized is not as daunting as it may seem. A few quick fixes and some ongoing solutions make it easier than you might have ever thought.

Method 1	Method 1 of 4: Managing Your Space and Time

1 **Monitor your activities.** Spend a couple days keeping a journal or log of your daily activities. This will help you see exactly what you do that you might not even realize, and it will provide an initial glimpse into organizational and productivity gaps. This exercise should also be done with your big-picture goals in mind. Through the activity log, you can see what activities might be time-wasters and which activities might actually further your goals.

2 **Determine your productivity times.** Some of us are morning people, and some of us cringe at the idea of mornings. You might already have a sense of what times of day you're most productive. Whether you prefer evenings, mornings, lunchtime, or right before or after workday rush hours, take advantage of those times to maximize your productivity.

3 **Prioritize your tasks.** We all know that some tasks are more important than others, but we don't always prioritize them accordingly. So develop a ranking system by flagging or starring important tasks, for example, and be honest and flexible.[1] Use reminders, either through a digital calendar or through sticky notes on your computer or desk. Devote more of your time and energy to top-priority items on your list. Examples include time-sensitive tasks such as things due by end of business or tomorrow. You might also prioritize responding to clients, bosses, or anyone else who pays the bills. And if you're not sure about the sensitivity or importance of a task, it's always good to ask.

4 **Knock out quick tasks right away.** Not all tasks need to be prioritized and scheduled for a future completion time. Some tasks take nearly as much time to plan for or schedule as they take to accomplish. If that's the case and you can bang out those tasks right away, by all means do it! Handling quick tasks immediately also helps prevent procrastination.

5 **Manage clutter and work materials.** Our desks easily go from cluttered to tornado sites, obviously hampering organization. Some people even operate on a clean-desk-only policy. While that's not absolutely necessary, take steps to clear your workspace.

- Declutter. Toss your junk in the garbage and file your needed materials systematically. Clear clutter whenever possible: during lulls in the workday, breaks, or in between tasks.

- Clean up after yourself immediately. That way it's on the top of your mind. Plus, you avoid the inevitable agitation of having current clutter become part of your future clutter.

- Keep necessary supplies handy. Not everything around you is clutter, of course. Having needed tools available saves you time and makes good use of your precious space.
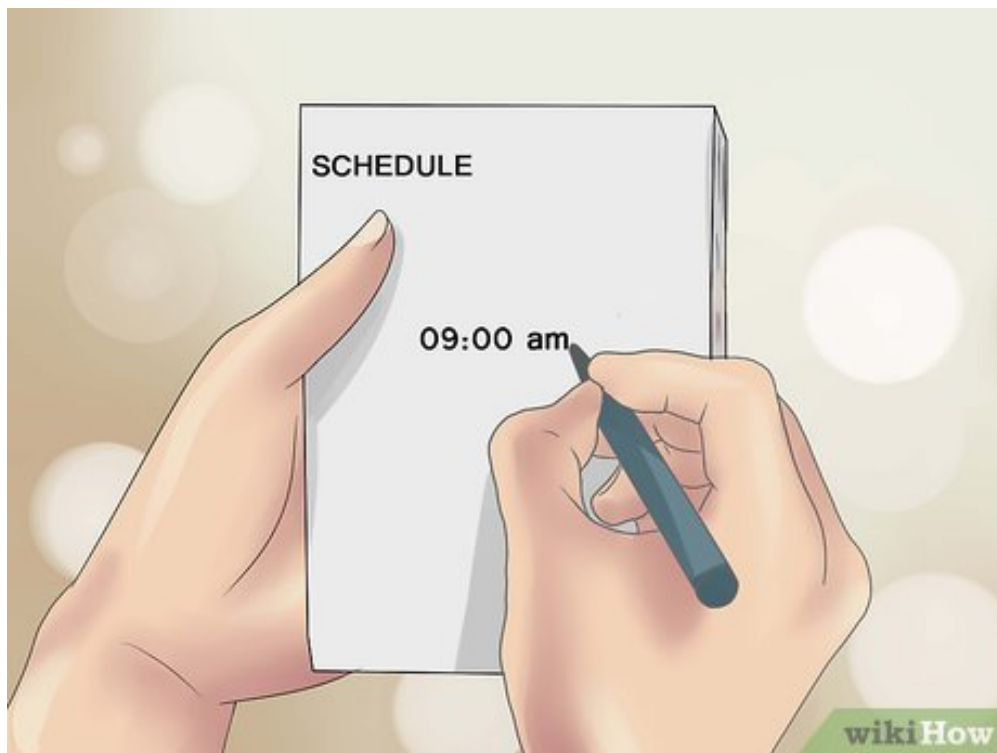
6 **Schedule activities and appointments.** Some people schedule only meetings, but not activities on their to-do list. Scheduling the most important tasks as well as appointments can be helpful. You might also "batch" your days by having meetings only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, for example. Keep some holes in your schedule as well for creative time to yourself or to accommodate the unexpected.[2]

- Use an organizer and calendar. These can be pen-and-paper organizers, or they could be software-based calendars and personal assistant apps, such as iCalendar or Google Now.

- Categorize your activities. Categorizing or color-coding activities can give you a quick visual reminder of what's important where. For example, categories might include correspondence, projects, events, meetings, brainstorms, and even breaks or exercise and gym time.

- Streamline your technology. Online organizers and email platforms such as Outlook, for example, can combine your to-do lists, calendars, and addresses. This not only boosts your efficiency but helps streamline your thinking.[3]

- Delegate wherever possible. In the madness of the workday, it's easy to forget that you don't have to do everything yourself. Delegate to an assistant or, if you're particularly swamped, ask a colleague to do you a solid and help you with a particular task. You can always repay them later when things slow down. [4]
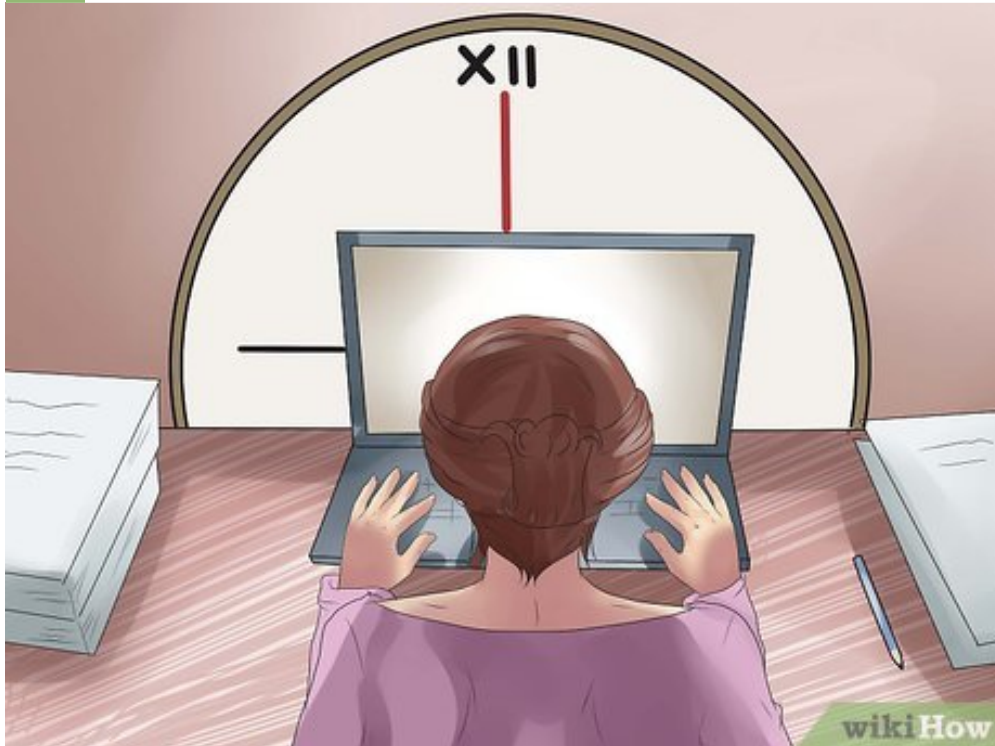
1 **Check email at scheduled times.** Not all of us have to be glued to our inbox, as many messages aren't actually as time sensitive as we may think. If you work in a job that doesn't require immediate email follow-up, check your email at scheduled times only about three to four times per day.

2 **File emails.** Use filing folders and flags to your advantage instead of letting messages pile up in your inbox.[5] Folders and subfolders in Outlook, for example, or Gmail's labels and multiple inboxes can be an asset.[6] If you're a journalist, for example, your folders might be called Current Stories, Future Stories, Old Stories, Interviews & Sources, and Pitches & Ideas.

- Delete and archive. Archive important, old correspondence, and delete the rest. In the example above, "Old Stories" is the journalist's archive folder. Once you start deleting old emails, you'll be surprised at how many emails are more worthy of the trashcan than the filing cabinet. Some people also swear by "inbox zero," which means having zero unread emails (or zero emails in your inbox, period). In addition to using folders and labels, you can achieve inbox zero by using your archive feature, deleting old emails during downtime, and using email decluttering apps.[7]

3 **Employ other forms of communication when more efficient.** Sometimes a quick phone call can do the work of 10 back-and-forth emails. If so, make the call! If you know an email exchange merits a discussion or will involve considerable back-and-forth, sometimes it's better to have a phone call. You will often get more detail over the phone, while you and the other party to the discussion avoid drafting lengthy, time-consuming emails. You might even email a colleague and say, "I have a lot of questions for you on this. Maybe a call would be easier. Can I ring you in 5?"

4 **Limit interruptions.** While strategic breaks are helpful, interruptions during your work times are not. Interruptions can slow you down, break up your work rhythm, and make you lose your train of thought. So, try using away messages and voicemail when you know you'll be too busy. These tools aren't just for when you're not physically in the office; they can be used when you're just too swamped. Many people also have an "open door policy," but you don't actually have to keep your door open at all times. You might even leave a friendly note on the door saying, "Conference Call in Progress" or "Occupied. Drop back later or email please."

5 **Utilize the cloud.** Cloud computing is worth considering because it can be cheaper, scalable, more efficient, and more easily updated.[8] Content available in the cloud is particularly useful because you can access it across your devices: computers, tablets, smartphones, etc. Cloud storage also serves as a useful primary or secondary form of digital backup. Check with your IT manager or software provider because you might already have a certain amount of free disk space available in the cloud or available for a small annual fee.

6 **Use bookmarks online.** The major browsers all have bookmarking capabilities where you can save and organize your favorite or most frequently visited web addresses for quick and easy access. Take advantage of them so you don't forget important sites to check for news or industry updates.

1 **Avoid multitasking.** All the experts seem to agree on this one. [9] While it may sound speedy or look cool on TV, multitasking is not efficient and can actually hurt your organizational effectiveness. [10] Instead, devote your full attention to one task at a time, handle it, and move on to the next item on your list.

2 **Create a schedule or timetable for yourself.** Thankfully, most jobs don't require scheduling everything in your day down to the minute. However, keeping a basic schedule of the highlights and most important tasks and events of your day can help keep you on task.

- Set time limits for certain activities. Some tasks do not require set time limits, but others should have time parameters to boost your productivity. Think of tasks throughout your day that tend to take more time than necessary, and give them time limits in the future.

- Budget extra time for other activities. Some tasks, as you've learned from experience, wind up usually taking more time than expected, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. For these types of activities, and for particularly important events and meetings, for example, budget extra time before and after.

3 **Use a timer app, stopwatch, or alarm clock.** These can be effective tools when used sparingly. Some people like to set their alarms 10, 15, or 30 minutes ahead of time to give them advance warning or buffer time before an activity. You can also set reminder alerts.

4 **Avoid postponing activities.** Ask yourself if postponing is absolutely necessary or if this urge is just an example of procrastination. If you sense the latter, don't postpone— power through! However, in cases when postponing all or part of an activity is unavoidable, be sure to make note of where you left off, and reschedule with concrete plans. Alternatively, you might come up with a contingency plan. For example, if you have to cancel an in-person meeting, perhaps you can hold a conference call or web conference instead.

1 **Take breaks.** Mental downtime is important to our productivity and healthy for the mind.[11] We get so caught up in our work sometimes that we don't stop to take much-needed breaks. Taking breaks gives us needed rest that improves our productivity, but it also gives us the opportunity to take a step back and ask whether or not what we've been doing is the most efficient use of our time.

2 **Sleep Better.** Without proper sleep, you might feel groggy, tired, or lethargic the next day, which can harm your schedule and efficiency at work. Aim for seven to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep per night.

3 **Don't compare yourself to co-workers.** Most of our coworkers' jobs are different from our own, and everyone has different methods of organization that work for them. A method that makes sense and is efficient to a colleague might not be the best method for you and vice versa.[12]
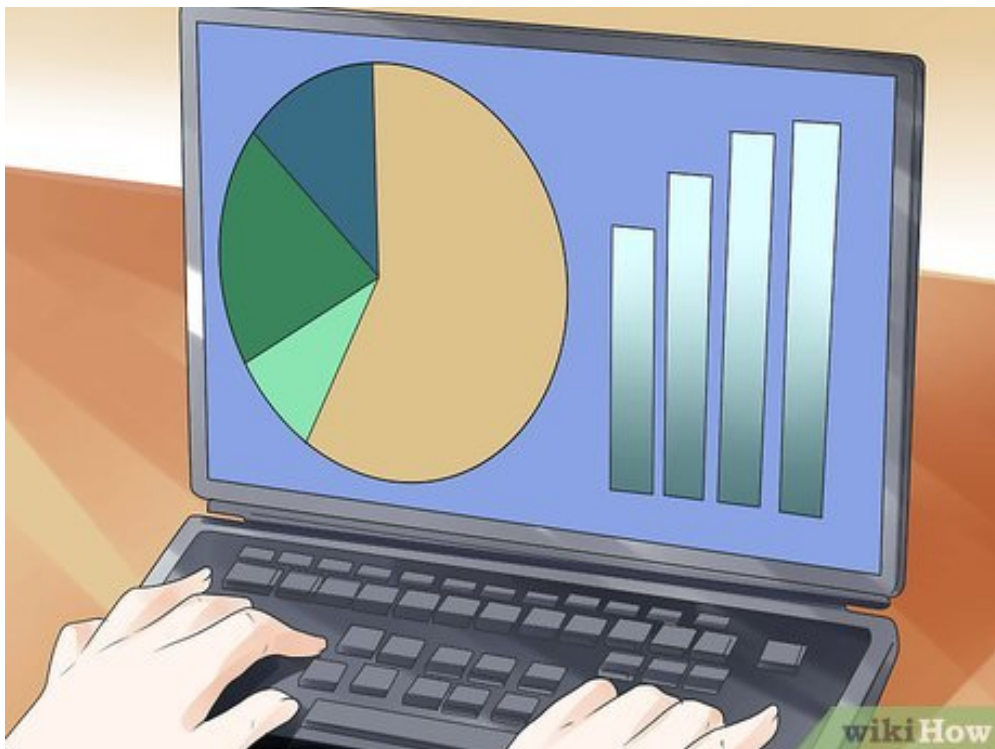
4 **Accept that organization is an ongoing process.** Don't expect to be perfect. Organization is ongoing and requires ongoing attention. You won't be optimally organized every day, but a little organization goes a long way to boosting your efficiency.[13]

⑦ Expert Q&A

What does it mean to be professional at work?

Devin Jones
Career Coach
Expert Answer

Professionalism usually refers to being respectful of an organization's culture and expectations. This can look different depending on the industry, but you should always try to be self aware and maintain respect for the environment and culture of your workplace.

Helpful 0   Not Helpful 0

How do you stay organized at work?

Devin Jones
Career Coach
Expert Answer

Treat organization as an ongoing process. Spend time everyday tidying up your work space and returning items to where they're supposed to go. If you notice organizational problems, come up with a plan to tackle them.

Helpful 0   Not Helpful 0

How do I stay organized when I work from home?

Ashley Moon, MA
Professional Organizer
Expert Answer

It's important to have a clear, designated workspace. Also, make sure you have a home for all of your office supplies, like paperwork and electronics, and get in the habit of putting everything away at the end of the day.

Helpful 1   Not Helpful 0

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This article was co-authored by Ashley Moon, MA. Ashley Moon is the Founder and CEO of Creatively Neat, a virtual organizing and life coaching business based in Los Angeles, California. In addition to helping people organize their best life, she has a fabulous team of organizers ready to de-clutter your home or business. Ashley hosts workshops and speaking engagements at various venues and festivals. She has trained with Coach Approach and Heart Core for organizing and business coaching respectively. She has an MA in Human Development and Social Change from Pacific Oaks College. This article has been viewed 12,527 times.

★★★★★
1 votes - 100%

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