

How to Create the Perfect Organizer

by Margaret Spencer Dixon, Esq.

Used appropriately, an organizer or planner can be a marvelous tool. Use inappropriately, however, it can be tedious and time-consuming, leading you to abandon it in frustration.

The basic concept underlying an organizer is simply to keep all the information needed to do your work and run your life arranged for quick and easy access. While your organizer should be as simple as possible, it should include at least a calendar, address and phone directly, and space for master to-do lists.

The most important thing to remember in figuring out how best to use your organizer is that it is only a means to make your life run more smoothly. The goal is to create a system that serves your particular needs and saves you time. So design your organizer to fit you, instead of adapting yourself to a particular pre-packaged system.

Make It Work for You

In that spirit, here are ten tips to help you get the most from your planner or organizer.

1. **Be creative.** Investigate the various types of organizers available, and mix and match sections. Check out the options at your local office supply store or in catalogs. Use only those sections you feel you really need, and use them in a way that makes sense for you. (Remember, there are no "organizer police"!)
2. **Be flexible.** As each new project or case arises, create a new section for it in your organizer, and keep your master to-do list for that project in that section. Phase out sections you no longer use. Instead of writing the name of each section on a tabbed notebook divider, use numbered dividers. That way you can simply update the table of contents as the sections in your notebook change. Continually streamline your system. As you gain experience in getting and staying organized, you will learn what works best for you.
3. **Make it convenient.** Choose an organizer that is large enough to hold all the information you want to record, yet is not so bulky that it's inconvenient to carry around. Usually this requires a variety of trade-offs, in terms of the size you choose, the amount of information recorded, and the extent to which you incorporate computerized elements. You can incorporate a smaller "satellite" notebook as part of your system, keeping the satellite with you to capture information and then using it to update your primary notebook.
4. **Keep it handy.** Designate one place on your desk to keep your organizer whenever you are at your desk. Learn to reach for the organizer automatically whenever you need to record information. Take it home with you as well as to meetings and on business trips.
5. **Keep your maintenance routine simple.** You probably don't need to perform a detailed planning session each day. Try preparing a detailed plan of action no more than once a week, then updating it each day to reflect tasks accomplished and changes in circumstances.
6. **Devote a section to your daily to-do list.** Ideally, your daily to-do list should include only those tasks you are seriously committed to accomplishing that day. Use your "master list" to keep track of all other upcoming to-do items. Strive for a realist daily to-do list. Focus on sticking to that list unless and until it becomes glaringly obvious that your time is better spent dealing with some late-breaking emergency.
7. **Keep one calendar for both business and personal commitments.** Choose a calendar that's large enough to record all your commitments even if you don't use tiny handwriting.
8. **Use technology.** A simple word processing program can be helpful in using your organizer efficiently. For example, create your master lists on the computer, print them out, insert them in your

organizer, and update them by hand until individual pages are full or get too messy for comfort. Keep your directory of names, addresses, and phone numbers on your computer. There are a wide variety of inexpensive, simple, flexible, and comprehensive software programs that can print lists and labels in any format you design.

9. **Don't use technology as an aid to procrastination.** One touted benefit of most computerized organizers is that they automatically move any undone to-do items to tomorrow's list. The downside of this "benefit" is that it reduces your sense of urgency about a task, since you know it will reappear on your daily to-do list without any affirmative action on your part.
10. **Use your organizer to put more fun in your life.** Have a section for fun things to do, books to read, and movies to see. Keep a section entitled "Tasks Accomplished" so you can see what you've actually completed and so you'll be motivated to reward yourself when you deserve it.

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