

Tax Time is a Great Time to Organize Your Paperwork	Vali G. Heist, Author and Certified Professional Organizer®
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It's that time of year when the birds begin singing and the flowers start blooming. No, not springtime, tax time! Paperwork and tax time go hand in hand and many people find the process of deciding what papers to keep and what to let go of, well, taxing! Tax time is a good time to reevaluate your filing system and take a hard look at the papers you kept over the years and determine how you can simplify your system. If you are paperwork-challenged, these tips will help you move in a positive direction.

Mail Sorting Station. A "station" keeps mail from migrating. Sort it right away and have a permanent home for:

- Recycling. Keep a box for newspapers, magazines, catalogs, and junk mail without identifying information (name and address doesn't count—that information is public knowledge).
- Shredding. Deposit credit card offers, unwanted personal mail, etc. See below—not everything needs to be shredded.
- Bills to pay. Deposit bills to pay and things to do.
- Papers to file. Deposit papers to be filed in a filing system.



Shredding and Identity Theft:

1. Shred any documents with social security numbers, open bank accounts, open credit cards, and personal financial/medical information.
2. Don't waste time tearing your name and address off of magazines or junk mail before you recycle it—name and address is public information.
3. Go paperless with bills and statements to limit the amount of mail.
4. Check your credit report to stop identity theft before it happens. I recommend the website and the phone app for CreditKarma.com.
5. Goodwill Industries has secure shredding for \$9/bag. Take to any location.

What to Keep, What to Discard:

1. Keep taxes for seven years and all the documents associated with those returns.
2. Old utility bills, bank statements, and credit card statements aren't necessary to keep unless they back up your taxes. You can always go online and find old bills.
3. Eighty percent of what people file away never gets looked at again. Be selective about what you keep so it doesn't end up as CRAP (Clutter that Robs Anyone of Pleasure).
4. Each year at tax time, go through all of your old files and paperwork and determine whether you looked at it in the past year. Recycle or shred what you no longer need.
5. Keep a copy of the front and back of credit and debit cards. If you lose anything, you can quickly call institutions to report it.

Other Tax Tips:

1. Download this list of documents to keep and destroy from Wells Fargo: <http://www.pwm.wfadv.com>
2. If you purchased health insurance, ask your tax accountant about the tax credit.
3. The deadline for 2015 Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) or 529 plan accounts is April 18, 2016.
4. For 2015, you can contribute \$5,500 (\$6,500 if you're age 50 or older) of your earned income into an IRA by April 18, 2016.
5. For more tax tips go to my handout "Tax Time Organization" at www.thecluttercrew.com and click on the Resources and Tips tab.

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to be all-inclusive. Any questions should be directed to your tax accountant or www.irs.gov.

Clutter quotes: "There are only three things for sure in this world: Death, taxes and a line at Starbucks."
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