

## 20 Ideas to Help Students Get Organized by Maria Gracia

You have a bright, new school year ahead of you, ready once again to help prepare you for your future. Now is the perfect time for you to start off on the right foot, and get organized. Here are a few tips to help you manage your time, avoid clutter, set goals, and stay on an organized path to success.

**GOALS.** Set realistic goals at the beginning of the school year, and break those large goals into mini-goals. Write these goals down on index cards and keep them in a highly visible place where you can see them every day. Writing down your goals makes them more concrete, and motivates you to keep working towards them.

**DON'T RUSH.** Wake up early enough for school to arrive well ahead of time. If you need 30 minutes to get up, shower and dress, pad that time by waking up at least 45 minutes prior to your departure. To ensure you don't turn off your alarm clock and go back to sleep; place your clock at the far end of your room. This way, you actually have to get out of bed to turn it off, and you're most likely to stay up.

**PREPARE YOUR WARDROBE.** Before you go to bed each night, choose, iron and lay out your clothes for the next day. This way, you'll be all set to dress and go in the morning.

**AVOID CLUTTER.** At the beginning of the school year, you have no clutter. Be careful not to build clutter as the year progresses. Create separate folders for school announcements, tests that have been graded, papers you must give to your parents and so on. As papers become outdated, such as an event that has passed, toss them immediately.

**MAKE TO DO LISTS.** Always spend a minimum of 15 minutes per day, preparing your To Do list for tomorrow. In doing so, you will know exactly what tasks you have to accomplish the next day.

**EFFECTIVE STUDY AREA.** Designate a quiet, well-lit area for studying. Don't study in front of the television, or in an area of your home where you're bound to be distracted. Hang a Do Not Disturb sign on your door. If you can't find a quiet spot at home, go to the library. In addition, you should study while sitting at a

table or desk. Avoid studying in a very comfortable chair or a bed, which may cause you to feel drowsy.

GET YOUR BEAUTY SLEEP. Get a good night's rest. This will ensure you are alert and ready to learn the following day.

AN APPLE A DAY. Eat three healthy meals each day, along with fruit for snacks. Don't overload on sweets, which cause many people to feel tired.

AVOID OVERLOAD. While you may sign up for extra school activities, such as basketball or cheerleading, don't take on too much. First determine how much study time you need. Then, choose one or two recreational activities that you enjoy.

USE A STUDENT PLANNER. Use a good student planner or organizer. The ones that have pocket folders, dividers and planning calendars are ideal. USE

ONE CALENDAR. Use one calendar to plan all of your school and personal activities, rather than two or more. When you use more than one, you run the risk of scheduling conflicts and missed appointments. This is very important. Heed the old proverb, A man who wears two watches, never knows the correct time.

COLOR-CODE. You may consider color-coding similar activities on your calendar. For example, highlight all upcoming tests in yellow, study time in green and recreational activities in pink.

WRITE IT DOWN. When you learn of an upcoming test, event, or anything you must prepare for or attend, immediately jot it in your planner. Don't wait for later, or you may forget about it.

BREAK UP YOUR STUDY TIME. Determine how many study hours you need, and schedule study time in your planner. For example, if you need six hours of time to study for a test, you may break that time up into six sessions, of one hour each. Choose the six days, and make a Study Time notation in your calendar.

SCHEDULE CONSISTENT STUDY TIMES. Set aside time every day for study, and make it consistent. For example, set your study time for each afternoon from 4:00pm to 6:00pm. Whatever you do, avoid last minute studying and cramming.

**BREAK IT UP.** Break up big tasks, into smaller, bite-sized jobs. For instance, if you have to study three chapters in your history book, study one chapter at a time each day. If you have to work on a project, break it down into three or four stages.

**EAT YOUR BROCCOLI FIRST.** Imagine eating your dessert before your broccoli. What would be left for you to look forward to? Just the same, do your homework for your most difficult subjects first. Then, everything else will be a breeze, and therefore, more enjoyable.



---

## Organizational Skills for Students with Learning Disabilities: The Master Filing System for Paper

By: Patricia W. Newhall (2008)

Think of it: Electricians arrive at a customer's home to do work and ask if they can borrow tools. A lacrosse team runs onto the field for the big game without their helmets or chest pads. Paramedics respond to a 911 call but leave the first-aid kit at the fire station. Unacceptable? Of course. The electricians would go out of business. The lacrosse players would be benched. The paramedics would be suspended. To do their jobs, these people need instant access to specialized equipment and tools. So do students. Yet we often hear: "I forgot my book." "I lost my binder." "I didn't print out my homework." "Can I borrow a pen?"

Students who have learning disabilities and weaknesses in executive function frequently struggle to keep track of the tools they need for schoolwork. Notebooks, handouts, homework—even pencils and pens—seem to vanish inexplicably. Why is it so essential that students learn to manage their materials? First, efficient access to needed materials allows more time-on-task for learning. Second, good organizational skills contribute to students' feelings that they are in control of their learning.

The Master Filing System for paper is one effective strategy that helps students with learning disabilities manage their materials. Though the research on the effectiveness of teaching materials management skills is slim, the work that has been done indicates that these skills are essential for academic and career success.

The success of an organizational system depends on its usefulness to students in relation to their specific learning challenges. The point of keeping materials organized is to help students with learning disabilities keep all their classwork and homework papers in one place that provides easy, logical access. Thus making their learning more efficient and effective. If materials are accessible, students can learn how to manage time and assimilate information more effectively. Classroom activities should reinforce these connections. For instance, teachers might allow students with learning disabilities (or the entire class) to refer to their materials during a pop quiz. Students who use the system to stay organized will do well.

Once a system that works for most students is consistently implemented, educators can make changes to suit individual needs, because no single system works for every student. Teachers need to help students create a system that works for them and help them use it consistently.

### Getting started: Materials

---

The first step is to assemble necessary materials. The master filing system requires a master student binder or a master student folder plus a master student file.

- *The master student binder* is a full-size, sturdy, three-ring binder, preferably with a zipper around the edges. It includes dividers for each class, plastic page protectors, looseleaf paper, and a three-hole punch designed to fit into the three-ring binder.
- An alternative approach is *the master student folder*. For each class, students have one plastic report folder with storage flaps, page protectors, and looseleaf paper. Ideally, each class folder is a different color. The practice of color coding materials is particularly helpful for visual learners. To engage students in the organizational process; a good project is to have them purchase or

make book covers that match their folders. Students should keep a three-hole punch in their desks or backpacks.

- The master student file is a sturdy accordian file or a container for hanging files, such as a file cabinet or crate. It should have enough sections or hanging files to hold a full year's schoolwork and be at least 12 inches deep. This file may be kept at home (a bit risky) or in the classroom.

## Steps to creating a master filing system

---

Teachers begin by explaining the master filing system to students, and showing them a sample system. Teachers reinforce that the master student binder or folder goes back and forth to school on a daily basis. The binder or folder is required for all schoolwork and homework, from referring to notes or reference information in class to filing completed homework so it is ready to turn in.

Once students have their materials, they label their binder dividers or folders for each class. They place note-taking paper in each binder section or folder as well as a few page protectors for important reference information (e.g., periodic table, multiplication facts, frequently misspelled words, and homework buddy lists).

In class, teachers remind students to take notes on paper from the appropriate binder section or folder. Teachers also remind students to write down the class and date for easy filing should papers go astray. Students file handouts, returned quizzes, and the like in the section of the binder or folder that corresponds to the class.

Once a unit test or project has been scheduled, teachers can guide students to start using the materials in their master binder or folder to create a study guide (e.g., summarizing main ideas, listing vocabulary, generating questions, etc.). By the day of the test or project deadline, students should have a complete study guide in the appropriate section of their master student files. When teachers return the unit tests or projects, students attach them to their study guides. This process gives students with learning disabilities a comprehensive reference to review for midterms and finals, conveniently stored in their master files. It also empties students' folders, leaving them ready to be refilled with the next unit's papers.

## Mastering the routine

---

As with any routine, consistent use and guided practice are the keys to success. Students need to develop good habits, including promptly three-hole punching and filing their handouts. Teaching students routines to manage their materials empowers them to develop the organizational skills critical to academic success.

The key is for students to clean out their binders or folders regularly. Ideally, the clean-out becomes part of preparing for a unit test or project. If teachers assign projects that require students to use all of the information from a unit, students begin to see how the system benefits them.

While organizational routines develop intuitively for some students, students with learning disabilities need explicit instruction in how to initiate a system, and guided practice using it. Encourage students to use the system, and acknowledge their successes. The sense of control that these students feel when they are organized contributes to their confidence that they can succeed in school.

Managing materials is one of the three key categories of study skills that contribute to students' ability to organize, remember and apply their knowledge. The other categories are **managing time** and **managing information**. To do well in school, students with learning disabilities must develop strategies that make them efficient, effective managers in each of these areas.. Unfortunately, many students do not develop these strategies intuitively. They need educators who are willing and able to provide them with explicit instruction, guided practice, and ongoing opportunities (and motivation) to hone the strategies they've learned.

## About the article

---

This article was adapted from ***Study Skills: Research-Based Teaching Strategies***, Published by **Landmark School's Outreach Program**. It was written by Landmark staff exclusively for LD OnLine.

Newhall, P. W. (2008). Organizational Skills for Students with Learning Disabilities: The Master Filing System for Paper. Adapted from *Study Skills: Research-Based Teaching Strategies*. Prides Crossing, MA: Landmark School, 21-22.

---

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/25179/?theme=print>

©2008 WETA. All Rights Reserved.

It's common for students with ADHD and/or LD to have difficulty with organizational skills and time management. Teachers can help provide needed structure, assist in becoming organized, and support these critical skills for success. The assistance you provide will depend on the child's age and ability.

### Classroom organization

- Encourage your school to establish a **school-wide expectation** for organization/study skills.
- **Teach how to organize** materials, desk, etc. Provide necessary supplies/time to get organized.
- Encourage students to **organize materials at the beginning or end of class**.
- **Provide time and assistance** (peer or adult) for cleaning out/sorting students' messy desks, lockers, and backpacks. It helps to dump everything in a big bag and discard unnecessary paper or trash.
- Have **periodic desk/binder checks** and positively reinforce (e.g. prizes, privilege) for compliance.
- **Clearly identify certain places** in the room (e.g. trays, shelves, color-coded folders/boxes) where students know where to turn in assignments or store unfinished work.
- Present all assignments, page numbers, due dates, etc. to students **verbally AND visually**.
- **Write assignments in one place** (e.g. top of the board) and keep them posted for students to copy.

### Materials

- Require the use of a **3-ring binder/notebook**, subject dividers, and pencil pouch (with sharpened pencils, erasers, highlighter, and other essentials).
- Require students to **carry a backpack/bookbag**, and bring the binder/notebook every day.
- Require the use of a **monthly assignment calendar** or **daily/weekly assignment sheet**.
- Make sure any handouts/papers you give students are **3-hole punched**.
- Give students a **clipboard** for papers on the desk.
- Provide bins, pencil cases, boxes and/or organizing trays for supplies and materials.
- Send home an **extra set of books** for the parents to keep at home.
- Require **labeling** of materials/supplies with students' names.
- Encourage the use of **self-stick notes** for marking pages in books, jotting down key words and notes.

### Visual cues

- **Color-code books, folders, and materials**. For example: blue math book, blue math notebook/section/folder, daily schedule has the subject 'math' highlighted in blue.
- **Color-code important notices, handouts, and assignment details**. Example: book reports in pink, weekly/monthly newsletters in blue. Try giving two copies (one for the notebook, and one for home).
- Use **visual/graphic organizers** with high frequency (e.g. sequence charts, story maps, sentence maps, webs, clusters, flow charts, Venn diagrams).
- Provide **framed outlines** for filling in missing words and phrases during instruction.

### Providing assistance

- Provide enough **time during transitions** to put material away and get organized for the next activity.
- Provide **models** of well-organized papers, projects, science boards, etc.
- Provide in-school help and **adult assistance for projects**. This may include help organizing layout on a project board, printing from the computer, cutting papers with a paper cutter, etc.
- **Help students organize ideas** by using self-stick notes, dry-erase boards, and questioning/prompting.
- Give **personal reminders** (verbally or notes) about materials needed for class assignments.
- Allow for **natural consequences** of being unprepared. Give **LESS DESIRABLE** materials for those who need to borrow materials such as golf pencils, old pencils, and used papers (with a clean back side). **DO NOT** positively reinforce students by giving them a new pencil, notebook paper, etc.

## Tips for Improving Students' Time Management



### Time and schedules

- Teach students **how to tell time** and read a non-digital clock.
- Teach students **how to read calendars and schedules**.
- Establish a **daily routine and schedule** for the classroom.
- **Post all schedules** and refer to them frequently. With younger students, use a pictorial schedule.

### Managing work

- Assist with **prioritization** of activities and workload.
- Utilize "**things to do**" lists. Model and teach how to write down and cross off accomplished tasks.
- Attach a "**things to do**" list on the student's desk, and monitor the practice of crossing off items.
- **Break down longer assignments** into smaller, structured increments.

### Planning ahead

- Provide **advanced notice** about upcoming projects and reports.
- Call close **attention to due dates**. Post those due dates and frequently refer to them as reminders.
- Keep a **master monthly calendar** posted in the classroom that contains all given assignments and scheduled activities/events. Provide checklists and schedules.
- Communicate and maintain the clear expectation that **all assignments are to be recorded** on the student's assignment calendars/assignment sheets, and monitor that this is occurring.
- **Model writing assignments** using a transparency of the calendar/assignment sheet. Teach students to write the assignments (tests, book reports, etc.) on the day they are DUE. Walk them through recording on the correct date and monitor the assignment calendars.
- Take a few moments at the end of the subject period or school day to **lead students in the recording of assignments** on their calendars/assignment sheets/planners.

### Providing assistance

- Try using a **contract for work** completed in class with positive reinforcement.
- **Use timers** for seatwork and set timers for transitions (First state: "You have 5 minutes to finish what you are working on and putting away your materials." Then set the timer.)
- Encourage students taking medication at school to have a **beeper watch set** for the time they need to go to the nurse's office.
- Check students with ADHD for **progress on long-term projects** (e.g. book reports, science fair projects). Check to see if they have the necessary materials. Ask to see what they have accomplished so far. Have a copy of all the guidelines/deadlines at home for the parents.
- **Assign study buddies**. They can check each other to make sure assignments are recorded on calendars/assignment sheets. Buddies exchange phone numbers to call each other when one is absent, communicate about what was missed in class, and collect handouts, notices, and assignments.
- **Provide additional assistance** either directly or from peer partners/study buddies.
- Routinely ask **table partners or groups to check each other** that everything is accurately recorded on each other's calendars/planners.
- Teach students how to **self-monitor on-task behavior**, so that they are using class time effectively for getting work done.
- **Use frequent praise and positive reinforcement**. Reward for meeting deadlines, finishing in-school assignments, and so forth.