1. **Take care of things right now**. Don’t throw those bills down on the kitchen counter, vowing to open them tomorrow. Sort through the mail before you put it down: junk mail goes in the recycling, bills go into a bin, basket, or box on your desk to be handled during your regular bill-paying time. This goes for email, too: during your designated email time, answer or delete messages as appropriate, right then. Don’t let it pile up into an overwhelming mess.

Likewise, if you see an item that’s not in its correct place, pick it up right now and put it away. Don’t walk past it and wonder later how the house got to be so untidy.

2. **Set aside time for the must-do tasks that can’t be done immediately.**Pencil it on your calendar: 20 minutes to pay bills, 30 minutes to make important phone calls, 30 minutes twice a day to check and answer email. Treat these scheduled tasks like you would any important business appointment - do them on time, every time.

3. **Decide which things are unnecessary, and get rid of them.** This applies not only to belongings, but to services, subscriptions, and sources of stress as well. Go through your home one room at a time. There is no reason you have to do your entire house at once, or even in the same month or year. Just concentrate on one room at a time, identify those things that you never use, and get rid of them. Donate them, give them to friends, or sell them if you can. A good rule of thumb is this: if you haven’t used it or worn it in the last year, it’s time for it to go.

4. **Do it in small doses.**Overwhelming tasks like tidying the garage or emptying your email inbox often get ignored entirely. Why? Because we take one look at the task and a cloud of anxiety tells us that it’s too big to tackle. Instead of trying to do everything all at once, set a timer for 10 minutes, 15 minutes, or whatever feels right for you. Even 5 minutes of work is better than nothing.

Do the task whole-heartedly and without distractions for the entire time. When the timer goes off, walk away and do something else. You can come back to it in a few minutes, a few hours, or the next day. The important part is to reset your mind with another activity so that it doesn’t seem like you’ve been doing the same thing forever.

5. **Know which documents to keep and which you can get rid of.**Get a filing cabinet for your home and keep your documents organized in it. As a general rule, tax records should be kept for seven years. Monthly bank statements and credit card statements should be kept for one year; if you get a year-end summary, keep it indefinitely. File product warranty information and instructions for as long as you have the product or as long as the warranty is valid. Birth certificates, marriage certificates, immigration papers, Social Security cards, house deed, car titles, and passports should be kept in a safe deposit box or fire-proof safe in the home. Keep copies of these documents with your attorney.

6. **Set a deadline for clutter removal.** Getting rid of the clutter in your life can be a very emotional exercise. If you find yourself anxious about getting rid of things, try doing it in slow stages. Get a box and label it with a date six months or one year from today. Put into it the items that you aren’t sure about giving away. This could be clothing, documents, gadgets, or anything else that is cluttering up your life. If you don’t need that item before the date on the box, get rid of it on that date.

7. **Make a menu for the week and stick to it.** Food preparation is where a lot of people find themselves woefully unorganized. Making a menu, and a shopping list to go along with it, will keep you from having to rush to the store every day after work. Keep a running inventory of what you already have so that you don’t buy duplicates. Make one weekly shopping trip and buy everything you need for that week’s meals and snacks. This saves on fridge clutter, unnecessary trips, and piles of spoiled and wasted food.

8. **Keep the important information handy.**You know that annoyingly cheerful woman who carries around binders full of information relating to whatever activity she’s doing? The one who always seems prepared for everything and never forgets appointments or meetings or school events? Maybe she’s so cheerful because she’s so organized. Those binders may be annoying, but they are an extremely handy way to keep information organized. Get a binder for every activity in your life: teams, clubs, freelance projects, volunteering, kids’ school information - it can all be kept in a binder.

Keep schedules, rosters, event notices, and any other pertinent information for clubs; a kids’ school binder could contain shot records, report cards, and important information about activities they’ve participated in. Having everything in one place will do wonders for your organizational skills and significantly reduce the time you spend running around looking for things before you leave the house.

9. **A place for everything…** Have a system of boxes, baskets, or bins with labels on them. Use them to organize toys, clothing, keepsakes, pens, gadgets and their chargers, batteries, and everything else that seems to pile up or get scattered. They don’t have to be anything fancy or expensive; saving boxes from things that you purchase works well. Whenever something is removed from its place to be used, ensure that it is put back as soon as you are done with it.

10. **Cut yourself some slack.** You won’t learn to be organized overnight. Building - or breaking - any habit takes approximately three weeks. After those 21 or so days of forcing yourself to do something, you’ll start doing it more naturally. Get the whole family in on your organization efforts and you will hopefully begin to see a difference in how smoothly your life runs.