

5 tips for organizing digital files

Digital clutter can be just as stressful as physical clutter around your home or office. If you have an inbox jammed with unread messages and a hard drive with haphazardly arranged files, it can have the same depressing effect as a messy home. Abby Quillen offers this advice for organizing your digital life.

Identify categories and naming guidelines. Look through your inbox and files to choose major categories the items can be sorted into. Create folders with meaningful category names that tell you exactly what's inside. For example, files for a specific project should be in a folder titled with the project's name and date.

Automate email filters. If your email program allows it, set up folders and automatically filter incoming email into certain categories. For example, all Facebook notifications can go into a "Facebook" folder, and messages from your boss can go to the "Boss" folder.

Sort and purge old files. Sort through everything on your computer, smartphone and other devices. Trash anything you don't need; if you're uncertain about some things, create a "Maybe" folder for them. Also, delete blurry or non-sentimental photos and videos.

Set some time guidelines on when to trash personal files. Credit card and bank statements should be kept for one year; keep loan documents and insurance policies until they're inactive; keep tax records for seven years; keep medical records, birth certificates and other vital records forever.

Create backups of everything you're saving. Hard drives don't last forever, so save the important stuff in three locations: your hard drive, a cloud service and an external hard drive.

— Adapted from ["Downsize and Organize Your Digital Clutter,"](#) Abby Quillen, Replacement Parts.