



Life in a box

Do you know the average retrieval time for piece of paper a whopping ten minutes!

Life in a box is a foolproof system for dealing with all the pending papers in your life. You know the ones that sit in a pile on your tables and counter tops waiting for you to go through. These are the papers that you leave out so you don't forget about them.

Your life in a box is not a filing cabinet so the papers will be out and accessible without being in piles.

Here's what you're going to need to whip your paper piles into shape:

- * One desktop file box
- * Set of hanging folders (any color)
- * Pad of 2" x 2" sticky notes (brand names stick best)
- * Pen

Here are your simple steps to deal with the pending piles of paper:

1. Set your kitchen timer for eighteen minutes and jump in. No, you will probably not finish, but you'll make a serious dent.
2. Pick up the first paper from the pile and decide what it is. Is it something to read? Read it now while the timer ticks down. DO NOT make a pile of things to read later, you want to make progress now piles!
Is the paper something you'll need to reference like a school calendar or a paper from an organization you belong to?



Use a post it note to label the file. Do this by sticking the sticky part of the note to the file and leave the rest sticking up as the label. There are no perfect label names, just write something that will help you remember what is inside.

Important, pending, this week and urgent are not the best choices, since so many of the papers potentially fall in those categories. Instead use names like, sports schedules, social invitations, scouts and so on.

NOTE: If the item is time sensitive like a party invitation or a brochure from the local community theatre write it on your calendar before putting it into a file- otherwise out of sight out of mind.

Let's say for example you find a party invitation. On the calendar write in the date of the party, the RSVP date and how to RSVP. Then you can add a note to mail the card and/or buy the gift so you are not buying the gift on the way to the party and wrapping it in the car. Then slide the invitation into a file with a sticky note label something like "invitations" "RSVP" or "parties."

Here is an example of how a paper might flow through your new system.

The mail comes in today and you receive a community school brochure that you'd like to flip through. You may or may not register for a class; you need to read the brochure first. Open the brochure to the registration page to see what the date is to register by.

Go to your calendar and write in a note about a week before the deadline to remind yourself to read the brochure and that it will be in the community school folder.



Then take a sticky note and write community school on it. Put the label in the file, put the brochure inside, and tuck it away. When the date rolls around you will see the note on the calendar reminding you that you need to read the brochure. At that point, carry the brochure with you so you can glance at it in your spare time.

If nothing catches your eye then toss the brochure. If you see something you want to register for then either fill out the form and send the check in. Or if you have enough time put it in the bill file to be paid next bill paying session. Write the date of the class on the calendar.

Then, place the brochure back in the community school file, since you'll want to have it on hand to refer to the day of the class so you have all the pertinent information. Done!

These files live here a short time, the summer camp files stays only until you register for summer camp or camp is ended. But no longer. Other files, like bill and receipts stay but the contents only stay a little while. That is why you use the post it notes instead of the plastic tabs.

Since the file is temporary, no sense wasting time making a file tab. Although for the files that are long term categories, like 'bills' and 'receipts', you may choose to use the tabs, since the post it notes will eventually fall off.

Where to keep your box: keep your box in a central location like the kitchen counter; DO NOT stash the box in an upstairs home office because you'll never use it. This box should sit where the most current pile of papers is sitting now since you're already in the habit of dropping papers there.

Just imagine how successful you'll feel when you need a paper and you can find it in under a minute!



Your life in a box is the best way to keep current papers at hand.

Which papers belong in the box? Here are some common categories:

- * Recipes: recipes you clip or print
- * Travel: brochures, other ideas
- * Entertainment: tickets to events and newspaper clippings of upcoming ideas
- * Bills: bills to be paid (once paid they'll go in the system we'll talk about in lesson 10)
- * Taxes: items needed for the upcoming tax filing
- * Contacts: business cards and scraps of paper with names and numbers
- * Photos: to be put into an album
- * Family Meeting: topics to be discussed
- * Babysitter: things your babysitter needs to know
- * Schedules: sports schedules, recycling calendars, event calendars
- * Health: kids medical records, prescriptions, physician referrals
- * Directions: either printed off line or written down



- * Social Engagements: party invitations, directions to the events
- * Restaurants: restaurants you want to try and reviews
- * Coupons: coupons and gift certificates
- * Grocery Shopping: sales flyers, shopping list, food store coupons
- * Discussion: things to ask your spouse about
- * Day Trips: brochures and ideas of day trips to take
- * Books to Read: lists of books you'd like to read one day and book reviews
- * Movies to See: a list of movies you'd like to see and reviews of them
- * Gifts: ideas of gifts to buy for others or a wish list for yourself, pictures clipped from catalogs stapled to the order information
- * Instructions: clippings of a craft pattern, decorating a cake or other directions
- * Take Out Menus: menus for the local restaurants and corresponding coupons
- * Clippings: newspaper or magazine clippings that do not fit another category but would be good to refer to at some point



- * Online: websites that have been recommended to you or that you would like to check out one day
- * School: lunch tickets, school work in progress, school calendar
- * Spiritual: schedules of events
- * "hairstyle ideas," "places to visit," "landscaping," "PTA," "Cub Scouts," "Bake Sale," "Kitchen Remodel," "Birthday Party," "Halloween Costumes," "Holiday Card Writing," "Getting Organized" and so on.
- * Give each family member their own file

Remember, your life in a box will be personalized since every person has different papers. You may have some or all of these categories and others like hairstyles, places to visit, landscaping, and so on.

What doesn't go in the box? Magazines, catalogs, your to-read pile, receipts, or financial statements.

Reminder! Before anything with a date goes into a file you must write it on the calendar or you'll forget. Say you get a party invite, before you toss it in an "invites" file note the party date on your calendar.

To keep from outgrowing your box you must skim your file tabs weekly and purge those that are a little too thick, like recipes, and to recycle the contents of the ones that are no longer active like the bake sale you were in charge of last week.