SURVIVE AND THRIVE
Managing Life with Adult ADHD

Abigail's Podcast Cheatsheet
#024

Sorting Papers

How to Sort Papers

This is for when you have piles of paper everywhere and need a triage method to sort and reduce the paper. The complete version of this method can be found in the Appendix of my book *"Forget Perfect: How to Succeed in Your Profession and Personal Life Even if You Have ADHD."* The book is available through Amazon or go to my website (www.abigailwurf.com/writing) to click on the direct link to purchase. The book covers: starting and completing tasks; time management; managing your money; setting morning and evening routines; simplifying your daily life; communicating; relationships; career and working and, of course, the basics on managing ADHD. This is followed by an appendix that includes over 75 helpful apps that may be of interest divided by topic, the paper sorting method, recommended books and how to find the right coach for you.

Step 1: The Initial Sort

Assumptions:
- Paper is everywhere.
- There are different types of papers and documents.
- There is no space clear enough to organize them.

Actions:
- You are clearing off your desk or table for a fresh start
- Get a big box or basket
- Dump enough of the paper into the container so that you can clear a space to work.
- Don't read the papers as you do this, it will slow you down.
- Also get out a large trash bag, shake it out so it's ready, and put it to one side of you but within easy reach.

- Put the container on the other side of you within easy reach.
- Take 4 index cards or sticky notes and make a tent out of each one by folding it in half.
- Label them as follows:
    - *Important Papers to Store*
    - *Papers Needing Immediate Action*
    - *Papers Needing Future Action*
    - *Papers to File*
- Place and spread out the tented labels on the clear surface you have created. These are your 4 quadrants on your clear surface.
- Don't forget your trash bag at your side. You want to put as much paper in there as possible.
- Begin to sort the papers from the container into the labeled quadrants or trash bag. Work quickly and efficiently.
- Once you identify what the paper is, put it in the proper quadrant or the trash bag..
- This is a "down and dirty" sort. Speed is key because you want to move as much of the paper as possible into the trash. If you stop and read the pieces of paper it will be harder to throw out the ones you don't need. Trust me on this.
- Do this in one sitting. Remember, fast!

Step 2: The Second Sort

Assumptions:
- There are now 4 piles of paper plus the trash bag.
- You have a space from which to work that only has the 4 paper piles.

Actions:
- Take the first pile (*Most Important Papers to Store*) and review them to make sure they can't be weeded down any more. If they can, do it now. The more you get rid of the better and easier the papers will be to store and find when necessary.
- Place these important documents in a safe place, whether it is a safe, a bank deposit box, a fireproof box or a secret compartment in a giant teddy bear. It doesn't matter just as long as you are consistent where you store important papers.

Step 3: Sorting *Papers Needing Immediate Action*

Actions:
- Take the pile of "*Papers Needing Immediate Action*" and put them to one side. In front of you clear enough space for 3 piles – A, B and C
- Start with the first piece of paper in the "*Papers Needing Immediate Action*" and decide if the paper is:

- A = Super urgent/Important?
- C = Not very urgent at all/kind of unimportant?
- B = Middling between the two?

- Start making piles with the A pile to your left, the C pile to your right and the B pile directly in front of you.

- Continue to sort all the paper from "*Papers Needing Immediate Action*" pile. Once you get the hang of sorting into the 3 categories you may need to go back and re-sort the first few papers you sorted when you where not clear what counted as an A, B or C.

- Once you're done with this, take pile A and sort those papers in order of immediate importance. If need be, simply do another A, B, C sort of your A paper pile. I think of this sort as Aa, Ab, and Ac. Then stack the 3 piles with Aa on top, Ab, in the middle and Ac on the bottom. Set this pile aside.

- Now do the same with the B pile – Ba, Bb, and Bc.

- Now do the same with the C pile – Ca, Cb, and Cc.

- Take the 3 new piles and stack them all A sorted pile on top, all B sorted pile in the middle and all C sorted pile on the bottom.

You have completed sorting "*Papers Needing Immediate Action*." Take the tented label you made for these papers and put it on top of the whole pile and set aside.

Step 4: Sorting *Papers Needing Future Action*

- Repeat the whole A, B, and C sorting system. The sort each of the A and B pile like you did before creating Aa, Ab, Ac, Ba, Bb and Bc. Stack the papers in that order once done with A on the top, B on the bottom. This is only for the A pile and B pile. Put the label *Papers Needing Future Action* on top of the pile and set aside.

- Take the C pile, yes, I didn't forget the C pile, and throw those into the trash! You will never get to those C's needing further action so you might as well just toss them. If they were going to get done and were of some importance, they would not have been put in the C pile. Don't cheat – throw them out!

Step 5: Setting up categories for your pile of *Papers to File.*

Actions:

- A classic mistake made at this point is to create a gazillion file categories. Don't do this because you will forget the system and never find what you need when you need it. Nor will you file papers in the moment because you will not remember the complicated system you created.

- Create a simple list of categories and then make a file folder for each category. Sort the *Papers to File* into the file folders always looking for papers that you can get rid of. Keep the categories broad.

- This list might look like:
  Bank Records
  Cars and Other Vehicles
  Children (One file per child)
  Contacts
  Financial Records
  Home
  Important Papers
  Medical and Health Insurance Records
  Memberships
  Pets
  Work Records
  Vacation and Travel

Each category is explained in my book's appendix (www.abigailwurf.com/writing).

My book explains this process in greater detail, if you have found this abbreviated version difficult follow, and is available through Amazon.
www.abigailwurf.com/writing.

 Quote:

"It isn't necessary to imagine the world ending in fire or ice. There are two other possibilities: one is paperwork, and the other is nostalgia." Frank Zappa