

The Busy Writer's Book of Checklists

Checklist 12 – Organize Your Files

Aspects of Organizing Your Files	Your Assessment		
	<i>Works Well</i>	<i>Needs Work</i>	<i>Poor</i>
The key to good organization of your files is simple: you need to be able to find any of your stored information quickly. This applies to email, contacts, manuscripts, passwords and usernames, research and checklists.			
Make a list of all the files you use in your work. (This includes all the files mentioned above plus any others that are relevant.) Survey your computer and storage systems to see how you are currently organizing your files.			
Identify your files with a color, number or code to identify those that belong together.			
Work out the best way to make the various types of files work for you. (In a filing cabinet? In folders on your computer? In drawers?)			

Your Paper Files

Label folders, boxes, or file drawers clearly.			
Ensure that each file is stored appropriately. (Tip: Keep a small notebook as a Master File List, or open a Word document or Excel spreadsheet to record where everything is.)			
Keep often-used files within easy reach. (Your current project can be kept in a portable file box next to your desk.)			
If you use folders, work out a system for those folders that works efficiently. (E.g. naming the folders, dividing them into sections, type of dividers (plastic, cardboard, plastic sleeves), naming each section, contents list for thick folders.)			

Your Digital Files

If you use Windows, most of your files will be kept in your Documents folder. Start by making a list of aptly-named folders to store your work. (E.g. Master folders can be FICTION and NON FICTION. Sub-folders under these can be labelled with the name of your Work in Progress. Sub-sub-folders can be labelled with different aspects of the work. (Example: DOCUMENTS >> FICTION >> Adventure Island >> then more sub-folders like Characters, Plot, Setting, Research, Adventure Island Draft 1, etc.) If you use a Mac, investigate the file system then organize it in a similar way.			
Make your current projects easier to find by using Microsoft's LIBRARIES feature. (You can create new collections [or libraries] of work, and include folders from different places - e.g. Music or Pictures.			
Microsoft's ONE NOTE is a handy way of storing your research in Notebooks which can be then divided into Sections and Pages. Anything you paste in from online research is automatically referenced to the source.			
Take charge of your email: use filters, stars, tags or whatever is necessary to organize your mail. (If you are currently checking your email via a web browser, consider using a computer-based program like Mozilla's Thunderbird as well. You can then create new folders to store your email, and filter incoming email. Use online forums and the program's HELP features to learn how to use the program.)			
If you regularly access sites with usernames and passwords, consider using a program like ROBOFORM to keep track of them all. (You can access the list with one master password. RoboForm will automatically fill in your username and password with one click.)			
Back up EVERYTHING. If you do not have a backup system, organize it ASAP. For peace of mind, back up your work (a) on your computer, (b) on a disk, external drive or thumb drive and (c) online. (An example of online storage is Just Cloud. http://www.justcloud.com/ There are plenty of others; do your own research... but DO choose one!)			