

Let's Get Organized

A Simplified Organizational Approach for all Students

(Excerpted from *A-Academics' Simplified Organizational System*)

By *Mick Rosenblum*

Recently, a “typical student” approached me in an absolute panic! With tears in her eyes, she told me that she had received a semester grade that she honestly believed was lower than she had earned. I explained to her that teachers do, indeed, make mistakes from time to time, but it is relatively easy to resolve the problem. All the student had to do was to take all of her graded assignments, tests, and quizzes to her teacher and have him re-calculate the grade. Unfortunately, the “typical student” is in the habit of discarding graded work the moment the teacher returns it. True to form, this student had kept no papers on file and, therefore, had no way to verify her grades or explore the possibility of a teacher-generated error.

It was a hard lesson to learn, but the student is not entirely to blame. Children, at a very early age, come to depend upon adults to keep track of important information. Naturally, mom and dad are responsible for making sure the child gets to school on time, goes to the doctor for routine check-ups, cleans up his or her room, etc. Eventually, however, there comes a time when a young student must begin to assume a modicum of responsibility and self-reliance. In doing so, sooner or later the student will discover that adults are not infallible. Unfortunately, all too often children come to this realization through episodes such as the one described above.

This is why it is imperative that a student begin using an organizational scheme from the moment he begins school (kindergarten is not too early to start organizing one's work). Parents cannot rely upon the school systems to teach children organizational skills. That is not to say that all schools completely ignore the issue. Unfortunately, the few schools that do, indeed, make a *token* effort to help the students to organize themselves, fall short of doing a complete job and almost always fail to reinforce the process throughout the school year. A school may, for example, give a student a "planner" (often the only organizational tool a school ever provides). In many cases, however, neither the teachers nor counselors take the time to show the student how to use the planner or to verify that the student has been using the planner at all! This holds true for private and public schools alike. Many of the most expensive private schools, after selling parents on the school's "rigid organizational and study skills programs," do little or nothing to teach the students to use and maintain these essential skills.

Because schools have routinely neglected to emphasize the importance of adopting efficient organizational schemes, students have come to the natural conclusion that organization is unimportant. In fact, students often argue against their implementing any "outside" organizational scheme by asking, "Why do I have to do this; the teacher doesn't make me do it!" The sad truth is that so many teachers are unaware of the impact that organization (or a lack thereof) has on a student's performance.

And what about the student who makes a concerted effort to get organized. He must take a trial-and-error approach to the issue, because nobody has ever showed him just what works and

what doesn't work. Let me give you an example. Students will often purchase several wire-bound or glue-bound notebooks believing that a separate notebook for each class is a good way to organize one's work. This sounds like a reasonably efficient and effective approach, doesn't it? In reality, this is one of the worst ways to organize one's coursework and will almost guarantee disaster, and here's why. If you were to visit any classroom on any given day, you are likely to see several students carrying a bundle of the aforementioned notebooks. Inevitably, one or more of these students will bring five notebooks into the classroom and will leave with three or four. In other words, it is easy to lose an individual notebook. "Ok," you might say, "but what if I were to place all of the individual notebooks into a single three-ring binder?" Well, this will certainly reduce the likelihood of your misplacing a notebook, but it does not solve another problem inherent in these notebooks . . . you cannot add pages. It is important for students to be able to rearrange class notes and add more notes (from textbooks, encyclopedias, etc.) to the notebook. This is easy with conventional three-ring binders, but is impossible with a wire-bound or glue-bound notebook. As a result, students who insist upon using such notebooks tend *not* to enhance or add to their notes. I have actually encountered students who were adamantly opposed to taking any additional notes if it meant "messing up" the order of their class notes. This is just one of many examples of organizational approaches that sound good but simply do not work!

Two Levels of Organization - Macro and Micro

Because the typical student is very weak in (if not devoid of) organizational skills, he needs to employ an effective organizational system immediately. Naturally, this system must not be overly complicated or burdensome, or the student will probably give up in frustration. With this in mind, I have developed an organization system that is effective, efficient, and easy to use. In fact, it is simplicity itself! This easy-to-use organizational approach was not born overnight, however. Rather, I have developed and modified this method over the course of twenty-eight years of private teaching and tutoring. It is a system that I am constantly fine-tuning and adjusting to maximize its utility. It is also a system that can be adjusted to "fit" any student's needs, without radically changing the basic approach.

When teaching students to use my organizational scheme, I subdivide the topic into two separate levels of organization, Macro-Organization and Micro-Organization. Macro-Organization refers to a student's keeping track of all grades and points earned in each class, all assignment and test due-dates, and all paperwork generated in each course. Macro-Organization also includes the all-important budgeting of study time and is the easier of the two sub-levels to learn to use. In fact, a student can set up and put to use a Macro-Organizational system in a matter of a few short hours.

Micro-Organization, on the other hand, deals with the specific techniques necessary to complete assignments, take notes, and perform other scholastic tasks in the most efficient and useful manner possible. Naturally, because a student will encounter so many different types of subject matter and assignments, he or she cannot assimilate all aspects of the Micro-Organizational sub-level in one or two sittings but must allow it to evolve over a period of time. That is not to say that a student will have to wait to get started. Quite the contrary, he or she can begin to use many of the Micro-Organizational features immediately.

It is also important to point out the fact that neither Macro-Organization nor Micro-organization stands alone. A student will remain inadequately organized until he or she learns to use both sub-levels simultaneously. You will undoubtedly discover that there is a certain degree of overlap between the two. A student may, for example, redesign or reword grade sheets or assignment sheets to suit particular needs. In other words, he or she is applying Micro-Organizational modifications to a Macro-Organizational feature.

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