

The Organized Student Binder What Works and What Doesn't

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

By *Mick Rosenblum*

Another essential macro-organizational tool is the binder. Notice I say *binder* and not *binders*. All too often, students will purchase separate three ring binders for each course. You may recall our discussion of the potential disasters associated with multiple wire-bound notebooks. The same holds true for three-ring binders...the more a student carries, the more he or she has to lose. This is why I highly recommend that students use only one three-ring binder to hold all *current* coursework. I emphasize the word "current " because some students have tried to store an entire semester's paperwork in one huge binder. You've seen those binders haven't you? They have three inch or four inch rings, and are usually spilling over with papers. Students who use these gigantic binders do so at the expense of a filing system...the binder has become their file box!

Not only is a monster-binder heavy and awkward to carry around, it has one potentially devastating pitfall, if a student loses it, he or she has lost everything! A student may insist that he have never lost a binder and never will. My answer to that is "why tempt fate?" Would you carry a thousand dollars in your pocket if you didn't have too? The truth is that no one ever knows how or when he or she might lose something. A few years ago, one of my students missed his carpool ride and had to take the trolley home from school. While he sat on a bench at the trolley station waiting for the train, some hoodlums crept up behind him, struck him on the head, knocked him unconscious, and stole his backpack! This poor fellow awoke a few minutes later to find a lump on his head and his backpack missing. Fortunately, he sustained only minor injuries (a headache for a day or two) and fully recovered in a week's time. He was lucky, indeed, that he had not been killed! He was fortunate in another way, too. Following my advice, this young man had diligently stored his graded papers in a file box (his binder contained only his most current coursework). He had also followed my advice by carrying his wallet in his front pants' pocket. Just imagine the look on his attackers' faces when they opened the backpack to find only a binder, an inexpensive calculator, and some dirty gym clothes!

I also recommend that students avoid purchasing those fancy-looking binder systems that containing a series of cardboard folders. Students, who store their papers in cardboard folders instead of three-hole punching them and storing them in the binder, are destined to lose those papers. The students may not lose the papers today or even tomorrow, but in a few months, when the folders have torn loose from the binder rings, the system works like a sieve. These fancy binder systems are also usually somewhat expensive. Our old friend the typical student is rather tough on binders and may need a replacement every few months. Why spend your hard-earned cash on a binder system that doesn't work very well in the first place and must be replaced on a regular basis anyway?

The type of binder I recommend is one that is plastic covered (so students can tape their assignment sheets to the inside cover) and has two inch metal rings. These binders typically have

plastic pouches on the inside of each cover. I encourage students to use those pouches only to hold papers long enough to bring them home to be three-hole punched. Students must never store any papers in the pouches for longer than a single day, because those papers will become restless and will eventually make their escape . . . usually right before the teacher asks for them.

I realize that there are certain courses that require a separate binder (science courses, for example). I am also aware of the fact that some schools have adopted the rather absurd policy of requiring separate binders for every course. In those cases, students must abide by the rules and purchase a bundle of binders, but the following is a way for to minimize the risk of losing individual binders. First of all, a student should still carry a single master-binder as a means to convey papers to and from school. If she discovers, however, that certain courses, require her to submit her respective binders only once or twice during a semester, and those teachers do not have "surprise binder-checks, then she should leave those binder at home. Individual course binders that a student is required to bring to class on a daily basis should remain in the backpack until the student absolutely needs to open them. The organized, diligent student does not store them in a locker either (typical student style). Remember, the probability of misplacing an individual course binder increases geometrically each time a student extracts it from the backpack ...and when it's gone, it's gone! That is why I recommend that a student use the master binder only; leave the other binders either at home or in the backpack.

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