

The Filing System

An Easy Way to Store and Retrieve Student Papers and Documents

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

By *Mick Rosenblum*

Macro-Organization involves the techniques necessary to maintain grade records and paperwork, meet assignment and tests dates, and efficiently organize study time. In order to accomplish these tasks, a student must have the right equipment. Fortunately, one need not purchase elaborate and expensive file cabinets and calendar books in to have an absolutely superb Macro-Organizational system. A relatively inexpensive trip to your local discount store will, in most cases, yield all of the tools necessary to become a well-organized, “professional” student (remember, school is a student’s “job”).

The cornerstone of any student’s new organizational system is the filing system. It is the primary means by which a student will store his or her paperwork (graded coursework, “old” handouts, grade reports, master sheets, old and new assignment sheets, etc.). To understand the importance of establishing and maintaining an efficient filing system, let us take a moment to trace the journey of a class handout from the time a student receives it to the time it mysteriously vanishes from existence. Our old buddy, the typical student, probably uses four separate filing utilities: his pocket, his locker, his floor (or desk drawer), and his wastebasket. He doesn’t even bother to use his binder anymore. By the first few weeks of the school year, the binder becomes completely (and randomly) filled with papers and is, in all likelihood, in two or three separate pieces (he *does* carries it with him, though, apparently for sentimental reasons). Instead, when he gets a new class handout, he merely stuffs it into his pocket (file #1) and deposits it, later, into his locker (file #2). Our hero intends, of course, to take the handout home with him, but by now, his locker is a school’s equivalent of a black hole... papers go in but never come out (the same holds true for dirty gym clothes, uneaten lunches and, of course, last quarter’s progress reports).

If by some miracle, however, the handout does arrive home, it is likely to be placed atop a constantly growing pile of papers stacked in the corner of the room or stuffed in a drawer (file # 3). Eventually, when the pile becomes too high, or the drawer becomes too full, the typical student simply inserts all of the papers into the wastebasket (file #4). Ultimately, when the teacher asks the students to bring that particular handout to class, our friend (along with fifty percent of the rest of the class) quickly raises his hand and declares “I didn’t get one.” He doesn’t even bother to search for handouts anymore...the typical student has learned long ago that, as far as papers are concerned, his filing system is a one way trip.

The preceding illustration shows how, in the absence of an efficient filing system, papers tend to magically disappear. Simply being able to hang on to papers, however, is not the only reason for maintaining organized files . . . it can literally save your grade in any given course! Because it is often difficult to convince the typical student of the importance of maintaining a complete filing system, I usually have to emphasize the point with the following example of an effective filing system in action. A year or so ago, one of my math students approached her teacher to compare the teacher’s grade records with the student’s own grade sheets (if grades are posted online, a student can simply compare his or her grade sheet with the online data). If the student grade sheets and the teacher’s records match, then all is well, but if there is a discrepancy,

the student can catch it before the grades are finalized. In the case of this particular student, the semester was almost over and the grades were to be submitted by the end of that week. The teacher shrugged her shoulders declaring "I would have given you an "A" but you failed to hand in seven homework assignments!" My student, who had completed and had handed in every assignment on time, could not believe her ears. Very professionally, however, the student asked the teacher exactly which assignments were missing and marked those assignments on her (the student's) grade sheet which she kept up to date in her binder. Later that afternoon, the student simply went into her room, opened her file box, and extracted the necessary documentation (the graded assignments). Imagine the surprise on the teacher's face when, the very next day, the student handed the teacher the seven "missing" assignments replete with the teacher's own grade marks! Needless to say, the student received her "A." Try to imagine for a moment how you would feel if you had worked diligently all semester to earn an "A" only to be given a "B"? By maintaining a complete filing system students can reliably substantiate their grades and avoid a lot of frustration, confusion, and tears.

Validating grades and locating papers, however, are not the only reasons for keeping everything on file. When it comes time to study for midterms or finals, it sure helps to have something to study! Graded tests and assignments are usually the best source of study material for major cumulative exams. Indeed, it is not uncommon for teachers to base those exams upon previous chapter tests and assignments. It is also not uncommon for the typical student to discard or "lose" chapter tests and assignments leaving nothing but the text book for major exam review. Sit and think, for a moment, about the ways in which you might use your filing system. Undoubtedly you will come up with many more reasons for maintaining efficient, organized files.

Speaking of which, just how does one go about organizing files? There are certainly many different ways to arrange papers and coursework in any filing system, and much depends on the courses themselves and the sheer numbers of papers they generate. Let me give you a general scheme for setting up your file system; feel free to modify it here and there to fit your needs. First of all, you will need to buy a plastic file box. I recommend you find one that is large enough to hold two semesters work and all of your master sheets (approximate dimensions 12in. x 11in. x 11in.). Be sure your file box does not have a flimsy lid. I also recommend you purchase three different colors of hanging file folders, 10 red, 10 yellow, and 10 blue. A few hanging file folders may come with the file box, so be sure to open the lid of the one you wish to buy to make sure it contains all of the goodies it is supposed to (hanging folders, labels, and transparent tabs.

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