

Organize for your style

De-clutter closets, drawers, and more with tricks matched to your personality

When it comes to stowing our stuff, we tend to fall into one of two camps: the outies, who keep their things out and within easy reach, and the innies, who hide everything in a closet or inside a drawer. Before you jump to conclusions, that doesn't mean that outies are slobs and innies are neat freaks. Chaos can get the best of you whether things look neat or not, says Standolyn Robertson, a certified organizing pro in Waltham, Mass. "I've worked with people who are neat and can't

find things, and there are those whose house looks like it was ransacked in a burglary, and they still know where everything is." According to Robertson and other organizing pros, the trick to finding tools and systems that will keep your house in order depends on knowing your personal storage style. Before you turn the page for our advice on four of the biggest organizing trouble spots, use our guide to determine whether you're an innie, an outie, or a mix of the two.

Which one are you?

OUTIE

If you're an outie, you worry that you'll forget something if it's not in plain sight. You work best with organizing tools that provide an instant view of what's inside. Those items make it easy to find stuff fast, and can even enhance the décor of your room. Your best bets:

- Decorative folders and file boxes in colors and patterns that suit your space and taste
- Transparent or open containers, including bowls, desk sorters with front-facing slots, paper trays, see-through storage boxes, a jewelry box with a clear window at the top, even plastic zipper bags
- Wall-mounted organizers that take advantage of vertical space, such as standing shoe racks, shelves, hooks, peg racks, hanging files, and magnetic boards that hold metal containers

INNIE

If you're an innie, your priority is having a calm and serene visual slate, so select closed containers in a single hue or pattern for a spare and tidy look. Opt for those that maximize space but have a slot for a label or offer some transparency when tucked into a closet or a drawer. Your tools should corral like things together yet keep piles separate. Your best bets:

- Folders grouped in a single color
- Modular drawer systems and stacking racks inside a closet
- Labeled bins that signal what's inside
- Shelf dividers that keep piles neat
- Transparent or open containers to tuck inside a closet or drawer—acrylic trays, hanging shoe bags with clear pockets, shoe boxes with clear windows, and hanging sweater sorters with open compartments

A LITTLE OF BOTH

Innie-outie hybrids have traits of each type. If that describes you, keep these items in sight: stuff you use most frequently, items you love looking at, or things that require immediate action. Put everything else away. To find items easily, group like things together and use labeled or transparent holders so that you can see what's inside.

MONICA BUCK; PROP STYLING: MARCUS HAY; FASHION STYLING: KIM FIELD

Your desk

The key to efficiency is knowing what you have and where it is

The OUTIE

Your ideas flow best when you see what you have around you, New York organizing specialist Julie Morgenstern says. But to keep piles and sprawl down:

HANG A SHELF

It's a great use of the space over the desk, and it helps you avoid piles when you run out of desktop real estate.

USE LABELS

Labels with words or pictures give you the visual cues you need to feel OK about putting things away.

ORGANIZE UP

Vertical storage helps you group similar items together—bills and other items needing action—and keeps the desk clutter-free.

BE MOBILE

A colorful tote, like the one at right, corrals files on a desktop and is handy to grab when you want to move stuff.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Coordinated accessories look nice and express your style. And they don't have to cost a lot: At right, two tin cans wrapped in decorative paper hold pencils and pens.



What NOT to do ... Don't keep everything out in the open. Tucking away stuff you don't use often can keep you from feeling overwhelmed. ■ Beware of corkboards—they can quickly become cluttered and that will reduce your efficiency. ■ Avoid piles, where things get buried and more easily forgotten.



What NOT to do ... Don't overstuff your file drawers; periodically go through files and shred all documents you no longer need. ■ Don't stash papers away until you've prioritized them; otherwise you might delay making a decision. ■ Avoid fixed-drawer organizers, where stuff easily can get jumbled.

The INNIE

You derive a sense of serenity from a clean, spare—even empty—work surface, says Tracy McCubbin, owner of dClutterfly, a Los Angeles-based organizing firm. You can easily get distracted by clutter. To keep it serene:

USE DECORATIVE FOLDERS

Choose colors and patterns for hanging files and folders that will look great with your office décor and on the desktop when you pull them out to work.

LIMIT THE COLOR PALETTE

To maintain calm and guard against too much visual stimulation, keep desk accessories within a limited color range—three hues at the most.

SEPARATE YOUR STUFF

Use drawer organizers or modular drawer inserts for supplies and papers—and size them to the items they'll hold, which keeps stuff neater.

LABEL YOUR FILES

Even though they're tucked away, labeling makes things easy to find and helps prioritize tasks.

Your closet

It should be set up to make it easy for you to get dressed in the morning

The OUTIE

Using hooks and shelves can help you access frequently worn clothes fast, Standolyn Robertson says. Here are some other ways to help you save time and prioritize your stuff:

LET IT ALL HANG OUT

Hang handbags, scarves, and belts on a decorative coatrack in your room. You can also leave out accessories like boots and an umbrella so you can get out the door more efficiently in the morning.

USE CUBBIES

An open-cube storage system is great for letting you see where sweaters, shoes, and other clothing items are at a glance. It also offers a perch for favorite objects you like to have out on display. Even in a closet it's best for outies to keep things in open bins and racks.

GET A VIEW INTO BOXES

Look for decorative boxes that also provide visibility inside so that you can see their contents. Or find boxes that can be labeled so you can find stuff at a glance.



Buy this! Open-cube storage systems keep things organized and handy and look nice, too.

What NOT to do ... Avoid lidded containers without windows or labels; they obscure the contents. ■ Also skip opaque garment bags—you can forget what's in them. ■ Don't forget to use your walls; installing hooks at staggered heights can create an artful display for scarves and handbags.



Buy this! An over-the-door bag can organize shoes, bags, and more.

What NOT to do ... Don't overstuff; if you're not wearing it, let it go. ■ Avoid visual clutter; adopt organizer Lorie Marrero's ABCD prioritizing system in which A items—those worn most often—are kept in easy reach, and the less-often-worn D items, like out-of-season stuff, are put in a remote spot.

The INNIE

You need systems that you can trust and that are intuitive and obvious because you don't rely much on visual cues, Robertson says. Grouping like things together is one tried-and-true tactic. Here are some others:

SEPARATE PILES

Shelf dividers prevent piles from tumbling into a jumble. They also help maximize vertical space.

KEEP HANGERS THE SAME

It creates a feeling of calm by eliminating visual clutter.

GROUP CLOTHING BY LENGTH

It's an easy way to find stuff, and it frees up more floor space under low-hanging items for stackable shoe racks.

CREATE PRIORITY SPOTS

An over-the-door mesh shoe bag corrals more than shoes and offers instant visibility to frequently worn items. A circular hanger keeps scarves in one spot. You can improvise something similar by placing plastic rings from six-packs over a hanger and looping scarves through.

Your jewelry

No matter how much you have, it's best to keep it all in one place

The OUTIE

Even with jewelry, you want visibility at a glance, says Lorie Marrero, creator of The Clutter Diet, an online organization consulting service. Here's how to keep it looking neat, not cluttered:

HANG IT ON THE WALL

Jewelry is beautiful enough to use as wall art. Just hang a fabric-covered cushion board and drape the pieces you wear most often over nails or pins.

ARRANGE ARTFULLY

Decorative knobs or hooks can also be arranged beautifully on a wall for hanging necklaces and bracelets.

DRAPE IT

A specially designed jewelry tree or even a small sculpture with branching arms looks nice on a dresser and provides the perfect perch for loop earrings and necklaces.

BOX THE LITTLE STUFF

Use a pretty, lidded box that works with your décor to hold rings, pins, and other small pieces you don't wear all the time. Tip: Look for see-through lids. Keep them on your dresser for easy access.



Buy this! A fabric-covered cushion board keeps your favorite pieces front and center and adds room art.

What NOT to do ... Skip big, closed jewelry boxes that put baubles out of sight and out of mind. ■ Don't overdo it. To avoid a cluttered look, ditch costume pieces you don't want; donate them to charitable groups. ■ Don't forget to group like items together—it helps cut back on repeat purchases.



Buy this! A second jewelry box for less-used items can be left out on a dresser or tucked away.

What NOT to do ... Avoid hiding jewelry in lots of itty-bitty boxes or jewelry bags; that makes it easy to lose track of what you have. ■ Don't buy random boxes. Measure before you shop. Make a list of all the pieces you want to store to figure out how big a box or how many drawer trays you need to buy.

The INNIE

You like to put things in compartments and behind closed doors, so invest in a nice jewelry box. Or try these other options:

USE TWO BOXES

It's hard to find one box that's large enough to contain all your stuff, so try the two-box system: Keep a small box for the pieces you wear frequently and a larger one to tame and conceal the items you use less often. You can tuck the second box away in a closet or drawer or keep it out on display as shown.

OUTFIT A DRAWER

Velvet-lined jewelry trays or inserts that fit inside a drawer can usually accommodate everything you own.

TRY A MINI ARMOIRE

If you have a large collection, jewelry armoires are a nice touch. They have a door that conceals multiple compartments designed to hold hanging necklaces and bracelets. They can also accommodate small items such as pins and rings, so you have everything in one handy spot.

Your junk drawer

Everyone has one, but they don't have to be junky

The OUTIE

If it's out of sight, it might end up out of mind when you're an outie who is actually inspired by and enjoys seeing things you own on display—yes, even junk-drawer stuff.

SHELVE IT

Shelves can be used for more than condiments and dishware; junk-drawer items can be put out within easy reach, too.

THINK TRANSPARENT

Small, see-through glass jars can house loose change, push pins, rubber bands, and more.

BE SMART ABOUT HOOKS

Pull items out of the drawer and hang them.

KEEP IT PRETTY

A trio of ceramic flowerpots serves as open bins to stow pens and pencils, tools, and other small stuff.

PUT IT OUT THERE

Decorative binders, color coordinated to dishware and surrounding items, can sit out on the counter to hold menus. Filing away your favorite recipes in a labeled box also keeps them together and handy.



Buy this! Pretty ceramic flowerpots can be used to organize often-used things like pencils and paper.

What NOT to do ... Avoid putting too much stuff out on the counter, which can look cluttered. Fight your instincts to spread out horizontally and think in terms of vertical storage solutions, such as shelves. ■ Avoid peg racks with a limited number of pegs; that can lead to pile-ups and disorganization.



Buy this! Modular drawer organizers of different sizes keep everything in its place.

What NOT to do ... Don't go crazy with containers. Too many colors and sizes can create visual chaos. Buy only what you need, and make sure they fit the space. ■ Don't make the junk drawer a dumping ground. Toss or donate things that are broken, duplicates, or unused.

The INNIE

By nature, you're a stasher, Marrero says. But because you also like things tidy and serene, here's how to keep the junk drawer from becoming a jumble:

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Try using modular drawer organizers that fit their contents precisely—for example, larger ones can fit menus, smaller ones keys and batteries.

KEEP IT ALL IN PLACE

Do as the pros do and place a small blob of museum putty on the bottoms of dividers to prevent them from sliding around and to keep your stuff from getting mixed up, too.

MAKE IT UNIFORM

Simple organizers with similar shapes will keep the look consistent. You can buy them or look around the house for freebies. Small metal candy tins and lidded glass food jars tuck neatly into drawers and make good holders for loose change, clips, and even oddball items such as dice.