

UNDERSTAND YOUR STARTING POINT

Where is All This Paper Coming From?

As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. If you really want to understand why you're inundated with paper, pull out the chart called "paper, paper everywhere!" that was included with the lesson downloads. Once your eyeballs stop spinning in your head, take a minute and digest the chart. Just look at all the different ways paper creeps into your home! It's no wonder paper is piling up on your flat surfaces! Let's take a look at each of these sources of paper inflow...

“Electronic items like e-bills, email, evites, and other forms of electronic communication, can become clutter, too. Just because this electronic “paper” isn’t piling up on your counter—without proper systems in place, these items can be clutter just the same!”

THE MAILBOX

This is no surprise, but your mailbox is one of the biggest sources of paper clutter in your home. Some of the items in your mailbox are welcome—items you're quite happy to share your home with. Your favorite catalogs, magazines, and coupons (for stores you shop at and for products you use) fall into this category. The most welcome (yet most rare) mail of all is the handwritten card or letter! For the most part, however, your mail is filled with things that you aren't particularly excited to welcome into your home—bills, coupons you'll never use, credit card applications, investment statements, donation solicitations, and junk mail, to name just a few. And if your mailbox doesn't give you your fill of paper, just look close by for the newspaper that's lying in your yard or on your front porch.



Now...if the only paper that came into your home was via your mailbox, that'd be one thing. But the mailbox is just the beginning of the paper onslaught.

CHILDREN'S BACKPACKS



If your mailbox isn't cluttering your flat surfaces enough on its own, just wait until your kids get home from school, backpacks loaded to the brim with paper. Argh! You're certain to reach your paper tipping point with what's hidden inside that pack: sign-up sheets, permissions slips, homework, lunch menus, the class newsletter, long-term assignment sheets (which you have to keep track of, by the way), graded papers, and even sentimental pieces of paper like artwork. This little pack is loaded with things you must do and things you want to hang on to in order to track and honor your child's growing-up years.

If you don't have kids living at home with you, not to worry, there are plenty of other ways paper can get into your home—just take a peek inside your purse!



YOUR PURSE OR TOTE BAG

Stop reading and go grab your purse, briefcase, or tote bag you carry to and from whatever job you go to. Is there any paper lurking in there? I bet there is. Without any effort at all, your purse fills up with random bits of paper: receipts, business cards, birthday cards, appointment cards, shopping lists, carryout menus and store coupons, to name just a few. Plus, you may transport papers to and from work, adding to the paper clutter at home. But it doesn't stop there...

SHOPPING BAGS

The shopping bag is an obvious source of “stuff” clutter in your home, but be careful: paper clutter sneaks in this way, too. From spontaneous magazine purchases at the checkout, to warranties and user manuals, paper, like stuff, creeps into your home little by little via the shopping bag.



Are we *done yet*, you may be wondering? Almost. There's just one last category of paper to talk about, the paper that's generated inside your home.

INSIDE YOUR HOME

If you haven't brought enough paper into your home from the outside world, you'll still have plenty of paper with what is created inside your four walls. Grocery lists, to-do lists, chore lists, magazine clippings, phone messages, printouts from the web, printed emails, art projects, and recipes are all common sources of paper clutter created inside the home.



Wow...it's no wonder we have piles and piles: Every single one of these sources of paper is a source of decision—or often, indecision. Without a system in place for handling each of these sources of paper along with the decisions and actions they represent, in no time the paper piles up and paper clutter creeps in (and stacks up!)

You may wonder why I went into such detail about where your paper is coming from. How does that help solve the paper clutter problem? The idea is to raise your awareness about where your paper is coming from. Once you have a feel for this, you can do something about it. You can begin to make different decisions about your paper and let less of it in. As they say, knowledge is power.

“If you want to eliminate your paper clutter, you have to do something different from what you’ve done in the past.”



Recognize Your Points of Control

It's important to realize that all paper is not created equal. Some of the paper that comes into your home is welcome—things like magazines you read, special pieces of art created by your kids, coupons for items you need to buy, flyers for events you want to attend, and so on. A lot of the paper that comes into your home, however, isn't so welcome. But some of it is necessary. The unwelcome but necessary papers are items that need our attention like bills, permission slips, or soccer sign-up forms. The third category of paper is the unwelcome and unnecessary paper: the paper that you don't need, or you don't have time for. Junk mail, unwanted catalogs, and magazines and newspapers that you don't have the time or inclination to read all fall into this category. But here's the good news. Once you see the difference between these various types of paper—you can begin to take action and change your paper situation.

There are things we can't control (papers your kids bring home from school, for example), but there are many sources of paper that we can control. At this point in the process, your goal is to keep the unwelcome and unnecessary paper out of your home, freeing up your time to focus on your welcome paper, your necessary paper—and those things in life that have nothing to do with paper at all. Do I hear family, friends, and recreational pursuits, anyone?

TAKE ACTION! IDENTIFY YOUR SOURCES OF PAPER AND YOUR POINTS OF CONTROL

Reading is good. Action is better. If you want to eliminate your paper clutter, you have to do something different from what you've done in the past. The first action step is simple: pull out the handout “paper, paper everywhere!” Your goal is to use this form to get the lay of the (paper) land in your home by understanding your sources of paper. Whether the landscape looks like a paper mountain or a paper molehill, simply follow the steps below to identify the sources of paper inflow and your points of control.

Step 1: Identify the sources of paper flowing into your home.

First, on the form, draw a line through any source of paper that doesn't apply to you. Then, use the blank spaces to write in the source of any other paper that comes into your home. Once you have your list completed, tell us in the forum what you discovered. Under the topic called “new sources of paper,” let us know if you discovered any sources of paper that weren't listed in the handout. This will help you and your classmates create a comprehensive list.

This is a sample of the first lesson of the online workshop
Organize Your Paper Clutter. To learn more, visit www.simplify101.com.

paper, paper everywhere!



flowing in

via your mailbox

- * catalogs
- * magazines
- * junk mail
- * bills
- * coupons
- * store circulars
- * invitations
- * event flyers
- * newspapers
- * credit card applications
- * social security statements
- * investment statements + prospectuses
- * insurance cards + policies
- * letters + cards
- * sports + recreation schedules
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____



flowing in

via backpacks

- * sign-up sheets
- * permission slips
- * artwork
- * completed work
- * homework
- * study guides
- * class info / newsletters
- * invitations
- * phone directories
- * order forms / fund raising forms
- * lunch menus
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____



flowing in

via purse or tote bag

- * receipts
- * business cards
- * birthday cards
- * appointments cards
- * carryout menus
- * store coupons
- * work papers
- * volunteer papers
- * church / synagogue directories, offering envelopes + bulletins
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____



flowing in

via shopping bags

- * magazines
- * warranties
- * user manuals
- * business cards
- * store coupons
- * pharmaceutical flyers + info
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____



created

inside your home

- * grocery lists
- * errand lists
- * to-do lists
- * chore lists
- * email print outs
- * web print outs
- * e-zine printouts
- * phone messages
- * magazine clippings
- * art projects
- * emergency info + phone numbers
- * baby sitter instructions
- * pet care / pet sitting instructions
- * project lists + paperwork
- * recipes
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____
- * _____