

The home office - 3 days

Has your office been swallowed up in stuff? The key to unearthing valuable table (and floor) space is to peel back the layers, says Davies.

But if your home office has become more than an office, doing double-duty as a catch-all space for miscellaneous items such as wrapping paper and a tool box, then the first order of the day is to define the space.

DAY 1: DEFINE THE SPACE

If you need your office to take on additional storage duties, that's OK. Start by defining office and storage zones. "Creating and maintaining these boundaries is important to avoid the natural overflow that can happen," says Davies.

Create the storage zone in an existing closet, shelving unit or within a piece of furniture.

Divide the storage area into categories. For example: housewares, electronics, tools and seasonal items.

DAYS 2 AND 3: ORGANIZE

Allow yourself anywhere from seven to 13 hours to organize your home office. But not all at once.

"The maximum time that most people can remain focused on an organizing project is about four hours," says Davies, so you are going to need a lot of breaks.

The following is her six-step process for reclaiming your office.

Step 1: Purge, toss, recycle, shred.

Step 2: Organize paperwork/documents into categories.

Step 3: Filing.

Step 4: Organize supplies. Take an inventory of what you have and cluster like items with like items.

Step 5: Assess and establish systems. This will mean different things to different people. For example, Davies loves magazines but only allows herself enough space to keep one year's worth. At the end of the year, she purges to make room for more.

Others may need a system for keeping on top of mail.

Assess where you need to establish a system or set of rules.

To help you get started, see the tips and rules at top right.

Step 6: Maintenance.



BEFORE: The first step when repurposing an area is to purge it of everything that doesn't suit its new purpose. — SUBMITTED PHOTO



AFTER: Give everything that belongs in the room a home and create systems for filing and storage. Then personalize with things that make the space feel like your own. — SUBMITTED PHOTO

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED ON PAPERWORK

- Divide and conquer by sorting paperwork into manageable piles. Categorized piles are less intimidating and can be tackled one at a time. Sort into the following categories.

Hot: You need to deal with it today: unpaid bills, for example.

To pay: Invoices and upcoming bills to be paid.

To do: These items need action: RSVP to your friend's party, sign your son's permission slip, etc.

To file: Papers that need to be retained for future reference.

To read: Articles, new phone plan information, etc.

- Use the touch-it-once rule to save yourself precious time. This rule forces you to make a decision about where each piece of paper should go. "Don't pick it up and put it down to categorize later," says Davies.

- With a recycling bin and a garbage bag handy, set a timer for 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, take a five-minute break and then start again.

Need professional help?

▶ The cost of hiring a professional organizer varies from \$25-\$125 per hour. Visit the Professional Organizers in Canada website at organizersincanada.com for a directory. Most organizers will offer a 45-minute complimentary consultation either on site, by phone or email.

Junk drawer - 2 hours

Everyone should have a junk drawer — but just one! Take it from chaos to order with these helpful steps:

- Dump out the contents of the drawer. Vacuum and wipe it out.
- Throw out anything that is garbage, broken or you just don't know what it is.
- Organize the "keepers" into small piles of each category.
- Take a picture of the different piles and make a paper template of the drawer size.
- With your picture on your phone and template in hand, find the perfect drawer inserts or small containers.
- Insert new drawer organizers and load.
- Cluster related items together, e.g. candles and matches.
- Try to avoid movement by binding items together with elastics or placing in small bags.