

How to write about being organized

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- *Use the imperative tense*:. Nothing makes you sound like an authority faster than the imperative tense. Sites like Lifehacker, LifeDev, LifeClever, which are aggregated by by LifeRemix, post a dozen imperative-tense posts per day; if you want to be linked by them you'd better sound like an authority.

Now, when it comes to organizing, your experience is dubiously better than anybody else's. I mean, if you're writing about how to implement cubic splines in n dimensions, the odds are good that you are an expert relative to your reader. But every last one of your readers has had to face the task of improving their productivity. Some would think that they should save the imperative tense for the points where they're an authority and use a form like "In my experience, I have found the following to be helpful. . ." when only a step or two ahead of the reader. But Lifehacker and the other thousand sites like it ain't gonna link to you with an attitude like that.

I was visited by a guru the other day. I'm looking for roommates again, and one of the applicants was raised on a relatively impoverished farm in India ("We only had a black-and-white TV."). While most people ask me about the utilities and cleaning schedule, he opted to spend the hour speaking on the importance of good breathing ("The body follows the mind, and the mind follows the breathing."). It was a good strategy, in that he was pretty interesting, and built his own world around him that swept you in. He spoke with comforting authority. I have been more focused on my breathing during my continuing search for a roommate.

- *Use new products to reduce clutter*: The great and wonderful irony of the minimalist lifestyle is that it requires purchasing heaps of stuff. The little foam wedges to put between your wine bottles that replace your wine rack with twenty foam wedges, the designer knife block for your minimalist set of six knives, and of course the binder carousel for all your binders—all of these are essential for the minimalist life. It's hard to be a minimalist traveler if you don't have a laptop bag, a day bag, a backpack, and a carry-on bag—which means you'll need to have a bag box at home.
- *Use new organizational products to reduce organizational clutter*: Just as a simple tupperware under-bed box won't do for holding your clutter, don't expect

people to keep their data organized until they have several competing tools with which to do so.

Your home PC will need an address application, a calendar application, a notes manager, as will your work PC. You will need a telephone with its own address/calendar/notes features, an online address/calendar/notes system for when you're away from your home/work PCs and your telephone, and maybe a system of 3X5 card management for when you want to use a pen. You might also want to buy 43 folders (one for each month, one for each of 31 days), so you have a place to put all your future-relevant papers. The next step is to get a series of syncing systems, which you'll need to check in on daily, to make sure everything is organized. Maybe put it all in a revision-control system just in case.

Bill Gates, a CEO of Microsoft¹ explains that he has three big-ass screens, with several Microsoft products simultaneously running, like a project manager, email, et cetera. Marissa Meyer, a VP at Google², uses Pine.

The consensus among the superproductive—and I know the consensus because I'm writing about it and am therefore an authority—is that they put all their information in one low-tech bin, like a plain old text file. Your haphazard notes, your phone numbers and addresses, your to-do list, are all plain text. From there, just use your text editor's search feature to find the person or detail you need right now.

Some folks threw together a few scripts to help you put your to-do list in a text file³, which I find to be convenient, though it's only marginally easier than just directly editing a text file. I keep things a bit more structured by keeping an entire `notes` directory with a few per-project files; I use `grep` to search them all at once when necessary.

If that's too much effort, maybe buy a notebook.

- *Write about not putting things off*: It seems simple enough, but think of the bullet-points you could mine from this one: act on every email so you can keep your inbox empty, get papers off your desk as quickly as possible, don't put off making a decision if it won't be any different tomorrow, keep an eye on how much time you spend procrastinating by reading about how to not procrastinate.
- *Use bullet points*: Bullet points have a feel of value-for-money. The thesis sentence and essay structure take time to get through before you can get to the take-away final points. People don't have time for such things. [Bonus tip: describe what People want, because distinctions about how different people have different goals only obfuscate what's going on.] Further, one thesis sentence can easily be rewritten as ten bullet points, so readers will feel like they're getting a full page of information, not just

¹http://money.cnn.com/2006/03/30/news/newsmakers/gates.howiwork_fortune/

²http://money.cnn.com/popups/2006/fortune/how_i_work/frameset.exclude.html

³<http://todotxt.com/>

a single concept. Would you rather read the single sentence “productivity enhancers tend to just turn into more clutter” or three bullet points offering lengthy elucidation?