



# PAPER SYSTEMS MAP

## THE THREE SYSTEMS OF SANITY

There are three levels/systems that are vital to address when restoring sanity with paper. They build on each other, so start with level 1 and then move through levels 2 and 3 according to your personality and environment (home, office, etc.). Please note that we are referring to all forms of communication, so a matching system should be created for your e-mails, etc.

### I. FOUNDATION

An understanding of the foundation system is critical to achieving sanity with paper. For simple needs or if the volume is huge, just separating the paper into the following categories will bring about clarity.

**INCOMING:** It is VITAL that all incoming communications have an incoming container and location. In the same way that incoming e-mails land in a specific folder, we need to create a similar container and spot for mail, thoughts, and information from other people. The key elements when establishing a place for incoming communications are—

- The location of the container needs to be close to the place of entry.
- The container size needs to take into account the volume of information coming in.
- The container should ideally be vertical with a large, open entry. If you use a horizontal container, select one that is open and comes with a lid.
- The design of the container is important. It should match the environment and the personality of the user.

### **ACTION:**

- It is absolutely necessary to have a container for the papers that need immediate attention, action, and decision.
- The container for your action file should be visual, vertical, and easy to sort into and work out of.
- Coupled with the container needs to be a system to address how often you take action on the paper.
- Refer to the action system section below for details on these areas.

**READ:** Choose a reading container for fast reading on the go, such as a mesh folder in your briefcase, and a larger container or location for reading while you are sitting, both for personal and work. Keep the following factors in mind:

- The right size of container is critical.
- Location of the container is key.
- There is a difference between "quiet" and "active" reading.
- There needs to be a system for when the reading happens.

**FILE:** In this container we have the items that are now ready to be filed as reference, storage or archive.

## II. ACTION

An action system is the missing element in most homes and offices. The purpose of an action container and system are to restore order to the pile of paper on the dining room table or desktop; it is for handling the papers that require decisions or actions before they are tossed or filed.

**SIMPLE SYSTEM:** This system works best for home managers or business people with seven or fewer general categories and a limited amount of paper. A vertical container with large pocket file folders or a small tabletop container with hanging file folders is ideal. Some examples of typical categories are—

- Bills to pay.
- Calendar items or events.
- Action items (one action folder for each person in the home).
- Other people in the home, such as children.
- Community.
- Projects.
- To file.
- Learning, schooling and classes.
- General reference information (related to future actions).
- Other.

**DETAILED SYSTEM:** Some individuals, homes or offices require a more detailed system. In cases like this, a larger tabletop container with file folders for the months, weeks and days can be beneficial.

It is recommended that a two-hour minimum per week for home and six-hour minimum for office be established for working with your paper.

Here are some ideas:

- Calendar/tickler system
- The **GO System** ([www.thegosystem.com](http://www.thegosystem.com)) is our favorite. Please contact us for details or training.
- General categories in separate folders

## III. REFERENCE, STORAGE AND ARCHIVE

Create the files for reference, storage and archive utilizing one of the systems listed below.

- Freedom Filer ([www.freedomfiler.com](http://www.freedomfiler.com))
- Paper Tiger ([www.thepapertiger.com](http://www.thepapertiger.com))
- Memorabilia system (for both adults and children)
- 4-drawer system (for financial records, warranties, reference and taxes)