

PEP TIP

Cleaning up your computer

The first step towards managing computer files better is to actually make sure that paper systems are organised.

Step one – make sure that your paper systems are uncluttered and well structured:

- throw out old or marginally useful information
- divide remaining paper files into three classes—working, reference, and archives, and arrange the working files to be nearest to you, and the archives to be out of your office, and
- create a subject filing structure for each of these classes of paper by mapping out your key functions.

Step two – go into your computer system and set up the same filing structure for your electronic documents. The closer your paper and electronic systems parallel each other, the easier it will be to remember where to file things and where to search for them.

Step three – If you use email, especially in a corporate environment, you may have hundreds, or in extreme cases, even thousands of messages in your in box. Begin deleting them, starting with the oldest. Messages you want to save should be put into the electronic folders or directories you set up in step two.

Step four – do the same with word processing, spreadsheet and other electronic document files. If you need to recapture space on your hard drive, organise your electronic archive system with the same categories you established in step one and transfer your files off your hard drive to floppies, CDs or another storage medium. Go through your hard drive and also examine if there are any programs you are not using (maybe inherited from a predecessor) and delete or transfer these to another storage medium.

Step five – If you're in a corporate environment, or on the Internet and being swamped with messages, remove yourself from distribution lists that are causing you to be swamped and not providing critical information.

Step six – go through your documentation and clear out manuals for programs you are no longer using.

Step seven – in the future, set up a certain time each day to process both your paper and email. Do it daily, like brushing your teeth—so the "plaque" doesn't build up in your system.

There are a lot of other techniques you could use, and many people benefit from having someone coach them through the process, but these are some tips you can use to get started.