

ORGANIZING

How to organize your printed photos

"A good snapshot keeps a moment from running away."
— Eudora Welty

Since I started working as a professional organizer, I have helped a lot of people organize a huge variety of spaces and items. One common denominator of most of them is that their physical photos are a hot mess. It is not unusual for clients to show me a huge stack of boxes or bins full of photos, or even an entire closet. They are usually overwhelmed and anxious about the sheer volume of photos that need to be organized, they don't know where to start, and they don't have a plan for getting it accomplished. They just keep adding to the pile, hoping that "someday" when they retire, are recovering from surgery, get snowed in one winter, etc., they will have time to tackle this huge project.

Does this sound familiar? Fear not, readers. I'm here to help you get started! This article will give you a simple plan to get started with organizing your printed photos. My next article will address digital photos.

The first thing you need to do is face the fact that "someday" may never come, and that the longer you wait to get started, the worse it's going to get. It's taken years to get into this situation with your photos, and it's not going to be a quick fix. But with determination and a clear game plan, you can be successful.

September is an especially good time to work on your photos. September is Save Your Photos Month, and the Association of Personal Photograph Organizers has a special program called The Summit in which you can sign up to receive emails chock full of helpful free resources. You can sign up and find out more details at this website: <https://www.saveyour-photos.org/>.

STEP 1: Get all of your photos into one location. Gather them all and put them somewhere you can access them during this organizing process without being in the way of normal day-to-day activities. Don't worry for now about putting them into any particular container; your only job at this point is to get them into the same location.

STEP 2: This is the most important step. Remember the phrase "Begin with the



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

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end in mind"? You need to decide what you really want at the end of this process. Fill in this blank: When I am finished organizing all of these photos, what I'd really like to have is _____.

There are so many possible outcomes, and only you know what is ideal for you and your family. There is no right or wrong answer. Really take the time to think about this question, and be realistic about it.

I have spent many, many hours over the years taking photos, printing them, and documenting information about them. As a result, I have most of a bookshelf full of albums. I actually feel like it's overkill at this point. The albums take up a lot of space, are heavy to move, and although they have come in handy for special projects, we don't look at them as often as I had thought. So I recommend going with a plan more limited in scope.

Here are a few photo project ideas that are more limited in scope:

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now is that eventually no one will remember the people in the photos. This would make a good extended family project.

Consider making an album using only school portraits in chronological order. Most of us have extra 5x7 or 8x10 school photos, so this is an easy album to make for each child.

Many families go on a summer vacation every year, and these vacations almost always include photos. Similarly, most families take pictures as they celebrate Christmas or other seasonal holidays. Both of these albums would be relatively easy and could be organized chronologically.

For both of my children, I made a printed photo album at the time of their high school graduation. I gathered the best photos from birth to their high school years to create this album. I had extra copies made for each set of grandparents.

You may not want any physical albums, but just the ability to more easily find the photos you need. Common events that require us to search for photos include high school or college graduation, weddings and funerals. Whether we're setting

up a physical display of photos or creating a slideshow, organizing your photos now will prevent many frustrating hours of searching. For this goal, you'll probably want to choose either organizing chronologically or by person and storing the photos in photo boxes.

STEP 3: Now that you have decided your end goal, it's time to start sorting all of your photos. I'm afraid there is no substitute for going through them one by one. Yes, it's time consuming, but it must be done. I suggest that you just do a few at a time to prevent the feeling of being overwhelmed. Try spending 20 minutes three times a week or so.

Don't put too much pressure on yourself to get it done quickly. You might try combining it with binge watching mindless TV or listening to relaxing music. Work on it with a family member, and have fun reliving some memories and laughing at photos from that awkward middle school stage. Keeping in mind your end goal, quickly sort through your photos. For example, if your goal is to create school portrait albums for each child, you will want to put these into one spot.

If you are starting with a huge amount of photos, you will need to be especially ruthless in purging. The pile of photos you're keeping should be much smaller than the ones you're discarding. It's not illegal to discard photos. Don't guilt yourself into keeping photos that you don't need! Keep in mind how freeing it will be to only keep the best and to be able to enjoy the ones you keep!

Here are some categories that should be discarded:

- Multiple copies of the same photo.
- Blurry or otherwise poor-quality photos.
- Damaged photos.
- Photos in which you can't identify either the person, event or location.

Most photos of animals at a zoo or geographical locations. These photos can be easily found through a web search.

STEP 4: Now that you've sorted through and chosen the best photos, it's time to create your desired project. You can find loads of creative ideas and specific how-to's on Pinterest or other websites. Have fun with it!

Happy organizing!

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