

Right-Brained Filing Systems that Work

Are you one of millions of Americans who consider yourself 'right-brained' or a creative-type? If so, you've probably struggled with standard filing systems and procedures your entire life. Most filing systems used in businesses across the country are set up from a logical or left-brained approach. If you struggle with how to organize your files at work, you may simply be approaching it from the wrong side of your brain.

Creative people are very visual in nature. They tend to look at things from a holistic and somewhat intuitive perspective. Their filing system should match their personality and be set up with visuals in mind. This means finding an approach that makes information about a particular paper or file less detailed. Here are some tips to help you keep your paper in order from a right-brained and visual approach.

Color Coding

By assigning a color to a source of information, you are creating a 'visual short-cut' for right-brained thinkers to take advantage of. Here are some color coding tips:

- Print all drafts on blue (or some other color) paper. The right-brained thinker can quickly glance at the paper and know that it's a document in progress. This thinking short-cut allows a right-brained thinker to make decisions more quickly and not get bogged down in the detail of the report.
- Use colored file folders to your advantage. Assign a different color to different projects, different phases of a project or to different types of information. For example, you might keep all project budget information in a green folder and all schedule information in a purple folder. This allows a right-brained thinker to quickly scan their desktop to find the folder with the information they need.

File Containment

Visual people rarely look inside desk drawers, let alone file cabinets. They look for things within their immediate visual path to find what they need. This is why most right-brained business people I work with never utilize the file drawer located at their desk. Usually it's filled with dusty catalogs, broken staplers or a box of hot cocoa mix. Here are some file containment tips that will help make filing more visual and less frustrating:

- Think vertical. Use step rack filing units to keep regularly accessed files on the desktop and within arms' reach. These units hold approximately ten or more file folders upright and each file folder is slightly higher than the next on a step system. Right-brained thinkers need to be able to see the options in a quick overview format. By avoiding a detailed review of each file and thumbing through a file drawer, a right-brained thinker can find just what they are looking for in seconds and are more likely to re-file documents in a system like this.
- Choose your file folder. There are a lot of choices in file folders filling the shelves of the local office supply stores. Right-brained thinkers may prefer using folders that are clear and see-thru rather than opaque. Again, this makes it easier to quickly assess what is in the folder without having to pick it up or open it.
- Use a free-style filing system. Right-brain thinkers like to move things around and look at them from different directions to get a feel for most things. This means a rigid filing system where the file tabs line up perfectly in a row will not work. In fact, most right-brained thinkers don't even use the tabs that require you to type them or write them out

and then slide them into a plastic tab holder. This is a waste of time to a right-brained thinker and a simple file folder with a write-on tab works more efficiently. Right-brained thinkers need a container for their files that they can re-work at a whim. The step rack is perfect for this because they can assign one step rack to a particular project, but within the individual rack, there doesn't have to be a particular order for the individual folders.

Managing Information

A right-brained thinker rarely uses a list; they think in a more cyclical process, going back and forth between thoughts, moving ahead, then going back and updating another point. Right-brain thinkers tend to use sticky notes for jotting down to-dos or scribbling a note on a nearby piece of paper. Here are some tips on managing this information vertically and visually:

- Create a sticky note corral. Designate a specific area for all sticky notes to be posted within the workstation or office. If necessary, use color coded sticky notes to differentiate to-dos from contact names or numbers, etc.. By creating a designated (and limited) space for the sticky notes to reside, a right-brained thinker will use the sticky note approach to move around thoughts or ideas and re-orient them when necessary. When a sticky note is completed, it goes right into the trash.
- Install a marker board. Many right-brained thinkers enjoy this method of conveying information. They can write big or small, in colors or erase ideas on a whim. Keep the marker board within arms' reach of the phone, computer and desk chair for quick thoughts.

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Resouce: 'Organizing for Dummies' by Eileen Roth & Elizabeth Miles & 'Organizing from the inside out' by Julie Morgenstern