

ORGANIZING FOR SUCCESS

by
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Teachers, how many times have you found students in your classroom who can't find their homework, the worksheet just handed out or notices to their parents that you thought were sent home only to find that they are still in your students' backpacks or desks? Does this happen in your classroom? Every year there are students that need to be taught how to get organized.

Do your students have a system for filing their papers? Many have binders but don't know how to use them or why. When they are explicitly taught the "why" and "how to do it", their papers stop getting lost and start getting turned in. What system works best? It depends on the student, their learning style and individuality.

Binders, Notebooks, Accordion Files:

One system is the 3-ring binder. The first item in the very front of the binder needs to be their class schedule placed in a sheet protector. This is followed by the planner (mentioned below). Next, a binder needs to have dividers labeled for each subject. The tabs can match the same color as the book covers for each subject. The color will trigger the thought that they go together. Each subject can have a poly pocket with one side for papers to DO and one for papers DONE, ready to turn in the next day. Notebook paper can be placed in each section, ready to go with extra paper located in the back of the binder. Each subject can be further divided if need be and labeled: notes, tests, handouts, worksheets. All papers are placed in the binder. It is the student's portable filing cabinet. At any moment you can ask a student to pull out a previous paper and he can actually find it. Papers stay in the binder until no longer needed. Then the papers can be transferred to a file folder at home if deemed important enough to save for future reference.

If a binder is not handy for organizing homework, one can use a spiral bound notebook that has poly pockets for each subject. This is labeled the same way, one side for papers to DO and one side for papers already DONE. This can be color coordinated as well.

Another system is the accordion file. It needs to have 7 or 13 subject's files in it, whichever matches the number of classes the student is taking. It needs to be sturdy and able to close. It should be set up the same as the binder. In front is the class schedule and planner, followed by the homework to DO section and the homework DONE section, and each class subject. The last section should hold extra paper.

Other Organizing Ideas:

Supplies need to be easy to locate. A pencil pouch can be filled with all classroom supplies you require: pencils, pens, erasers, highlighters, white out, small stapler, ruler, sticky notes. This can be placed in the front of the binder or in the backpack in the front where it would be easy to find. Extra paper can be placed in the back of the binder or can be put in a vinyl pouch just behind the pencil pouch. On-going projects can be placed in a poly envelope or a separate binder with pockets so all papers and notes can be found in one place.

Planners:

Using a planner is very important. This teaches the student time management and how to plan ahead. Model how to fill them in each day. Check off assignments as they are completed. Plan ahead and let students know when projects or tests are due. Then have them learn to work from the end date and figure out how far ahead to study for tests or help them break a project down into component parts that can be completed along the way to finishing the overall project. This instills a real sense of pride. Attainable goals and success will keep them on track.

After trying out the new system for awhile, students will see less lost or missing papers and grades will go up. This is a great time to encourage them and praise them for good organization. If however they get off track they can get right back on again if the teacher points out the lapse and reminds the students to go back to their organizer system. It will take time for it to become automatic. Having binder checks along the way will help to assess if they are masters of their new organization system. Having parents involved in checking their planners and binders as well will help reinforce the importance of this new skill. It will be used for a life-time. Teachers that take the time to teach organizational skills will be helping their students build confidence, organization, and improved grades. These very important skills will help them during their school years as well as throughout their lives.