

Infobriefings® on Index Cards

A Guide for the
Reluctant Organizer™

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Benefits of Index Cards

I'm a compulsive organizer. But, not everyone shares my enthusiasm. Some people are even reluctant organizers, are organizing-challenged. Why bother getting organized? To take control of your life, to stop wasting your time, energy, money.

Putting it in writing is crucial to successful organizing. It frees your mind to be creative, to focus on what's important. No more worrying about remembering. You don't need a perfect memory. You don't need a fancy computer system, elaborate technology and techniques either. What do you need?

You need index cards! The benefits are huge. Index cards are:

- inexpensive, no costly wastage when (easily) discarded
- widely available in diverse types, customizable sizes (cut)
- available as personalized and specialized cards
- flexible, not flimsy, not easily torn or damaged
- not subject to mechanical, electrical, battery failure
- portable, compact, fit in pockets, go in and out quickly
- usable any place, any time, with any pen or pencil
- amenable to fast input, even under diverse lighting
- suitable for text (any language) and graphics (any type)
- usable with handwritten or computer-generated content
- complementary and compatible with other systems
- easily sorted, organized, exchanged, mailed, stored
- adaptable to multiple, varied uses
- useful for exchange of ideas with ease and informality
- characterized by concise writing due to their small size
- well-suited to identifying gaps in information
- scalable (get more) and upgradeable (add designs, etc.)
- interactive, tactile, increasing users' level of involvement

Index cards do have some disadvantages. But, they're rarely insurmountable. Look at the table below about index cards and devices (computers, PDAs).

Disadvantage	So What?
Handwriting affects readability	Handwriting can affect PDAs
Rearrangement on card is tricky	One idea per card forces focus
Computer search is lacking	Users can easily scan and skim
Sharing is harder than digitally	Photocopying allows sharing
There's no edit or undo button	Eraser, liquid paper, labels work
Spellcheck doesn't exist	Proofing is needed for all work
Cards hold less information	Memory can expand (add cards)
Piles of cards can be bulky	Cards can fit in small places
Dropped cards get disordered	Numbering allows reordering
Multiple projects can confuse	Color-coding keeps separate
Cards don't play music/games	Cards hold notation and games
Email or surfing isn't possible	Cards don't make pesky beeps
Cards don't sync with PDAs	Data can be entered manually
Data isn't password-protected	Personal shorthand is secure
Automatic backup isn't possible	Photocopies/scans offer backup
Loss of cards means loss of data	Cards don't suffer crashes
Spills, dog bites harm cards	Sleeves/containers reduce harm
Ink and graphite cause damage	Protectors help control messes
Cards cause paper cuts, bleeding	Careful handling avoids injury
Low-tech cards lack snob appeal	High-tech tools risk poverty

Start using index cards today. I'm sure you have at least a few in your desk at work or in a drawer at home. No matter how overwhelming the task seems at first, this guide can help you. Use the multiple solutions to get organized, to gain control.

Skim this book for an overview. Notice the hundreds of short, easy-to-implement possibilities. Then, read in more depth.

Use the questions in the next section to guide you to the best choices for you to build your index card system. Consider:

- Why you're organizing with index cards
- What types of index cards are available
- How you can adapt cards to meet your needs
- How index cards can be arranged
- What storage options are possible
- Which methods work for transporting index cards
- How your index cards can be protected

After you've chosen the basics for your system, look through the multitude of tips. Decide on one area, one topic to tackle first. Keep this guide handy to help implement your system.

Organize in small chunks—much less intimidating. Allot 10 to 15 minutes each day to get organized with index cards. Keep a supply with you—ready for whatever happens. Create a checklist in a few spare moments. Brainstorm a new project on an index card. Try different methods. See what you like, what works, as well as what doesn't meet your needs. That's why I've presented options—one size definitely does not fit all.

Whatever methods you use, whatever index card system you create—KISS—Keep it simple, Stupid/Sweetie. And, have some fun, too. Play around with different types of index cards, different uses. Get creative. Enjoy organizing with index cards!