

20. Organization of Space

... of supplies, papers, assignments, and classroom information

Have you ever had the “where-did-I-put-that-important-form?” syndrome?

The teacher was sure she had put the list of marks in her Marks folder, but now it simply wasn't there. Panic mounted as she searched frantically through every drawer of her desk and every file folder in her cabinet. She needed those marks. She hadn't recorded them yet! Just when she was about to give up, the missing sheet of paper slipped off her plan book and fluttered to the floor. Saved! This time!

Ten Ways to Organize Space

1. Have specific places for everything. Use bins, colored folders, and labelled boxes for everything from books and papers to “show and tell” collections. Shoe caddies and pocket charts make excellent miscellaneous organizers.
2. Cut the clutter. Keep your desk free of piles of paper. Maximize workspace.
3. Avoid hoarding old lesson plans and materials. Discard any individual lessons or worksheets that have not been used in six months or units that have not been used in a year.
4. Keep a separate file folder for each student; put anything pertaining to the student in it immediately. Cull the files monthly.
5. Keep a personal bulletin board adjacent to your desk. Tack all contents from your mailbox or principal there as soon as you get them. Go through these weekly, culling or responding to them.
6. Assign students to organize and clean specific parts of the room on a regular basis.
7. Use a system of In/Out folders for assignments. Choose a separate color for each subject and keep the folders on a shelf or table (*not* on your desk). Consistently refuse to accept assignments in any other place.
8. Assign a particular place in the room where all materials for the day, such as worksheets and handouts, will be kept. At the end of each day, remove extras and put materials there for the next day.
9. Clean the interior of your car frequently. (Teachers tend to keep *everything* in the back seat or trunk.) Less clutter equals less stress.
10. Clean out your purse or briefcase regularly. Again, less clutter equals less stress.

21. Organization of Time

... including teaching and personal commitments

How often have you thought you'd never finish all of the required curriculum in any given year?

Mr. Parker was frazzled. It was the beginning of June. Already the students were in "summer mode" and he still had a huge chunk of curriculum to cover. He had to make a decision: skip most of the remaining curriculum, or try to force-feed it to the students in three weeks. Suddenly he thought about the past several years, and unhappily realized he faced the same conundrum every June. He wondered if all teachers were like him, but was too embarrassed to ask.

Ten Ways to Organize Time

1. Keep a personal timetable, organizer, or daily planner that you carry with you at all time. Log *everything*, including doctor appointments, upcoming school events, deadlines, and meetings.
2. Write *everything* on a large desk calendar—meetings, supervision responsibilities, upcoming school activities.
3. Establish routines for specific daily activities, such as taking attendance and preparing for recess. They will become organized habits.
4. Time everyday class activities, such as moving from one place in the school to another. Inform the students of how long they have to complete the move; then, ask them to try shortening it by a few seconds.
5. Practise making one activity serve two or more purposes. For example, dismiss students at recess by having each answer a quick question or repeat an important fact.
6. Always have instant activities ready for those difficult moments when work is finished, but there are still so many minutes until the bell. (See "Instant Activities," next page.)
7. Do your best to ensure that directions and instructions are succinct and clear. (See Providing Clear Directions, page 55.)
8. Consistently arrive at school early enough to prepare for the day. Teachers who arrive at the last minute are notoriously less effective.
9. Be a list maker. Prioritize the to-do items and check off daily what you have accomplished. (Scan your old lists when you feel you haven't accomplished anything!)
10. Avoid exceeding time guidelines you set for yourself. For example, if you allow yourself one hour for marking, but are not finished in that time, stop anyway and complete the marking in another self-allotted period.

Instant Activities

- Simple games such as Simon Says
- Word searches, puzzles, or mazes
- **Twenty Questions:** Keep a set of file cards with either trivia or learned fact questions in your desk.
- **Finger Facts:** In pairs or small groups, students shake closed fists three times, then open to reveal some fingers, the total number of fingers shown to equal a number called out by the teacher.
- **The Grand Old Duke of York** (a quick stand-up-sit-down):
*The Grand Old Duke of York,
He had ten thousand men.
He marched them UP to the top of the hill,
and he marched them DOWN again.
And when they were UP they were up.
And when they were DOWN they were down.
And when they were only HALFWAY UP,
they were neither UP nor DOWN.*
- **Partner Word Toss:** After the teacher provides a prompt, such as “fruits” or “items of clothing,” students toss related words back and forth, until one falters.
- **Name Game:** The class takes turns saying each student’s name with an accompanying adjective, for example, Pretty Patty. Or, students could say each name with an appropriate phrase: Good-at-math Patty.
- **Ice Cube Dance:** Everyone stands and for thirty seconds imagines that an ice cube has been dropped down his or her neck.
- **The Glad Game:** In small groups, students take turns responding to a sentence provided by the teacher and completing the phrase *I am glad ...* For example, the teacher says, “Tomorrow is Friday,” and students reply, “I am glad it’s the last day of school,” “I am glad we get gym tomorrow,” “I am glad my family is going to the zoo on Saturday.”
- **Thunderstorm:** Students rub their hands together for a few seconds, then click their fingers, clap lightly, clap more energetically, and finally rapidly hit their desks and stamp their feet. They reverse the actions to illustrate a storm leaving.
- **Alphabet Game:** Using the alphabet in sequence, students talk to a neighbor, with each piece of dialogue beginning with a word that starts with the next letter in sequence. Example: “**A** bug was on my lunch.” “**B**ut you didn’t eat it, did you?” “**C**ould you eat a bug?”

22. Organization of Mind

... to approach each task with a clear head

How often have you felt your head was about to burst with all the information, things to do, and student needs racing through your brain in a never-ending loop?

“You look terrible,” Mr. Ludwick told the other teacher monitoring the hall with him.

“Thanks,” was the mumbled reply. “Can’t sleep.”

“You sick?” Mr. Ludwick asked.

“Na—just too much stuff in my mind. You know how it is.”

“Actually, I don’t,” Mr. Ludwick said. “I sleep like a baby.”

“What’s your secret?” the colleague yawned.

“I just tell myself as I get into bed that I’ll think of all that stuff in the morning. It works for me.”

“And then do you think of it in the morning?”

Mr. Ludwick smiled. “What difference does it make?” he said. “I get a good night’s sleep.”

Ten Ways to Organize Your Mind

1. Do your best to focus on one thing at a time, even if you are multi-tasking. Do this by purposefully forcing away thoughts of anything but the immediate task.
2. Use the “I’ll-think-about-it-later” strategy. When you find many thoughts bombarding your brain, pick one, and tell yourself you’ll think about the others in ten minutes (or half an hour or “later”).
3. Sing. Join a choir or glee club or simply sing along with your car radio or a CD at home. Singing forces the mind to relax and release random thoughts.
4. Make notes diligently. When thoughts pop into your head, jot them down instead of allowing them to clutter your mind.
5. Experiment with pre-sleep techniques for uncluttering the active mind to find one that works for you. (See next page.)
6. If you wake during the night and a cluttered mind prevents you from returning to sleep, get up, have a warm drink (without caffeine), read something “light” for 15–20 minutes, then return to bed.
7. Practise “active listening,” where you focus all your attention on the speaker to internalize and really *hear* what is being said.
8. During the day, practise simple at-your-desk exercises whenever you feel mind clutter bogging you down. (See next page.)
9. Go for a *brisk* walk, even just around the school, and focus on the environment.
10. Take a class in yoga, tai chi, or pilates and attend regularly.

Uncluttering the Mind

Getting Ready to Sleep

- Take a warm bath (not a shower) at the same time nightly.
- When you get into bed, take a series of three to ten deep breaths, holding each for as long as possible and releasing slowly.
- Avoid sugar or caffeine for two to three hours before bedtime.
- Try to go to bed at about the same time every night.
- Invest in a night-time eye mask. When worn, a mask provides a sense of peace and quiet.
- Some people relax with a glass of wine before bed. One glass serves the purpose.
- Try a warm milk drink, preferably not chocolate.
- If you understand yoga, practise a couple of the relaxation stretches before getting into bed. The “seated forward bend” (rag-doll slouch) or the “child’s pose” work well.
- Read a book for pleasure just before retiring.

Relaxing the Body

All of these exercises can be done seated at your desk or even in your car. Often, when the mind is racing, the body is also tense. By reducing the physical tension even a little, the overactive head seems better able to relax. At the very least, the exercises will serve as an effective, temporary distraction.

- To reduce neck tension: On an exhalation, turn your head as far to one side as possible and look down over your shoulder. Hold for a few seconds. Inhale as you return to centre and repeat for other side.
- To reduce leg tension: Extend one leg away from body, foot flexed. On an exhalation, lean as far toward extended leg as possible and hold.
- To reduce anxiety: On an exhalation, slump forward onto your knees, rag-doll fashion, and hold.
- To release tension in back: Reach one arm down to the floor while the other stretches to the ceiling. Hold for twenty seconds.
- To reduce upper back fatigue: Squeeze shoulder blades as close together (behind you) as possible. Hold for five seconds. Pull shoulders as close to each other in the front as possible. Hold for five seconds. Repeat.
- To release back tension: Clasp hands in front, then push arms away from the body while inverting the hands (palms facing away from you). Hold.
- To reduce neck tension and headaches: Gently roll the head in a half circle from one side to the other with chin down to chest in mid-arc. Do not drop the head back.
- To reduce lower back stress: Contract abdominal muscles (pull belly button to backbone and then “down” to tailbone) and hold for as long as possible.
- To reduce anxiety: Close eyes and breathe in deeply (expand stomach, raise diaphragm). Hold for five seconds. Gently exhale through mouth, attempting to remove *all* residual air from lungs. (*Note:* If you cough, that’s good!) Repeat several times. Use imagery to visualize yourself inflating and deflating like a balloon, and blowing out all stress on the exhalations.