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Paper Clarity Chart

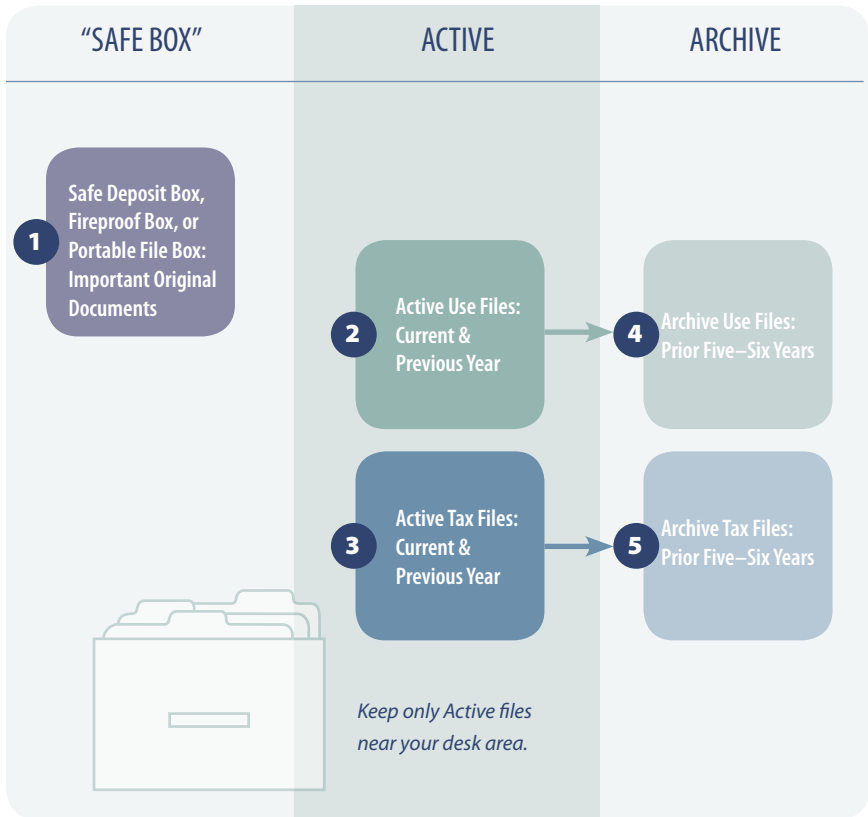
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A common mistake that people make is turning their work space into a storage bin. It is important to keep the files you regularly use (Active) separate from older files (Archive) so that you don't get buried in the past. As Active files become Archive files, shift the files with each passing year into a storage area away from your desk. Since space is often an issue, learning to properly let go of documents helps keep your work area clear, and creates room for what you do need to store from previous years.



CASH	
Document	Duration
ATM receipts	Check receipt at ATM. Record in checkbook. Toss after reconciling bank statement each month.
Bank statements (debit card)	Shred each year after filing taxes. Only keep year-end statement for seven years.
Cancelled checks (check images on statement)	Shred each year after filing taxes, except keep checks for large purchases until end of warranty, for donations over \$250, and those that support claimed deductions with tax return.
Deposit slips	Keep until cleared on bank statement.
Donation receipts	Keep in tax file.

Bill Paying

When bills arrive, put them—unopened—together in one place off your desk so you have more desk space to work. Contact companies that you get regular bills from to arrange bill arrivals around the same time each month. Build a routine to pay bills only one or two days per month. This way you don't have to handle your bills every day, which saves time, prevents late charges, and reduces worry.

Receipts

You do not need to take most receipts home with you. Get in the habit of saying to the cashier, "I don't need a receipt, thank you". Only take a receipt for big ticket items, potential returns, when tracking cash expenses, or for taxes. Put the receipt in your wallet (not your shopping bag). Then put receipts in one place near your desk. After you reconcile your bank statement, only file the receipts you need for taxes or big ticket items, for example. You have backup: your bank and credit card statements, especially if you use a debit card instead of cash.

Donations

Charities must be officially recognized by the government for you to receive a tax write-off. A charity's status can be found on its website or on www.Guidestar.org. Put checks instead of cash in donation baskets so you have a record for taxes or set up automatic withdrawal with the charity that you give to regularly. Clothing value is now limited to the price paid by used clothing stores in your area. You need an appraisal for items valued greater than \$500. Charities are required to give you a donation form on letterhead only for donations of \$250 and more. You need proof of donation (check or receipts). To find current values of household donations, go to www.SalvationArmy.com.
