



ESL Podcast 468 – Organizing Your Office

GLOSSARY

disorganized – messy and being very difficult to find things; with things not grouped by type, so that one doesn't know where things are

* She owns hundreds of CDs, but they're very disorganized, so she can never find the ones she wants to listen to.

to crack down – to become very strict; to begin to make someone follow rules

* The police used to just give people a warning when they drove too fast, but now, the department is cracking down and giving people very expensive tickets.

pack rat – a person who saves everything and never wants to throw things away, even if they aren't very useful anymore

* What a pack rat! His house is filled with old papers, like movie tickets from three years ago and newspapers dating back to the early 1990s!

to turn over a new leaf – to have a new beginning; to begin a new phase in one's life, usually to try to change one's habits and do something better

* Each year, on January 1st, she says she wants to turn over a new leaf and start exercising, but she never goes to the gym for more than a few weeks.

to accumulate – to increase in quantity over a period of time in a particular place; to add more and more of something to a given space

* A lot of snow accumulated around our house last winter.

to put (one's) mind to (something) – to commit to something; to decide that one will do something, especially if it is difficult or unpleasant

* Playing the violin can be difficult, but if you put your mind to it, I'm sure you can succeed.

clutter – a mess; many things that are in an area where they do not belong and need to be put away

* There's so much clutter on the floor that we can't even walk into our teenage son's room!

pile – a group of many objects that are on top of each other

* They threw their dirty white clothes into one pile, and their other dirty clothes into another pile.

file – a group of papers related to a particular project or client, usually kept together in a folder

* Do you have the file for our most recent sale to the Acme Corporation?



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to sort – to organize objects, grouping them by size, type, age, color, or some other characteristic

* He sorted his unwanted clothes into three groups: too small, too old, and too ugly.

to purge – to throw something away; to get rid of something; to remove or destroy something

* When he started his new diet, he purged his kitchen of all foods with added sugar, fat, or salt.

filing cabinet – a piece of furniture made of metal or wood with large drawers that can be locked and are designed so that special folders hang from the top to hold files

* This filing cabinet has all our files for the past year. Anything older is sent to storage.

to make room for (something) – to make space for something; to move one's things so that something else can be put in its place

* They had to sell some of their office furniture to make room for the new baby in their small apartment.

to triage – to decide which things are most important and must be handled immediately, and which ones are less important and can be handled later

* When the bus hit a large truck, many people needed medical care, so the nurses had to triage them.

overflowing – with too much of something, so that it cannot all be held inside a box or another container

* Whenever it rains a lot, the swimming pool in their backyard starts overflowing.

to label – to put a small piece of paper with a written description onto another object, so that it is easy to know what that object is

* Before you put food in the freezer, please label it with today's date.

essential – very important; critical

* The ability to work calmly in stressful situations is essential for a surgeon.

to-do list – a piece of paper where one has written down the things that one needs to do

* Each morning, she makes a to-do list, and then draws lines through each item as she finishes them during the day.



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task – something that one must do, especially when it is part of a large project
* If we're going to clean the kitchen, our first task is to wash the dishes. Then we can clean the counters and floors.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these things belongs in a filing cabinet?
 - a) A new leaf.
 - b) Files.
 - c) An inbox.
2. What does he need to purge?
 - a) All the things that are essential.
 - b) All the papers on his desk.
 - c) All the old files.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

file

The word "file," in this podcast, means a group of papers related to a particular project or client, usually kept together in a folder: "After he pays the bills, he puts them in files – one for each company." The verb "to file" means to put things into folders so that one can find them easily later: "Where did you file the papers that were on my desk?" The phrase "to file (one's nails)" means to rub a rough piece of heavy paper or metal against one's fingernails to make them shorter and/or to change the shape of them: "She filed her nails and then painted them bright red." The verb "to file" can also mean to give an official form or other document to an agency or organization: "When did you file your taxes last year?"

to label

In this podcast, the verb "to label" means to put a small piece of paper with a written description onto another object, so that it is easy to know what that object is: "She labeled all her children's school supplies with a sticker that said: 'Property of Melina'." The phrase "to label (someone) as (something)" means to describe someone in a way that may not be true: "As a child, he was always labeled as a poor student, but the truth was that he just needed glasses." When talking about clothing, a "label" is the small piece of fabric sewn on the inside that has the name of the manufacturer and washing instructions: "According to the label, this sweater needs to be washed by hand."



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CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, many businesspeople use “PDAs” (personal digital assistants) or other “electronic organizers” (small computers with calendars and lists) to help them “manage their time” (know what they need to do and when in order to meet deadlines and be successful). But some people still prefer to manage their time “on paper” (in writing).

The FranklinCovey company makes a popular “planner” (a special book with calendars and other sections) called the Franklin Planner. The planner is named after Benjamin Franklin, who was a very famous early American who kept a small book with all the information he needed. Today, the Franklin Planner is a “ring binder” (a special book-like cover that has metal rings that open and close to hold papers inside) with many “loose-leaf pages” (individual pieces of paper that are not connected to each other). Each page might be a calendar with one day, week, or month. People use those pages to write down important events and appointments.

These types of planners also include an “address book,” where people can write down “contact information” (phone number, email address, mailing address) for the people and organizations they need to communicate with. Other sections of the planners include a place to make to-do lists, “ledgers” (lined rows and columns) for tracking expenses, “diary” (a book where people write their private thoughts and descriptions of their day) pages, and more.

Many other companies sell similar planners under different names. “Generically,” (referring to the general name for a product, not a brand name) these are known as “day planners.” Some people thought that day planners would disappear as computers became more common, but they “remain” (are still) popular because they are small and “portable” (can be moved easily from place to place).

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 468: Organizing Your Office.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 468. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. You can go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode, which will help you improve your English even faster – and also make you a little better looking!

This episode is a story about organizing your office. If you are a “messy” person, a person who has things in a disorganized way, this will be a good episode for you. You'll learn some vocabulary about organizing yourself. Let's get started.

[start of story]

I have a very disorganized office. My co-workers have been making jokes about my office for a long time, and my boss finally cracked down on me. He told me: “Get the office organized by Friday – no excuses!” What choice did I have?

I've always been a pack rat. I hate to throw anything out, but I was determined to turn over a new leaf. It's true I've worked in the same office for four years and have accumulated a lot of paper, but if I put my mind to it, I'm sure I could get rid of all of the clutter.

There are piles of paper and files all over my desk and sorting them out won't be easy. All I need to do, though, is to purge my filing cabinets of old files to make room for new ones. I also need to triage the papers on my desk, on the floor, and in my overflowing inbox. Then, I only need to make new files and label them. Finally, I'll only keep those things on my desk that are essential and get rid of anything that isn't.

That's a pretty good plan, don't you think? I've already made a to-do list. Now all I need to do is start on those tasks!

[end of story]

My story begins by saying, “I have a very disorganized office.” Something that is “disorganized” is something that is not organized, when you don't know where



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everything is that you own; things are very messy. I say that my co-workers have been making jokes about my office for a long time, and my boss finally cracked down on me. “To crack down on (someone)” is a phrasal expression meaning to be very strict, to make someone follow every single rule. “To crack down” means to suddenly enforce a law that perhaps was not enforced before. When the police crack down on protesters, they may be violent with them in order to get them to stop, arresting them and so forth. It can be both a noun and a verb: a “crackdown” could be a noun; “to crack down” is the verb, of course.

In this case, my boss cracked down on me, he made me follow the rules. He told me: “Get the office organized by Friday – no excuses!” meaning I will not accept any excuses – any reasons why your office is not organized. I say, “What choice did I have (what else could I do)?” I then say that I’ve always been a pack rat. The expression “pack (pack) rat (rat)” refers to someone who saves everything, who never throws things away, even when those things are not useful anymore. “I hate to throw anything out,” I say, “but I was determined to turn over a new leaf.” I was determined – I had decided to turn over a new leaf. “To turn over a new leaf” (leaf) means to have a new beginning, to change your habits and do something in a completely different way.

Well, I say I’m going to turn over a new leaf; I also say it’s true that I’ve worked in the same office for four years and have accumulated a lot of paper. “To accumulate” means to increase the quantity of something over a period of time, usually in a specific place, to add more of something in a given place. If you say, “I’ve accumulated a lot of old newspapers on my dining room table,” they have increased, there are more and more of them; I need to do something about them, such as throw them out. I say that if I put my mind to it, I’m sure I could get rid of all of the clutter. “To put your mind to (something)” is an expression that means to commit to something, to decide that you are going to do it, no excuses, even if it’s difficult. “Clutter” (clutter) is a mess, many things that are not where they should be. Many of us have clutter in our closets; they are full of things that are not very well organized, things that often don’t belong there.

I say that there are piles of paper and files all over my desk. A “pile of (something)” is a group of many objects, one on top of the other. You could have a pile of papers, many papers on top of each other; you could have a pile of books, one book on top of another. “Files” are holders for a group of papers, usually about a particular topic or a particular organization or person – customer, for example. We all, in an office, have files, places where we keep papers about a similar topic together.



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I say that there are piles of paper and files all over my desk and sorting them out won't be easy. "To sort (something) out" means to organize them. You can also just say "to sort." "To sort" usually means putting things in order, in the proper sequence. "To sort things out," however, has a little more general meaning, meaning to organize things to, to clarify, to make a situation easier to understand or to resolve differences among people about something. Here, it just means to organize these piles of paper and files.

I say, "All I need to do is to purge my filing cabinets of old files." "To purge" (purge) means to get rid of something, to throw something away, to remove something. I'm going to purge my filing cabinets. A "cabinet," here, is a piece of furniture; a "filing cabinet" usually is made of metal or wood and has large drawers where you put the individual files. I have filing cabinets of old files, if I purge them – if I get rid of some of them, I'll be able to make room for new ones. "To make room for (something)" means to make space available for something, to move something out so that you can put something else in there.

I say, "I also need to triage the papers on my desk." "To triage" (triage) means to decide which is the most important thing: what you have to do right now, what you have to do later, and so forth. Doctors, if they are in a medical emergency at a hospital and they have dozens of people coming – lots of patients with injuries after an accident, for example – they may have to perform a triage. They have to triage – separate the patients that are most sick from those that can wait a little. In this case, I'm triaging the papers; I'm sorting them to get the most important ones first. I also have an overflowing inbox. An "inbox" can be part of your email program, where you first see your messages. An "inbox" can also be a small box where you put papers that you need to work on. Is something is "overflowing," we mean that there's too much of it so that the container, in this case the box, is too small because you have so many papers and files. It's overflowing.

"Then," I say, "I only need to make new files and label them." "To label" (label) means to put a small piece of paper with a written description onto an object so that you know what that object is. "To label your files" means to write on the top of the file what is inside of this file so you can find it easily. "Label" has a couple of different meanings in English however, so take a look at that Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

I say that finally, I'll only keep those things on my desk that are essential and get rid of anything that isn't. "Essential" means very important, the most important, critical. I'm going to only keep the most important things – the essential things, and get rid of anything that isn't essential. "That's a pretty good plan, don't you think?" I ask, "I've already made a to-do list." A "to-do list" is a piece of paper



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where you write down all of the things that you have to do. I say that all I need now is to start on those tasks. A “task” is something that you have to do; it’s an action, it’s an activity. You can’t just write down a list of your tasks, you actually have to do them.

Now let’s listen to the story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

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That’s a pretty good plan, don’t you think? I’ve already made a to-do list. Now all I need to do is start on those tasks!

[end of story]

Our script for this episode was written by someone with no clutter on her desk, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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