

# MONEY SMART FOR A HEAD START

## Organizing Your Finances



Feeling swamped by paperwork? Managing money, paying bills, and keeping track of documents can be overwhelming. Take a moment to think about your current system. What's working well—and what's not?

### Keep It Simple

The best system is one that fits your busy life. Ask yourself:

- Do I have a safe place for important papers?
- Can I pay bills on time without stress?
- Is it easy to find receipts, tax forms, insurance documents, and other records?

A simple, organized approach to managing your finances can save you time, reduce stress, and even help you save money. Plus, it frees up more time for the things you enjoy.

### Getting Started: Tidy Up Your Money Routine

Do bills sometimes slip through the cracks? Is your kitchen counter buried in paper clutter? Even a solid system can use a little fine-tuning. Here are three small changes that can make a big difference:

- **Time:** Make It Manageable – Money tasks don't have to take hours. Try breaking them into bite-sized chunks:
  - Set aside 10 minutes every few days or an hour once a week
  - Use that time to sort mail, pay a bill or two, or check your bank balance

- A little consistency goes a long way.
- **Space:** Create a Paper Zone – Do you have a go-to spot for important papers? If not, bills can easily get lost under junk mail or your child's latest masterpiece. Try:
  - A labeled folder or tray
  - A small basket near where you open mail
  - Keeping things in one place helps you stay on top of deadlines.
- **Storage:** Keep What Matters – Where do you store papers you need to keep? It doesn't have to be fancy:
  - A plastic bin, a drawer, or even a shoebox will work
  - Just make sure it's labeled and organized
  - The goal is to make it easy to find what you need—when you need it.

Small steps = big peace of mind. Start with one change this week and build from there!



Extension

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## Tame the Paper Pile

Mail, school forms, bills—paper adds up fast. Here's how to stay ahead of the clutter and keep your household running smoothly.

## Create a Paper Landing Zone

Designate a spot for incoming papers—mail, school forms, receipts, and more. A tray, basket, or folder near the door or kitchen works well.

- Sort every day or two.
- Recycle or shred what you do not need.
- Act on important items like permission slips or time-sensitive mail right away—or set a weekly time to handle them.

## Stay on Top of Bills

Avoid late fees and lost bills with a simple system:

- Pick a visible spot to keep bills—on the fridge, in a basket, or another place you check daily.
- Pay right away if possible. If not, schedule a weekly time to take care of them.

## Automate When You Can

Many people save time and money by setting up automatic payments through their bank.

This helps avoid:

- Late fees, missed due dates, extra trips to the post office

Just make sure your account has enough funds when the payment is due. Not sure how to set it up? Contact your bank for help.

## Set Reminders that Work for You

For bills that cannot be automated, use reminders: Mark due dates on a calendar, set alerts on your phone or computer, use a bill tracker app. Choose a method that fits your routine—and stick with it!

**Caution:** Paying bills online is best done at home on a protected computer. Avoid banking on a public computer or devices connected through public wireless networks.

Visit our online course, Money Matters, and select the "Staying Organized" for more information.  
<https://finances.extension.wisc.edu/programs/money-matters/>

## To \$um it up

- \$ Late fees add up.** Paying bills on time saves money and helps build a good credit rating.
- \$ Don't get caught by surprise:** For quarterly or annual expenses like insurance, property taxes, or license renewals, set aside money from each paycheck and use reminders to stay on track.
- \$ Trouble keeping up?** If you are struggling to pay bills on time—whether it is due to forgetfulness or tight finances—help is available. Contact your local UW-Madison Extension office for personalized tips and support on managing your money.

## Want to Learn More?

- Visit our website for more financial education resources. <https://finances.extension.wisc.edu>
- Contact your local Extension Educator: <https://counties.extension.wisc.edu>
- For help with balancing your monthly spending plan, contact the nonprofit National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC) at <https://www.nfcc.org> or 800.388.2227.