

what your stuff says about you

Target your clutter-accumulating weaknesses with this simple quiz and discover easy strategies to get you organized for good!

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CLUTTER—WE ALL HAVE IT. We all hold on to things we should let go, and we have different reasons for doing so. New York City-based professional organizer Melissa Picheny helps clients make clutter-busting decisions as she walks them through the process of getting organized. Take her quiz to discover the “why” behind your own piles of clutter, and find ways to say good-bye to the stress of too much stuff.

1. I just found a pile of cards from last year’s birthday. I:

- a. Stash them with other cards from previous years.
- b. Am pretty sure I had another pile like that somewhere.
- c. Check the envelopes to make sure I have the contact info.
- d. Put them on my desk to deal with later.

2. Spring is just around the corner, and the thought of “spring cleaning” makes me think:

- a. I should wait until summer or maybe fall to clear some things out.
- b. Oh, NO, it’s spring already!
- c. Hooray! I can use the coupon I saved to buy one/get one free on gardening supplies.
- d. I really need to switch out my wardrobe, but first I have to...

3. I’ve decided to throw a last-minute dinner party for close friends and want to get the house ready. I:

- a. Find the extra leaves for my great-aunt’s table and set it using my mother’s china.
- b. Immediately regret doing something so impulsive because I don’t know if I will be ready in time.
- c. Have everything I need and can’t wait to see everyone.
- d. Realize at 6 p.m. that I didn’t schedule a sleepover for the kids to be out of the house.

4. I am most likely to keep:

- a. Things that have been given to me by friends and family.
- b. Everything!
- c. Items that look useful or can be used in an innovative way.
- d. Objects I’m not ready to make a decision about.

5. My brother-in-law just asked us to hold onto a few more pieces of their furniture. I:

- a. Am secretly thrilled to get another one of Grandma’s antiques.
- b. Hang up the phone feeling a wave of anxiety.
- c. Have already purchased a larger storage space for this purpose.
- d. Don’t know when we will have time to coordinate.

6. My magazine subscriptions are coming to an end. I:

- a. Quickly renew—can’t be without my favorite magazines!
- b. Never even see the notice in the pile of unopened mail.
- c. Decide to keep all of them—there are so many useful tips.
- d. Put the invoice in my to-do file so I can think about it later.

7. I am finally going to make the photo albums I’ve always wanted to. It’s a great opportunity to:

- a. Reminisce about the good ol’ days.
- b. Use all of the photos to make an album for everyone in the family.
- c. Finally use the high-tech photo scanner I purchased last year.
- d. Find time to gather and send the photos to a professional to scan them for me.

8. Going to the grocery store is:

- a. Best left to someone else, trust me.
- b. Exciting. I love to buy all the latest products. The packaging is so enticing.
- c. A chance to stock up on water, paper products, and canned goods.
- d. Often a last-minute rush. I visit three to four times a week.

9. My makeup drawer is:

- a. Full of unused makeup given by friends.
- b. Overflowing with samples.
- c. Organized with the essentials, and the backups are in the linen closet.
- d. A bit out of control. I really need to wash my brushes sometime soon.

10. On Saturday mornings I’m most likely to be:

- a. Wrestling with the decision of which shows to delete from my monthly DVR list.
- b. Sleeping late and procrastinating about getting the day started.
- c. Bringing an overdose of snacks to the kids’ sporting events.
- d. Randomly thinking about the things I meant to do this past week but ran out of time to do.

11. My work colleagues know that I:

- a. Stash piles of papers in my drawers so my desk looks clean, even though I keep all of my papers.
- b. Will have the notes from every meeting we’ve ever had.
- c. Have my own mini mart in my office, full of snacks and necessities.
- d. Come up with really great ideas and then rely on others to follow through and make them happen.

12. The main reason I want to get organized is:

- a.** I want to have a home that feels like it's my own.
- b.** I'd like to break the cycle and teach my children better habits.
- c.** I'd like to create more space in my home.
- d.** I want to feel more in control of my environment.

13. Growing up, my room was:

- a.** A photo montage of all my friends, favorite things, and gifts.
- b.** Very messy, but my parents didn't seem to mind.
- c.** A little bit of a minefield, but nobody was allowed to enter without saying the secret word.
- d.** Quite neat. I don't know what's happened to me.

14. My partner and I have different opinions about what things are most important to keep. I believe:

- a.** We should keep anything someone gives us and get storage space if necessary.
- b.** It's important to keep magazines from 2004 because I haven't been able to read them yet.
- c.** One of everything isn't enough.
- d.** Decluttering is best left to me—I'm going to sort through things this week.

15. When I look at my calendar and realize that I double-booked myself, I:

- a.** Am so guilt-ridden that I can't bring myself to cancel either appointment. In an attempt to satisfy everyone, I leave the first one early and show up late to the second.
- b.** Can't believe I did this—again.
- c.** Commit to using my calendar reminder in the future to avoid such mistakes.
- d.** Can't believe I finally remembered to use my calendar.

16. When it comes to getting rid of my kids' toys, I'm likely to:

- a.** Pick out the toys they aren't using and pass them down to someone else's kids.
- b.** Let them keep whatever they want; I don't want them to miss out on anything.
- c.** Keep things they might want to use at a future time.
- d.** Ask them to go through their toys and books and donate what they are willing to.

17. When packing for a quick weekend getaway, I:

- a.** Will take enough for a week and a half for the whole family—you can never bring too much!
- b.** Have trouble finding the things I need for the trip.
- c.** Get excited to use my travel pack of accessories.
- d.** Barely have time to lay out all my clothes and get things in the suitcase before I'm out the door.

18. When I think of decluttering, my gut reaction is:

- a.** Nervous that someone else will see my mess.
- b.** A wave of anxiety about where I would even begin.

- c.** Annoyed that I have to get rid of things.
- d.** Calm—I'm ready to finally make some changes in my home.

19. When I organize my kids' artwork, I:

- a.** Remember each piece of art and can't bear to part with anything.
- b.** Ask them what they want to keep and allow their input to dictate what stays and what goes.
- c.** Buy something that will hold all of their artwork and keep it in case they ask me where it is.
- d.** Display it around the house and try to rotate the pieces.

20. We are getting ready to "right-size" to a smaller home. My first step is going to be:

- a.** To figure out how to tell other people not to give us any more of their things.
- b.** To buy my favorite ice cream and ignore the move for as long as possible.
- c.** Brainstorming how I can squeeze all my stuff into the new place.
- d.** To hire someone to help me.

About the Author

Melissa Picheny founded Declutter + Design in 2004 to inspire, motivate, and provide clients with simple solutions to their organizational and spatial needs. Her philosophy encourages folks who are organizationally challenged to declutter first, then design, and then buy things that will help support their new system. To view her work, visit declutteranddesign.com.

THE RESULTS: Look over your answers to see which letter you circled the most. Then take a peek at your corresponding profile below.

mostly **C**'s...

THE CURATOR

Emotionally attached

Everything you own has sentimental value. Whether items are new or have been passed down, you keep everything because the thought of getting rid of anything makes you feel guilty.

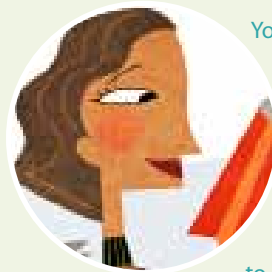
The Action Plan:

- **Take photographs** to retain the memory of cherished furniture, artwork, and accessories without letting them continue to take up valuable space.
- **Repurpose** old concert and camp T-shirts into a throw blanket or a wall hanging. Frame old memorabilia or place small collectibles into shadow boxes.
- **Donate** your gently used items to a good cause. You'll feel good (not guilty) about letting go.
- **Avoid** the trap of paying for an off-site storage space. If you're not using items right now, it's time to give them away.
- **Tap** into more personalized strategies at BHG.com/curator.

mostly **b**'s...

THE GATHERER

Overwhelmed



You squirrel away EVERYTHING! This trait commonly stems from watching your parents behave the same way. You feel overwhelmed by your stuff and are afraid to make decisions about what to keep and what to get rid of.

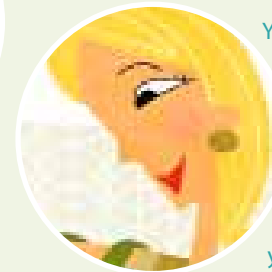
The Action Plan:

- **Visualize** what your home will look and feel like once it is organized. Make a list of the ways it will change your life—and refer to the list when you waver on getting rid of things.
- **Break the process** into bite-size pieces, and focus on starting in one place, such as a closet.
- **Help time fly** by turning on some dance music or listening to audio books as you clean out an area.
- **Make a "later" pile.** When you come across something that becomes a distraction, put it in the "later" pile to review at another time. This lets you stay focused on the task at hand.
- **Discover** more letting-go solutions at BHG.com/gatherer.

mostly **C**'s...

THE SCOUT

Always Prepared



You love that family and friends can rely on you to handle any situation. Your tendency to keep things comes from the anticipation that you "just might need it someday," but you're beginning to realize that you don't—and won't.

The Action Plan:

- **Take stock** of what you have versus what you really need. Sort your belongings into piles of like items so you can see how much you have.
- **Assess** each pile, and honestly answer two questions: "When was the last time I used this?" and "On what occasion will I use it again?"
- **Let go** of all duplicates and rarely used or inexpensive-to-replace items. Donate the items to family and friends.
- **Find a constructive way** to use your energy by making go-bags and emergency kits for friends and family so they can be prepared like you!
- **Slim down** your stuff further with extra tips at BHG.com/scout.

mostly **d**'s...

THE OPTIMIST

Time Challenged



You have the best of intentions and a general system in place, but your home is bulging at the seams. Your existing system is failing due to lack of time management.

The Action Plan:

- **Mark events,** to-do's, and calls to make in a digital calendar that can send you reminders.
- **Determine** the top five unwanted items that come into your home, such as junk mail and free gear, and employ strategies to avoid accumulating the stuff in the first place.
- **Set a weekly date** with yourself to review the week ahead, pay bills, toss/shred unwanted paperwork, and file important documents.
- **Get ahead** by taking advantage of what technology has to offer. Pay bills online to avoid late fees and paperwork. You can also download apps to help you keep track of finances and important holiday and school events.
- **Find** additional get-motivated pointers at BHG.com/optimist.