STEP 1: *Remove*

I believe that you can't truly organize without placing your hands on every single item in the space. As crazy and overwhelming as it may seem, by the end of the organizing process, you'll be glad you did this. Yes, you're making a mess in the process, but there's a method to the madness, I promise! Stay with me!

Remove all the items from the room or specific space that you are organizing. Empty all drawers, cabinets, shelves, and take everything off the surfaces. Place it all in a pile in the center of the room. Depending on the size of the room and the amount of items in it, it may be best to use a separate room nearby.

WHY?
It's really hard to imagine the options you have for organizing your space if you can't see the bare bones of it amongst all the clutter.

1. Removing every item from the space allows you to start with a blank canvas to envision the possibilities for this soon to be ordered space. You will be able to see the space that you have as if you just moved into the home and have a clear mental space to begin thinking about how you might want to arrange items back into the space.
2. You'll be able to see what you actually have. Organizing is about functionality and being intentional. Simply shifting items around doesn't give you a full idea of all you have. Having the items laid out in the room brings you face to face with all of your possessions and clutter. I can't tell you how many of my clients have found lost items after just this first step!

TIP:
If you're starting a project that you can't finish the same day, it may be too overwhelming to take everything out as seeing it all may cause anxiety. If this is case, start with one section or one category of items so that you're not left with a huge pile that you can't tackle right away.

ACTION:
Decide where to start! I recommend starting with a smaller space and working your way up. If you're new to this, you don't want to overwhelm yourself early in the game. Start small, build your confidence, and then move to a larger project once you've experienced success.

STEP 2: *Categorize*

Now that you have removed all items from the space, it's time to start making sense of what's in front of you by placing the items into categories. Categorizing (or sorting) is simply grouping like items together. These categories can even have subcategories. For example, let's say you're organizing a room that has a lot of books. You may choose to group the books by genre, author, color, etc. Do what's best for you and what will help you later locate the exact book you're looking for. The same goes for other types of items (clothes, toys, art or office supplies, and so on).

WHY?

1. Grouping like items helps you take inventory of what you have and how much of that item you have. This will be helpful in the next step!
2. Categorizing creates a system that will later save you lots of time and frustration when looking for and putting back items.

Think about walking into a store. There's sections, categories, and signs for each type of product and these categories help to make your experience as a consumer easier. You likely won't spend much time in a store or purchase anything if it's cluttered or you're confused about where to find something. The same idea applies to your home. If you can't easily identify and locate what you're looking for, chances are you might not take the time to flip your home upside down to find that item, especially if you're in a rush to get out the door. The system that you are creating is meant to make your experience in your home as pleasant as possible, so keep that in mind when categorizing.

TIP:
It's ok to have a miscellaneous pile. Most people do! However, make sure you're categorizing those miscellaneous items by location. Try not to mix too may different random items just because they don't have a group to go into. Do your best to edit the miscellaneous pile based on where items would be used. You might find that as you begin organizing other areas of the home, you'll be able to add to those categories or create a new ones.

ACTION:
Think about the system you're creating. Similar to the example of going into a store, imagine yourself or another person in your home looking for a particular item, using it, and then putting in back. Ask yourself, "Do my categories make sense for me? Do they make sense for the other members of my family? Should this be in another category or location? From there, make adjustments as needed.

STEP 3: *Declutter*

You've categorized all the items and can now clearly see everything that you have. Now it's time to declutter! This is arguably the most important step, yet the one that can be the most difficult. Decluttering is removing any items you don't need (which is clutter) from a space to make it more functional. While the process can be emotional for some, I've found that most people feel better physically and mentally once they've done it!

WHY?
Simply put, if we're honest with ourselves, we just don't need everything we own. And why take up space in your home with things that aren't serving you?

1. Decluttering ensures that you're keeping only that which you love, need, and will use in your home.
2. Simplifying what you own creates a more peaceful living environment and mental state for you. One in which reduces stress and anxiety, saves you time and money, promotes discipline, positive decision-making, healthier living habits, and so much more!

The list of benefits and reasons why it's so important to declutter during your organizing process and on a regular basis is extensive! So trust me on this one; you won't want to skip this major step!

TIP:
Decluttering can be a lengthy process depending on how much clutter you have, so hang in there and trust the process! For each item you pick up, ask yourself these specific questions to keep the process moving forward and to minimize making emotional decisions:
1. Do you love it?
2. Do you use it?
3. Do you need it?
4. Do you have space for it?

From there you can decide what to keep, donate, or toss. Make sure to keep trash and donate bins nearby. Something about separating those things from what you're going to keep and placing them in a separate bin makes it feel more final and may prevent you from having second thoughts. Also, if you're prone to decision fatigue or think decluttering could be an emotional process for you, I recommend having a trusted friend or family member present to encourage you and keep the process moving forward. That voice of reason will come in handy if you get stuck or overwhelmed.

ACTION:
Before you start, first think about how you might benefit from decluttering. Having those benefits in mind will keep you motivated throughout the process. Then, go find your decluttering buddy if you'll need one.

STEP 4: Contain

You should now be left with categories that have been properly decluttered. What you have in each category should only be those items you've selected that you love, need, will use, and have space for. The next step is to contain these categories. To contain means to set limits or boundaries to or to have within a particular area.

WHY?

1. Containing your categories creates a home for those particular items. The basket or bin that you place those items into becomes their home and creates a system for locating and putting those items back.
2. Containing keeps categories from mixing, reducing the likelihood that you will misplace an item.
3. Containing makes transporting items easier.

Have you ever moved and your process of packing/unpacking was a nightmare because there was stuff everywhere with no organization? So many loose items with no system place. This step of containing not only creates a functional system where you currently reside. It also makes relocating from one home to the next or even from one room to the next in the same home much easier. The time-consuming tasks of packing and unpacking during a move would drastically be simplified because the sorting and organizing is already done!

TIP:
Not every single item will need to be bound to a basket or bin. The "home" for some items may be in a drawer, cabinet, or on a shelf or table without the need for a container. For example, items like a stapler or tape dispenser you may appropriately choose to set upon a desk or in a drawer. But do try to contain as much as you can and those items which would make sense to confine to a container. You may also want to label the containers. It's visually appealing and further helps with identifying what you need.

ACTION:
Take a look around your home for any spare baskets or bins that you could repurpose as homes to contain your categories. If you're into the pretty matching bins to create a uniform look, start by taking inventory of how many categories you have and get the measurements of the area you'll be setting these containers in. With this necessary information, your shopping trip for organizing products will be much more productive. If you're not sure of the look you're going for or what types of products you'll need, get some ideas and inspiration from Pinterest. Pinterest never disappoints!

STEP 5: *Organize*

You've made it to the last step! Now that your categories have been nicely contained, you're ready to set up your space. By organizing you are arranging into a structured whole, bringing each individual item and category together to create a functional system.

WHY?

You want to arrange everything in a systemized way because it makes your day-to-day tasks simpler. They way you choose to arrange everything is completely up to you, but you want to make sure you're maximizing the space you have.

TIPS:

1. Check out Pinterest for ideas on how others have organized a similar space.
2. Store items where you'll use them. Don't place a category in the living room, if you use those items in the bedroom. It may never make it back to its home.
3. Don't place bins to closely together if you can help it. Give your categories room to breathe and enough space to make it comfortable and less of a hassle to grab what's needed quickly.
4. Consider other family members. If you have categories that will need to be accessed by children, think of how placement will affect them. Make sure the "home" makes sense for everyone who will use it.

ACTION:

Begin thinking about the new habits you will need to adopt to be able to maintain your newly organized space. To maintain anything, you must have discipline. It's not always about what we want or feel like doing, but what needs to be done in order to continue having the positive outcomes we desire.

If you're used to letting paper pile up, there's an area for improvement. Dedicate one day a week at a set time to sort through mail and other paper that piles up throughout the week. If the sink is always overflowing with dishes, make it a habit to load the dishwasher every night before bed. Maintenance must be incorporated into your daily routine and viewed just as important as anything else on your to-do list. Once you've adjusted and have found the frequency that works for your lifestyle, it's like clockwork from there.