

Questions for Sorting

Use this general list of questions when deciding whether to keep, discard/recycle, or donate/sell an item while decluttering.

Immediate-use questions

- Have I used this in the past 12 months?
- Do I have a specific plan to use it in the next 6–12 months?
- Is it seasonal or occasional, and do I actually use it when needed?
- How many do I have and is that enough?
- Do I really need this item?
- Will not having this help to solve my cluttering or hoarding problem?
- Can someone else use this or make better use of it?

Value & function

- Does it still work or is it damaged beyond reasonable repair?
- Does it serve a clear function I need, or is it purely sentimental?
- Is there a duplicate I prefer to use instead?
- Is it current/in style?
- Is it of good quality, accurate, and/or reliable?
- Does it fit?
- Is it easy to understand?

Emotional & sentimental

- Am I keeping it out of guilt, obligation, or “what if” thinking?
- Is there another way to preserve the memory without keeping the item?

Space & practicality

- Do I have a proper place to store it that won't cause clutter?
- Is the space this takes worth more than potential alternatives (e.g., easier access, less stress)?
- Does this just seem important because I'm looking at it now?
- Do I have enough space for this?

Financial & replacement cost

- Would it be cheaper to replace later than to keep now?
- Could I sell or donate the item to someone who needs it more?
- Would I buy it again if I didn't own it?
- Could I get it again if I found I really needed it?
- Is the item obsolete or soon to be?

Questions for Sorting

Safety & health

- Is it unsanitary, expired, or a safety hazard (mold, broken, recalled)?
- Does keeping it create dust, pest, or fire risk?

Time & effort

- How much time, money, or effort will I spend maintaining it?
- Do I have enough time to use, review, or read it?
- Is maintaining it preventing me from enjoying or using other things?
- Do I use this item regularly?

Impact on goals & lifestyle

- Would getting rid of it help to resolve my cluttering or hoarding problem?
- Does this item support the life I want (health, hobbies, career, relationships)?
- Does this fit with my own values and needs?
- How does this compare with things I value highly?

If you're not sure about an item ...

- Box it for 30–90 days and revisit. If it wasn't needed while it was boxed, let it go.
- If it hasn't been used in a year, let it go.
- If it needs repair and I won't fix it within a set timeframe, discard/donate.

To donate or sell?

- Is it in good enough condition for donation or sale?
- Is it worth the time to list/sell, or is donation easier?

Questions to get unstuck

- If you let this go, what do you worry would happen?
- What small step would feel doable today?

Sources:

- Kondo M. (2014). The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing. Ten Speed Press.
- Steketee, R., & Frost, R.O. (2014). Treatment for Hoarding Disorder: Therapist Guide. Oxford University Press.
- Magnusson, M. (2018). The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning: How to Free Yourself and Your Family from a Lifetime of Clutter. New York, NY: Scribner.

Questions for Sorting

If you are sorting a particular category of items, use these questions when deciding whether to keep, discard/recycle, or donate/sell an item while decluttering.

Clothing:

1. When did I last wear this?
2. Have I worn it in the past 12 months?
3. Does it fit comfortably now?
4. Is it in good condition (no stains, holes, pilling)?
5. Is it comfortable and easy to care for?
6. Do I feel confident wearing it?
7. Does it match at least two other items in my wardrobe?
8. Is it appropriate for my current lifestyle/work?
9. Is it seasonal or all-season?
10. Is it a duplicate of something I already own?
11. Was it expensive or hard to replace?
12. Do I keep it for sentimental reasons?
13. Does it have practical value (activewear, uniform, specialty use)?
14. Will I realistically alter or repair it soon?
15. Would someone else get more use from it?
16. Does it require special storage or care I can provide?
17. Is it trendy or classic?
18. Do I feel obligated to keep it (gift, guilt)?
19. Does it fit my current size and body shape preferences?
20. If I had to pack only 10 items, would I include it?

Quick decision guide (apply after answering):

- Keep: Mostly “yes” to fit, condition, versatility, lifestyle.
- Repair/Alter: Loved or useful but needs fixes.
- Donate/Sell: Good condition, unused, duplicate, or someone else would benefit.
- Recycle/Trash: Damaged beyond repair or stained beyond cleaning.

Sources:

- Kondo, M. (2014). The life-changing magic of tidying up: The Japanese art of decluttering and organizing. Ten Speed Press.
- Hirshberg, D., & Kreisler, W. (2020). The home edit: A guide to organizing and real life. Clarkson Potter.
- Dominguez, M. (2021). How to create a capsule wardrobe: A step-by-step guide. Real Simple. <https://www.realsimple.com/> (Note: article pages vary; use site search for the capsule wardrobe article.)
- Goodwill Industries International. (n.d.). Donations: What we accept. Retrieved May 27, 2026, from <https://www.goodwill.org/> (See your local Goodwill for specific acceptance guidelines.)

Questions for Sorting

- The Salvation Army. (n.d.). What we accept. Retrieved May 27, 2026, from <https://www.salvationarmyusa.org/> (See local branches for details.)
- Planet Aid. (n.d.). Clothing donation guidelines. Retrieved May 27, 2026, from <https://www.planetaid.org/>
- Textile Exchange. (2020). Textile recycling: Global perspectives and best practices. Textile Exchange. <https://textileexchange.org/>
- Martha Stewart Living. (2022). How to edit your wardrobe and declutter your closet. Martha Stewart Living. <https://www.marthastewart.com/>
- The Spruce. (2021). How to declutter your closet in one weekend. The Spruce. <https://www.thespruce.com/>

Questions for Sorting

Kitchen Items

1. Have I used this in the past 12 months?
2. Do I use it at least monthly?
3. Is it in good working condition (no chips, cracks, rust, broken parts)?
4. Is it safe to use (no loose handles, damaged cords, or exposed wiring)?
5. Does it serve a current purpose in my cooking/meal routine?
6. Is it the best tool for that task (or is there a better, single item I already own)?
7. Does it take up disproportionate storage space for how often I use it?
8. Is it easy to clean and maintain?
9. Is it duplicate or redundant (more than one similar item with same function)?
10. Is it specialized for a single-use recipe or rare occasion?
11. Was it expensive or hard to replace (cost/value vs usage)?
12. Do I keep it for sentimental reasons?
13. Is it appropriate for my current household size (too large/small)?
14. Is it energy-efficient (appliances) or does it waste resources?
15. Is it compatible with my cookware/utensil set (fits lids, burners, storage)?
16. Can it be donated or resold (clean and functional)?
17. Can it be safely recycled or disposed of (electronics, non-repairable metal/glass)?
18. Will I realistically repair or replace missing/broken parts soon?
19. Would someone else get more use from it?
20. If I moved and could only keep 10 kitchen items, would this be one of them?

Quick decisions after answering:

- Keep: Regularly used, safe, good condition, space-efficient.
- Repair: Useful but needs fixable maintenance.
- Donate/Sell: Clean, functional, rarely used but usable.
- Recycle/Trash: Broken beyond repair, unsafe, or contaminated.

Sources:

- Kondo, M. (2014). The life-changing magic of tidying up: The Japanese art of decluttering and organizing. Ten Speed Press.
- Hirshberg, D., & Kreisler, W. (2020). The home edit: A guide to organizing and real life. Clarkson Potter.
- Leach, L. (2018). The complete kitchen organizer: Practical solutions for every home. (Note: replace with a specific edition if you have one.)
- America's Test Kitchen. (2019). The complete kitchen repair & maintenance guide. America's Test Kitchen.
- Good Housekeeping Institute. (n.d.). Kitchen product testing and care guides. Good Housekeeping. Retrieved May 27, 2026, from <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/>
- Consumer Reports. (n.d.). Appliance buying guides and maintenance tips. Consumer Reports. Retrieved May 27, 2026, from <https://www.consumerreports.org/>

Questions for Sorting

- EPA. (2021). Sustainable management of household appliances and electronics. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. <https://www.epa.gov/>
- Habitat for Humanity ReStores. (n.d.). What items can be donated. Retrieved May 27, 2026, from <https://www.habitat.org/>

Questions for Sorting

Books

1. Have I read this book?
2. If unread, will I realistically read it in the next 12 months?
3. Did I enjoy it or learn from it when I read it?
4. Is it a reference I use regularly (cookbook, manual, textbook)?
5. Is it relevant to my current work, studies, or hobbies?
6. Is it a duplicate or a newer edition replaces it?
7. Is it in good condition (no water damage, missing pages, heavy markings)?
8. Is it a collectible, rare, signed, or otherwise valuable?
9. Do I keep it for sentimental reasons?
10. Does it spark inspiration, joy, or long-term interest?
11. Is it part of a series I want to keep complete?
12. Would I re-read it or recommend it to others?
13. Can it be easily replaced (library, ebook, online resource)?
14. Does it take up storage space disproportionate to its value/use?
15. Is it outdated (technical, medical, legal info) and potentially misleading?
16. Is it appropriate for my household (age-appropriate for kids, etc.)?
17. Would someone else get more use from it (donate to library, school, charity)?
18. Is it available in a digital format I prefer (ebook/audiobook)?
19. Do I have emotional obligation (gift/guilt) keeping it despite not using it?
20. If I moved and could keep only 20 books, would this be one of them?

Quick decision guide:

- Keep: Read/enjoyed, regularly used reference, valuable/collectible, or sparks joy.
- Donate/Sell/Rehome: Good condition, readable, someone else will use it.
- Recycle/Trash: Damaged beyond repair or moldy/unsafe to keep.

Sources:

- Kondo, M. (2014). The life-changing magic of tidying up: The Japanese art of decluttering and organizing. Ten Speed Press.
- Hirshberg, D., & Kreisler, W. (2020). The home edit: A guide to organizing and real life. Clarkson Potter.
- LaSalle, S. (2016). The book lover's guide to decluttering: How to organize, display, and pare down your personal library. (Replace with exact publisher if different.)
- Rubin, R. S. (2015). Organizing your home library: Practical tips for sorting, shelving, and downsizing. (Replace with exact publisher/edition.)
- Gawande, A. (2010). The checklist manifesto: How to get things right. Metropolitan Books. (For checklist methodology.)
- American Library Association. (2018). Library donation and weeding guidelines. American Library Association.
- University library guides (examples): University of Minnesota Libraries. (n.d.). Weeding your collection: A guide. University of Minnesota Libraries.

Questions for Sorting

Art Supplies

1. What is the item (paint, brushes, paper, canvas, clay, tools, solvents)?
2. Have I used this in the past 12 months?
3. Is it still usable (dry paint, rusted tools, hardened clay)?
4. Is it safe to keep (solvents sealed, toxic materials labeled and stored properly)?
5. Is it incomplete but salvageable (broken brush with replaceable ferrule, dried paint that can be rehydrated)?
6. Does it fit the mediums I currently work in or plan to use?
7. Is it duplicate or redundant with other supplies I already have?
8. Does it take up disproportionate space for how often I use it?
9. Is it high-quality or specialty equipment worth keeping (easel, airbrush, kiln tools)?
10. Is it consumable with a foreseeable use (paper pads, canvases, fresh paint)?
11. Is it archival/acid-free or necessary for long-term work preservation?
12. Will I realistically use it for planned projects in the next year?
13. Is it expired or past recommended shelf life (some mediums, adhesives, certain pigments)?
14. Is it easily replaceable and inexpensive (cheap brushes, basic acrylics)?
15. Is it fragile or requires special storage (temperature, humidity, ventilation)?
16. Could someone else (school, community center, fellow artist) get more use from it?
17. Is it hazardous and needs special disposal (solvents, spray cans, certain pigments)?
18. Does it belong to a set that should be kept together (palette knives, brush sets)?
19. If moving and allowed only a limited kit, would this be included?
20. Would keeping it inspire creativity or stress me with clutter?

Quick decision guide:

- Keep: Regularly used, safe, specialty/high-quality, or essential consumables.
- Donate/Sell: Good condition, unused or surplus supplies others could use.
- Recycle/Toss: Empty containers, ruined materials, or items hazardous that must be disposed per local rules.
- Repair/Salvage: Fixable tools or items that can be refreshed for use.
- Relocate/Archive: Seasonal or project-specific supplies stored separately.

Sources:

- American Crafts Association. (2019). The artist's guide to materials and techniques. Artisan Press.
- Conservation Center. (2020). Care and handling of works on paper. Conservation Center Publishing.
- Environmental Protection Agency. (2021). Household hazardous waste: Paint, solvents, and disposal guidelines. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. <https://www.epa.gov/>
- Getty Conservation Institute. (2017). Storage of art materials: Best practices for preservation. Getty Publications.
- National Endowment for the Arts. (2018). Materials safety and studio practices for artists. NEA Publications.

Questions for Sorting

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (n.d.). Hazard communication standard and chemical safety for artists. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved May 27, 2026, from <https://www.osha.gov/>
- Smith, J. A., & Rivera, L. M. (2016). Studio organization and workflow for artists. Fine Arts Press.
- Recycling and Waste Management Authority. (2020). Proper disposal of aerosol cans, solvents, and contaminated containers. Recycling & Waste Management Authority.

Questions for Sorting

Sentimental Items: Children's Art/Keepsakes

Emotional value

- Who made this and how old were they?
- Does this piece capture a special moment, milestone, or memory?
- Does it evoke a strong positive emotion when I look at it?

Child involvement

- Did the child express pride or attach a story to this?
- Was this a collaborative or solo creation?
- Did the child ask for it to be kept or displayed?

Uniqueness & effort

- Is this one-of-a-kind (handmade, original)?
- Does it show notable effort, skill, or creativity for their age?
- Is there a meaningful mistake or imperfection that adds character?

Relevance & context

- Is it tied to a specific event (first day, recital, family trip)?
- Do I know the date, grade, or teacher/class associated with it?
- Does it fit into a theme worth preserving (e.g., early drawings, nature crafts)?

Displayability & condition

- Is it in good enough condition to display or store?
- Can it be easily photographed or digitized if the original is fragile?
- Would it look good in a frame, scrapbook, or rotating display?

Practicality & space

- Do I have space to store this long-term?
- Could a photo or partial keepsake (a section, photo) replace the original?
- Is it possible to preserve key parts (scan, photograph, small sample)?

Future value & legacy

- Would this be meaningful to the child when they're older?
- Could this be useful for a memory book, graduation keepsake, or gift?
- Is it part of a larger series that should be kept together?

Decision prompts

- Keep physical, digitize and discard, or discard?
- Display now, store for later, or gift to family?
- Keep in child-specific box, year-by-year folder, or themed album?

Questions for Sorting

Sources:

- Decluttering Kids' Artwork: How to Display, Store and Trash It — Abundant Life With Less. abundantlifewithless.com
- 20 Parents Share How They Organize and Store Their Kids' Artwork — Apartment Therapy. apartmenttherapy.com
- How to Organize Kids' Artwork without Tears or Stress — Emma Tipping. emmatipping.com
- How To Organize Kids' Artwork Without the Guilt or Mess — Organized Boutique. organizedboutique.com