

This is a reprinted article from www.speechmag.com:

Comins, J. (2004) My Top Resources – how to stay organised. *Speech & Language Therapy in Practice*. Autumn.

My top resources

These ideas on how to stay organised are from Jayne Comins, a speech and language therapist and psychotherapist who works at Queen Elizabeth and the Wellington Hospitals in London, and in private practice.

Jayne trained as an occupational and organisational psychologist before becoming the first information officer at what was then called the College of Speech Therapists. Needing to retrieve a vast range of information, often at a moment's notice, Jayne wished she was better at being able to work amidst mess and clutter! She finds a clear desk helps her to think clearly, and likes to know that she can quickly put her hands on information when she needs it.

1. Filing cabinet

I've got rid of hanging files and find it much easier to store and retrieve labelled document wallets. I make sure I have a stack of these so I don't run out. Ideally I'd have drawers with those movable metal plates at the back.

I try to file everything in a general A-Z system method. Rather than have a bulging file where everything under one heading is kept together, I sub-divide. For example I have several wallets for the Association of Speech & Language Therapists in Independent Practice and they are labelled as 'ASLTIP - AGMs', 'ASLTIP - medico-legal', 'ASLTIP - contact information'. I used to think that a single sheet of paper didn't warrant a wallet of its own. I now realise that, using this system, single pages are really easy to find.

2. Day file

This is a vibrant purple polypropylene ringbinder that I check each day. I store paper in transparent pockets under different sections. This system has replaced my daily list of things to do; currently the file divides into 'phone/email', 'action', 'maybe' (such as events I might go to or books I might order), 'tickler' (something I'd like to do, but it's a long way ahead), and 'waiting for' (for example copies of order forms, notes of messages I've left).

3. Large-capacity magazine files

These are used by librarians and office staff for filing upright magazines, journals and catalogues. Having given up on them in the past because I found them to be too thin and flimsy, I found some fat, brown, sturdy ones in Paperchase. Now my stuff doesn't fall over. I have two and they sit on a shelf within swivel distance, meaning that I don't end up ploughing through a tip on my desk.

I keep one magazine file for project folders needing immediate action, for example, 'City University lecture' and 'Vocal cord palsy audit'. The other one is used for articles and journals I might want to read. It means I can grab something from the file if a patient cancels or I'm about to catch the train.

4. Continuing professional development file

I've had fun with this one. I think it's important to treat yourself to an attractive good-

quality ringbinder, and I like looking at - and feeling - mine. It's a cheerful turquoise one, making it easy to find. All my professional activities are filed under different sections and near the front I have my curriculum vitae, biographies, job descriptions, certificates of registration and memberships as well as my Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists personal log. Apart from being required to record this information, you never know when you might need it.

5. Zodiac diary

I have diaries which are kept in the department at my hospital sites, but I still need my own diary for an overall picture of the week and for my private work and social life. Call me old-fashioned, but I still prefer a paper diary. I've used a Letts Zodiac diary for a few years now and it's by far the best one I've ever had.

It's a week at a glance across two pages and there's equal space for every day as well as for morning, afternoon and evening, giving you a total of twelve spaces a day, plus a space a day to write in deadlines. I also like the fact that appointment times are not printed for you so it's more flexible.

I find this system only works if you use a pencil and rubber so you can make changes to the appointments. The diary hooks into a slim, leather Filofax.

6. Filofax

Both my gorgeous Psion organisers broke down tragically. I smashed the first one when it fell and my second one crashed badly. I got bored having to back them up and recharge them. I also became obsessed by lists and then was terrified of theft. Having said that, I still miss having one. There's something deeply satisfying about their neatness and compactness, and they're great for retrieving information. You only need a key word and up it all pops.

My black leather Filofax is a thin, soft, sleek version and it gets recharged with polish and a duster. To keep it slim I don't use section dividers but have alphabet letters stuck to the top of each page. I only use it for addresses and other contact information and I use narrow-lined pages. It's too frustrating trying to fit everyone's address, second home, emails, faxes, mobiles and landline phones in those little spaces that Filofax address pages provide.

7. Blank business cards

I use these to write down errand lists. They're great for fitting into a purse or wallet so you won't lose them, you can buy them easily from a good stationers, and a box lasts ages. I still use backs of old envelopes and recycled Christmas cards for big supermarket shopping lists.

8. Samsonite mini backpack

I bought one after being recommended it by a friend and colleague. They come in light brown or black and have a deep, zipped inside pocket where I keep my Filofax and diary, and a zipped outer pocket where I keep my mobile, keys and train tickets. I sponge them down regularly with washing up liquid to keep them looking smart. Less than £30 each, they're found in the travel section of major stores.

9. Foldable bag

Well, it was either another bag or a lipstick. These clever, lightweight, unisex shoulder bags are ideal for carrying piles of stuff from one end of the hospital to another or for shopping on the way home. They fold up really small into a zipped

pouch. I found mine in a Japanese store called Muji. I believe there are branches up and down the country as well as abroad.

10. Holiday and courses lists

Put me on a plane and I switch off from work alarmingly easily. When I return I have a block about what I did on the day before my holiday. I scribble a list of what I do that day and what I need to do the minute I return. It helps to get my brain in gear. I also have on computer a list of everything I'm likely to need if I go on holiday, attend a conference requiring me to be away, and if I'm running a course myself. It saves wasting time having to rethink lists.