

Quick Clutter Fix

The seven steps to getting your home guest-ready in a hurry

Step One (5 minutes): Gather together six boxes and mark them:

- ✓ Donate
- ✓ Relocate to Another Room
- ✓ Shred
- ✓ File
- ✓ Put Away a Little Later (two boxes)

Grab a 30-gallon trash bag, a bag for recycling (if you recycle) and a timer.

Step Two (15 minutes): Take your boxes, bags and timer to the most important room and set your timer for 15 minutes.

Starting to your left, and moving clockwise, pick up each out-of-place item and put it away in that room, if it belongs in that room, or else throw it away (or recycle it) if it's trash or put it in the appropriate box to take care of in a bit. Try to let go of as much as possible so you won't have to deal with it later. Don't leave the room!

Keep going until the timer goes off. When time's up, put any out-of-place items you weren't able to get to in the "Put Away a Little Later" box.

Step Three (5 minutes): Set your timer for 5 minutes, Take a break and get a drink of water. The minute the timer goes off, proceed to Step Four.

Step Four (15 minutes): Take your boxes (start a fresh "Put Away a Little Later" box for this room), bags and timer to the second most important room and repeat Step Two.

Step Five (5 minutes): Repeat Step Three. Enjoy your little break—you've earned it!

Step Six (15 minutes): Take your boxes and distribute the contents. Put the items for charity in your car. Put away the stuff in the Relocate to Another Room box. Shred. Recycle. Take out the trash. Take a deep breath.

Step Seven (1 minute or less): Take a moment to schedule some time to go through the contents of the "Put Away a Little Later" boxes. Perhaps you can do it right after your guest leaves. Also, make an appointment with yourself to file the papers that ended up in the "File" box.