



Keep or Toss? A Guide to Financial Paperwork

STEP 1 Gather All Financial Documents

- Collect paperwork from filing cabinets, drawers, desks, and any scattered locations.
- Sort into categories: Banking, Taxes, Investments, Home, Insurance, Loans, Legal Documents, and Personal Records.

STEP 2 What to Keep and How Long

Keep Permanently (Store in a Safe Place)

- Birth & death certificates
- Social Security cards
- Passports & citizenship documents
- Marriage & divorce papers
- Military records
- Wills, trusts, & power of attorney
- Property deeds & mortgage documents (until property is sold)
- Car titles (until the vehicle is sold)
- Beneficiary designations (update as needed)

Keep for 7 Years (For Tax Purposes)

- Tax returns & supporting documents
- W-2s, 1099s, and related tax forms
- Records of deductible expenses
- Home purchase & sale records
- Investment tax documents (1099-DIV, 1099-B)

Keep for 1-3 Years

- Bank statements (1 year unless needed for taxes)
- Credit card statements (1 year unless needed for disputes/taxes)
- Pay stubs (1 year, then reconcile with W-2)
- Utility bills (keep for 1 year unless for business use or tax deduction)
- Medical bills & insurance EOBs (1-3 years unless for tax or disputes)

Keep Until Updated or No Longer Needed

- Insurance policies (keep the latest version)
- Loan documents (keep until paid off)
- Monthly investment statements (keep until year-end statement arrives)
- Home improvement receipts (keep until property is sold for capital gains tax purposes)

STEP 3 What to Throw Away & How

Shred Before Disposing

- Old tax documents (older than 7 years)
- Bank & credit card statements (unless needed for taxes)
- Expired insurance policies
- Pay stubs after W-2 reconciliation
- Utility bills after 1 year

Recycle or Trash (No Personal Info)

- Expired warranties
- Junk mail & promotional offers
- Old receipts (unless needed for warranty, returns, or taxes)

STEP 4 Organizing & Storage Solutions

- Use a Filing System: Create labeled folders for categories like taxes, banking, home, insurance, and legal documents.
- Go Digital: Scan & store copies of important documents in a password-protected cloud storage or external drive.
- Invest in a Fireproof Safe: Store irreplaceable documents like birth certificates, wills, and property deeds securely.
- Create a Master List: Keep an inventory of key documents and their locations (consider sharing with a trusted person).

STEP 5 Set a Routine

- Shred and declutter monthly (credit card statements, bills)
- Review & update files yearly (tax records, policies, legal docs)
- Check expiration dates (passports, insurance, credit reports)
- Update estate documents as needed (beneficiaries, wills, power of attorney)

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