The journey to success in middle school starts with an organized binder. An organized binder is a valuable tool for saving time and keeping track of your school work. Think of your binder as sort of a compact file cabinet that you carry around all day to file and retrieve handouts, notes, information and homework. The goal is to create a system that lets you file papers in an organized way, so that they can be easily located and quickly retrieved. Whether school has just started, or you’re in the middle of a school year, take the time to organize your binder into a “Goof-Proof™” system!
Scattered Sara is so sick of never being able to find her papers, handouts and homework. Last week she handed in her math homework in science and lost her permission slip for the field trip to the cheese factory. Sara’s decided enough is enough! She’s determined to set up a system where she can quickly find, file and keep track of all her important papers.

O.K. This school year I’m the new Sara! No more lost schedules, assignments or homework...

I’m gonna have all my homework, handouts and everything important...

...filed and organized!

When I get home from school I can find what I need right away, like graded papers and assignments, in class I’ll always be able to find my homework.

I’ll have a system where all my papers are separated by class and subject.

GOT IT! AWESOME!

OK! I’m good to go!

Sweat - stuff stuff

Go Owls! Pellet power
Poor Scattered Sara, always searching for assignments, homework and handouts! She’s decided that it’s time to get her binder organized. For obvious reasons, the file-cabinet approach wasn’t practical. After visiting the Middle School Tool Shed, Sara designed a binder system that’s easy to use and lets her store, organize and retrieve her papers quickly. In this chapter, Sara shares the secret of her Goof-Proof Binder System with you.

**Sara’s Goof-Proof Binder System**

“OK everybody, listen up! In middle school it’s important to have an organized binder. An organized binder helps you keep papers filed in the right place, so they won’t get lost. It also helps you find important information fast, like class schedules, study guides and reading lists. Believe me, having an organized binder makes middle school life a lot easier!

“Most teachers let students decide for themselves what kind of binders to use and how to organize them. But some schools or teachers have specific rules about binders. So, if your teacher gives you instructions for organizing a class binder, follow them carefully!”
Binder Styles
There are many different binder styles and sizes. The capacity of a binder (that means how much stuff it will hold) is determined by the size of the binder rings. Rings for school binders can be anywhere from one half inch (1/2") to three inches (3”). Some binders fasten with Velcro, others zip. Some come with pockets, some with pencil bags. With so many choices, it should be easy to find a binder style that’s right for you. Here’s how:

Standard Style vs. Notebook Style
A standard style binder is a three-ring, vinyl binder. They come in all sizes and colors. A standard binder with 1/2" to 1" rings is just right for holding materials for one class. If you want to put materials for more than one class in a standard binder, look for one with rings that are 1.5" or larger.

A notebook style binder has three rings, a larger capacity and can easily hold materials for more than one class. The exterior of the binder is made of a water resistant material and it closes by zipper or Velcro. Some come with built in pockets and pencil bags.
How Many Binders Will You Need?

After deciding what style of binder is best for you, figure out how many you’ll need. To do this, make a list of your middle school classes. Include activities you’re involved in like clubs, band or the school play. Circle “a.m.” if it’s a morning class, and “p.m.” if it’s an afternoon class.

Here’s my list of classes and activities

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. History</td>
<td>am/pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Language Arts</td>
<td>am/pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Drama</td>
<td>am/pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Science</td>
<td>am/pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Math</td>
<td>am/pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tech</td>
<td>am/pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Band</td>
<td>am/pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OK, Now Count up Your Classes!

If you plan to use a separate binder for each class and activity, you’ll need one binder for each class and activity on your list. Try using a different color for each class and activity. That will help you tell your binders apart when you’re in a rush!

If you plan to put materials for more than one class in your binder, try using one binder for morning classes and another binder for afternoon classes. Use a standard binder for after-school activities, like the band or the school play.

I use two notebook style binders. One holds the materials for my three morning classes. The other holds materials for my afternoon classes. At lunch break, I go to my locker and switch binders!
Now let’s get the inside of your binder organized!

What goes inside your binder to make it Goof-Proof?

Binder inserts (also called binder accessories) are an important part of the Goof-Proof Binder System. Whatever style of binder you choose to use, these inserts will help keep the inside of your binder organized!

1. Subject dividers.
   Always keep papers, handouts and homework separated by class. Science handouts belong in the science section of your binder, math papers belong in the math section—you get it. Subject dividers are great, because they make it easy to keep materials separated by class. Plastic subject dividers are best because they won’t rip or tear, and fall out of your binder.

   Sheet protectors are cool because they preserve and protect all of your important class handouts. Always use sheet protectors to hold things like your class schedule, course syllabus, class rules and expectations, reading lists, supply lists, rubrics, grading policies and grade logs—stuff you have to keep in your binder to refer to during the school year.

   Most middle schools require students to use wide-ruled binder paper. Any brand will do. (Some math teachers want students to use graph paper. Check with your math teacher about that.)

4. Two-pocket folder.
   A three hole-punched, two-pocket folder is great for holding worksheets, handouts and homework—stuff you have to move in and out of your binder each day. Poly Pocket folders are made of a plastic-like material and are best because they won’t rip or tear and fall out of your binder.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Standard vinyl or notebook style binders.</td>
<td>How many? ___________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Plastic subject dividers.</td>
<td>One (1) plastic three hole-punched subject divider (with tab labels) for each class and activity on your list. (You’ll need about 7 or 8 of these.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Plastic sheet protectors.</td>
<td>Clear, top-loading standard weight sheet protectors. (You’ll need 50 or more of these!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Binder paper.</td>
<td>Wide-ruled. Buy extra binder paper to store in your desk at home. If you use graph paper for math, be sure to buy some.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Plastic pocket folder.</td>
<td>A 2-pocket, three-hole punched (Poly Pocket) folder for each class and activity on your list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. One permanent marker (black) or a label maker.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here’s a Goof-Proof Binder Shopping List that you can copy and use when you shop for your Goof-Proof Binder!

You can also go to: www.middleschoolguide.com to download and print this form!
Tool Number 1: The Binder

Putting It All Together!
You’re doing great! Once you’ve got your binders and binder inserts, you’re good to go. Just follow these easy steps to assemble your very own Goof-Proof Binder!

Step 1
Find a large space to work in, like the kitchen table or living room floor. Place one binder in front of you and open it up.

Step 2
Take one plastic subject divider and, starting with the first class or activity on your “Class and Activity List,” use the permanent marker (or label maker) to label the tab of the subject divider with the name of the class or activity.

Step 3
Place the labeled plastic subject divider into your binder, laying to the left side.
Step 4

Place five or six plastic sheet protectors behind the subject divider. Sheet protectors hold class handouts that you’ll need to use or refer to throughout the school year, such as the class schedule, syllabus, rules, project rubrics and reading lists. If your teacher gives you a multiple page handout that has been stapled together, pull it apart and place each page in a sheet protector so each page can be seen. As you receive updated handouts, remove the old ones and replace them with the new ones.

Step 5

Place 20–25 sheets of binder paper (or graph paper in the case of math) behind the sheet protectors. The binder paper is for homework, class notes, in-class assignments, tests and quizzes. Refill binder paper as needed.

Step 6

Place a 2-pocket folder behind the binder paper section. Open it up. Label the left side of the pocket folder “Handouts & Worksheets.” Label the right side “Homework/Graded Papers/Signed Forms.” The left pocket holds regular class handouts like worksheets and study guides. The right pocket holds your finished homework, graded papers and forms that need to be signed and returned to school. Always place your homework in the right pocket when you finish it. Remove graded papers and store them at home.

Step 7

Repeat Steps 2–6 for each class and activity on your Class and Activity list.
When assembled, a subject section of your binder should look like this:

- Plastic subject divider with the tab labeled with the name of the class or activity.
- 20–25 sheets of wide-ruled binder paper (or graph paper for math).
- 2-pocket folder with the right pocket for homework, graded papers and forms that need to be signed and returned to school. The left pocket holds handouts and worksheets.
- Sheet protectors to hold important class handouts that you need to refer to throughout the school year.
**BUST THAT CLUTTER!**

Binders that are stuffed with old papers and handouts won’t be Goof-Proof for long, so bust that clutter! Toss out papers you don’t need. Store graded papers, notes and old handouts at home.

**CAUTION!**

**YOUR BACKPACK IS NOT YOUR BINDER!**

Papers belong in your binder, *never* shoved loose into your backpack! With the Goof-Proof Binder System, it takes only a few seconds to file papers in the right place. If you don’t have time to file papers in class, keep an extra 2-pocket folder in your backpack. Use it to *temporarily* hold papers and handouts until you have time to file them in your binder.

**DITTO FOR YOUR LOCKER!**

Papers that are tossed into your locker will end up lost or squished at the bottom, along with last week’s moldy cheese sandwich. If you can’t resist tossing papers into your locker, buy a magnetic filing pocket (available at office supply stores). Place it on the inside of your locker door. Use it to *temporarily* hold papers and handouts until you have the time to file them in your binder.
Let’s Practice Middle School Work Management and Organizational Skills!

The Goof-Proof Binder

1. An organized binder is important because it helps you:
   a. keep papers filed in the right place, so they won’t get lost.
   b. find important information fast.
   c. store, organize and retrieve papers, homework and handouts quickly.
   d. all of the above.

2. A notebook style binder:
   a. has a large capacity to hold materials for more than one class.
   b. closes with a zipper or Velcro.
   c. has a water resistant exterior.
   d. all of the above.

3. Your science teacher has given the class instructions for organizing their science binders. You:
   a. ignore her directions and organize your science binder the way you want.
   b. tell her that you have a better, goof-proof method.
   c. carefully follow your science teacher’s instructions.
   d. none of the above.

4. Always use plastic sheet protectors to preserve and protect important papers and class handouts, such as:
   a. class schedules, reading lists and supply lists.
   b. rubrics, grading policies and grade logs.
   c. any paper or handout you may need to refer to for any extended period of time.
   d. all of the above.

5. Always keep papers, handouts and homework separated by:
   a. day.
   b. alphabetical order.
   c. class.
   d. none of the above.

6. Which of these sandwiches is most frequently found squished and moldy at the bottom of a middle school locker?
   a. bologna
   b. cheese
   c. peanut better and jelly
   d. I won’t answer such a silly question!
7. If you use single subject binders, you will need ______ binder(s) for each class and activity.
   a. one
   b. two
   c. three
   d. three hundred

8. Papers should ____________ be shoved loose into your backpack or locker!
   a. always
   b. never
   c. sometimes
   d. none of the above

9. True or false? You can go to www.middleschoolguide.com to download and print as many Goof-Proof Binder Shopping Lists as you need.
   a. True
   b. False

10. Select the correct order of binder inserts to assemble a Goof-Proof Binder:
    a. binder paper, subject divider, 2-pocket folder, sheet protectors.
    b. subject divider, sheet protectors, binder paper, 2-pocket folder.
    c. subject divider, 2-pocket folder, sheet protectors, binder paper.
    d. sheet protectors, subject divider, 2-pocket folder, binder paper.

How did you do? Check your answers on page 169.