

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR DORM ROOM

By Smart Girls: Dhawn Hansen and Tracey Turner

Whether you are returning to college or are a freshman new to the DORM experience, you can benefit from being organized. One thing is for sure, your space will be LIMITED and most likely you will be sharing it with at least one roommate. Following these general guidelines can make your transition to dorm life much more enjoyable.

PRE-PLANNING

If possible check out your new ACCOMMODATIONS prior to packing your things. Determine the amount of space you have to work with and preplan how to best utilize this space. Remember you will need to share with your roommate so be fair. COORDINATE with your roommate if possible to avoid duplication of larger items such as a television, fridge, microwave, iron, ironing board, etc.

A WORD OF WARNING

Check with your college to avoid bringing any items that are NOT allowed such as hot plates, toaster ovens, space heaters, etc. Different rules apply depending on the college you attend. You may also want to check with your dorm regarding COMMUNAL items such as vacuum, irons and ironing boards. If you use these items infrequently you would be better off borrowing them and saving your space for more important items. Your dorm may also offer a small communal kitchenette. Be aware of what is AVAILABLE for your use prior to purchasing must haves for your dorm room. Most dorm rooms are furnished with a bed, desk and closet for each student.

MAXIMIZING WHAT YOU HAVE

Make the most of your allotted space by adding organizing racks and shelving to your closet. Under the bed organizing CONTAINERS can store a host of items which will be easily accessible. You may need to purchase bed risers to raise the bed off the floor a few inches to allow these containers or drawers to fit. You should check with your college on the possibility of raising your bed to either a loft or bunk bed set up if you prefer. HANGING pockets which attach to the end of your bed are also an option for creating additional storage space. Other ways to increase your space is to utilize back of doors, inside of closet doors and wall space for shelving or memo boards or hanging organizers. The more you can utilize space off the floor the more LIVING space you will have. Place organizers in desk drawers to maximize space and to keep things handy. Hanging clear pockets inside closet door can be used to store undergarments, socks, gloves, hats, etc.

THE FIRST RULE OF DORM LIFE

Take only what you need and will USE. Period.

CLOTHING

Assuming that you can still utilize your parent's home for storing the bulk of your possessions, only take clothing suited to the current SEASON. You can change these out for the next season's wear when you go home for a visit. Pack a jacket, hat, one pair of athletic shoes and two pairs of comfortable casual shoes. You can LAYER clothing to suit the weather. Make sure you have enough underwear to last at least two weeks or until laundry day.

ELECTRONICS

A laptop takes up less space than a desk top computer and provides PORTABILITY so that you can study or work on assignments away from your dorm room if necessary. You can also utilize the computer labs that are available on most campuses. Stereos, televisions, electronic games, etc. should be COMPACT. Label these items with your name and record the serial numbers in the event of theft.

SHOWER ITEMS

A hanging toiletry bag or plastic TOTE is a great way to store and carry items to and from the communal showers. This keeps all items prepared to go and prevents leaving items behind and then needing to replace them. A pair of flip flops works great for shower SHOES. Don't forget to pack a robe.

CLEANING SUPPLIES

Coordinate with your roommate to avoid duplication of cleaning supplies due to lack of storage. Yes, you will need to dust and vacuum and SANITIZE your room, occasionally. Most likely you will need LAUNDRY supplies -- detergents, rolls of quarters and a laundry basket or bag. Plastic laundry baskets take up too much space in a dorm room. Check out folding laundry baskets or over the door hanging laundry bags as a better option.

FOOD

Keep all crackers, snacks, etc. in SEALABLE containers or zip lock storage bags to prevent ants or other bugs from enjoying your snacks.

OTHER

Keep KNICK-KNACKS to a minimum as they take up room, require dusting, and may be broken or stolen. Extra PILLOWS can double for turning bed into sofa seating or flooring seats for visitors.

MAKE LISTS

Now that you have taken stock of your dorm room, coordinated with your roommate and thought about the items you really "need" to bring with you, make a list. Separate the list into 4 columns. Record all of the items you plan to bring with you and already have under the HAVE column, those items you need to buy under the NEED column, those items you would like to have if possible under the WANT column and those items prohibited by your dorm rules under the CAN'T have column. After you have assembled your list, reread it to ensure that all things on the list are absolutely necessary. If not remove them. Also double check to make sure that you haven't forgotten anything. If so add these to your list.

PACKING

Utilize your list to check off items as you pack them in boxes to TRANSPORT to your new dorm room. Save this list and add to it as you accumulate new things and remove items you have determined unnecessary. Keep the list in a file so that you have it handy to check off things as you prepare to leave your dorm room for the summer. This will ensure that you don't FORGET to retrieve things that you may have lent to one of your friends or neighbors. It will also help you identify the items you will need to pack again to return to dorm life next fall.

CLEANING OUT

If you find that you have items that you don't use or really don't need bring them HOME on your next visit or sell or give them away. Keep your space as organized and functional as possible.

MORE THAN A PLACE TO SLEEP

Make your desk an inviting place to STUDY. Keep it organized. It is important to have a date book or CALENDAR to keep assignment due dates, reminders for tuition and fees, parking permits, etc.

HOLD ON A MINUTE

A word of advice, don't buy storage containers until you have determined HOW and WHERE they will be used. There are so many styles and varieties available that it is best to determine what you need, where you will put it and what you will keep in it before you buy!

A COZY PLACE TO LIVE

If you have only those items you need, create a space for them and return them to that space each time you use them you will save time and create a an ENJOYABLE stress free living environment.

Dhawn Hansen and Tracey Turner are organizing consultants and co-owners of the Be Smart Girls brand. They are widely recognized as experts in their field and partners in 3 additional companies: Hansen Turner Solutions, LLC, Get Squared Away and Delta Solutions dedicated to improving the lives of others through organization.