

How to Organize Your Life With Spreadsheets

By Lindsey Cook, Digital Transition Team

Spreadsheets make my heart sing. They are the best, most organized way to store information and to peruse it in a glance. Plus, storing your spreadsheets in Google Sheets means you'll always have access to them, even on the go with the mobile app.

Using Spreadsheets to Organize Your Journalism:

- Make a sheet of sources for a big story or your beat. Include things like name, position, area of expertise, contact information, comments on conversations, the last time you called them, etc.
- Story ideas: Include time estimate, area of interest, what you're waiting for, notes.
- Store URLs to all your clips with categorization. This makes it easy to find links relevant to one section of your beat or the last time you reported on a certain topic.
- Make a story outline, complete with subheads, major points and quotes in their own rows. Reorder rows until the structure works.
- Track every source you quote in a story for a month to assess racial and gender breakdowns in your coverage.
- Make a list for stories, datasets or sources that you want to follow-up on. These could be stories you want to do every year around an event, an anniversary you want to remember to check on or a dataset that comes out every year.
- Make a "People I'd Like to Meet" spreadsheet with the city each person is located in and why you'd like to speak with them. When you travel, check the spreadsheet to see if anyone is in cities you're traveling to.
- Use IFTT (more on this below) to [save every link](#) on tweets you like or send out in a spreadsheet.
- Use IFTT to [save every tweet](#) from a source's handle as they send it.
- Use IFTT to [keep track of receipts for your expenses](#).

Store Any Information You Need to Reference Frequently in One Place:

- A spreadsheet with all your frequent flier numbers for different airlines.
- Renewal dates for different items or services like when your air filter should get changed out, when you'll need new tires or the last time everyone in your family went to the dentist.
- Sorting and filtering your contacts: No more "New phone, who dis?"
- Birthdays.

- Important numbers like your license number, passport number, etc.
- A 101 guide to your kid with allergies, dietary preferences, important phone numbers, class schedules, daily activities, body measurements (makes clothes shopping easier), etc.
- Where should you go out to eat tonight? Make a spreadsheet of restaurants you want to try (or movies you want to watch, etc.), with price range, type, who recommended it, if you need reservations, address, distance to home/work.

Plan Trips With Ease:

- Itineraries for each day of your reporting trip or vacation.
- Lists of places you want to travel.
- Vacation days for the year with planned trips and days.
- Make a master packing list for each person in your family of everything they need on trips. Add to it every time you realize you don't have something on a trip that you would like to have. Before you go on your next trip, duplicate the sheet and delete everything you know you won't need (no swimsuit on a ski trip).

Organize Your House:

- Catalog all the items in different closets and crannies. Where is that fold-up cooler again? Oh yeah, bottom shelf of the spare closet.
- Clothes in your or your kids' closet: When you purchased them, from where, how much, how often you wear them. Makes calculating cost per wear easy, if you like that sort of thing.
- Track what you wear to repeating events so you don't happen to be wearing the same shirt every time you teach or every time you go to a monthly check-in with a source.
- Never forget which switch controls each appliance in your [breaker box](#).
- Product warranties: Include what is covered, the purchase date and length of the warranty.

Project Management: Beyond the obvious project management of your large work projects, series or investigative stories

- Planning a big event like a wedding: Seriously, just put it in a spreadsheet.
- Seating charts.
- Floor plans of a house.
- Use a Google Survey feeding into a Google Sheet anytime you need to gather information from people. For example, need everyone's T-shirt size and dietary preferences for a family reunion? Make a survey.

Organize Your Hobbies:

- Comparing road races you could run: Running distance, location, entry fee.
- Writing a book: Track different chapters and move around with ease. Include page numbers and length.
- Stats for a little league team, fantasy football or fantasy baseball. Joining together a few different datasets can really put you above in fantasy league drafts.
- Gather your book ratings with start and end dates, gender and race of author, length and genre. [Or crowdsource your book recommendations](#), TV shows or movies.

When You Need to Make a Big Decision: Assign points to different categories for a pro/con list on hyper-drive. The math doesn't lie.

- Choosing among job opportunities. (This [template can be used for lots of things](#).)
- [Dates](#): Wouldn't recommend sharing it though!
- [Your life goals](#). Why not?
- Comparing lots of information about different houses or apartments such as cost, number of bathrooms, square feet, etc. Decide on your wish list and points for each item ahead of time, and assign points to each as you go.
- Comparing gyms: Cost, your rating, commitment, distance to work, distance to home.
- Comparing different products against a wish list that contains many features like a car, backpack, grill, etc.

Get Healthy:

- Meal planning: Use sheets to store possible meals with their ingredients. Then, copy over into your weekly meals and grocery list.
- Workout stats: How many miles ran, times, workouts done, how you felt the next day.
- [Your time](#): It's worth a try for a week. You'd be surprised what you can learn.
- Your reactions to different foods.
- Create a personalized weekly "[unit test](#)" to check-in with yourself: Pass/fail, did you sleep an average of 7 or more hours a night this week? Did you work out at least 3 times?
- More ideas: Blood pressure, weight, body measurements, sleep, food diary, mood tracker with triggers.

Do Even More With [IFTT](#): If you aren't using this amazing service to organize your life, you really should be. Here are some spreadsheet-focused recommendations:

- [Store a record](#) of how often you do anything with the simple press of a button (like [how much coffee you drink](#)).
- [Store your fitbit activity](#). Bringing data like this out of the app and into a spreadsheet means you can combine it with other useful data to assess patterns. For example, how your coffee spreadsheets correlates with your hours slept spreadsheet.
- [Log a row to the spreadsheet](#) automatically each time you charge your Android phone to keep track of your battery life.
- [Remember to call your mom](#).
- [Keep a record](#) of how often you visit the gym, using the location information on your phone.
- [Track your runs or trips](#).

Manage Your Finances:

- Store charges for your work expense report.
- Create a budget.
- Evaluate your monthly expenses.
- Analyze your credit card charges: Most companies allow you to download all your charges as an Excel workbook. It's convenient, if you can handle knowing how much money you've spent at Starbucks over the past decade.
- Create a record of charges you'll need to write off on your taxes at the end of the year.