People have asked how I stay organized while writing. Some individuals possess a natural inclination for organization, while others don't. I also believe that each person's idea of organization differs. I'm a fan of things being orderly. My post-it notes have an order about them when hung on the wall or thrown in my notebooks. It all makes perfect sense to me.

My husband, however, finds organization in what I can only refer to as pure chaos. I sit at his work desk a few times a week for various Zoom meetings because the lighting is better in the office after dark than in my writing nook. He always "sets up" the desk for me. Which equates to clearing the middle of the table for me to use. I've learned that despite post it-notes being everywhere, scraps of paper sticking out at odd angles, and the in/out tray looking more like a recycle bin, but it works for him. He has a system, and if I mess with anything, I'm asked where that oddly shaped scrap of paper disappeared to.

When I'm working on my manuscripts, I have a system of organization that works for me, and it doesn't involve odd scraps of paper — okay, hold on. If my kids are reading this they'll say, "But Mom, remember that time we almost threw out a scrap of paper with what we presumed was a rude drawing on it? And you lept across the table and snatched it, saying, 'Give me that, it's essential to what I'm working on.' It was your drawing of a strange staircase and chandelier."

They'd have a point, too. During the middle of an online meeting, I became distracted and needed to doodle the scene before I lost the image. The unfortunate circumstance was that it was not in my writing notebook, and my kids thought I was drawing semi-obscene things.

After much thought on the original question, I've come up with four ways I use to (mostly) keep myself organized.

1. Scrivener

I've already gone into great detail about why I love this program. I'm currently typing away in it while working on this article. It is my number one way to stay organized when I'm writing. I can flesh out each chapter, scene, character, locations, or even vague story ideas. Each in their own file, so I never lose them. I can even take photos of those weird drawings I make

and drop them right into my Scrivener project.

I'm a very visual person, and I love how I can add photos to my character profiles and research files. It allows me to see what I'm looking for when in corkboard mode. I love that once I finish working on a draft, I can move the scenes within it around. I can move the entire draft and begin a fresh one, or leave them open side by side while I work.

There are many reasons I love Scrivener, but I can't discuss them all or we'll never get to the other ideas.

2. A Notebook

I've used a few different notebooks over the years, and what you use will depend on your preference. I'm kinda picky about paper quality, because certain textures give me chills so bad I grind my teeth.

Over the years, I've ordered personalized notebooks from Plum Paper, I've picked up some from office supply stores, rock paper, and this year I built my own. It's small compared to previous years, but it's perfect for carrying around, throwing in my bag and taking with me. Plus, I can easily add more paper to it — the kind that doesn't make me grind my teeth.

The key components of a notebook for me are a section for each story I'm working on. My current notebook has 3 main sections for the 3 manuscripts I'm working on. I fixate on one story at a time, but need space to jot ideas for others.

Within each section, I also keep finer details. As an example, I have two pages of post-it notes that contain various details from names to colors. Yep, colors. One of my characters has a broken leg, and I need to remember what color the darn cast is! There are post-it notes with crazy doodles on them which pertain to scenes where people must be seated in a specific order. I have a few hand-drawn maps I created to help me remember where everything in the town or country I made up is.

And then, as I'm editing, I may jot down random words or sentences I know will require some deeper work. Once I've tackled those, I cross them off and move on to the next.

3. Plot Hole Board

In 2021, someone in my writing group shared a mini story from twitter where an author's niece referred to plot holes as pockets. Forever after the author adopted the term because it sounded better. And somehow we embraced the same terminology that year.

Hanging in front of my writing desk are two pieces of paper. One says Pockets To Mend. The other says Mended Pockets. As I'm editing or writing, if I realize something might be flawed, I'll jot it on a sticky note and slap it on the correct sign. Then, I know what to edit. Once fixed, I move the sticky note to the mended board.

Last year, I had a sticky note that kept getting thrown back and forth between the two boards. Why? Because I wrote two characters in, then removed them, then brought them back. Then removed one, then brought her back. I'm pretty sure the sticky note was just as confused as I was!

4. Bankers Box

I have one banker's box per manuscript. Every time I print a portion out, finish a notebook, or remove sticky notes, they go into the coordinating box. This may sound a little excessive, but if you've ever written something and lost it, you'll understand. While I like to have organizational methods in place, they aren't fail proof. Accidents happen. Technology fails, and being human, I make tragic errors.

I once wrote a scene out by hand, and somehow, after typing it up, I lost the typed version. Because I had previous drafts in the banker's box, I could retype it. By the time I finished, my heart rate had normalized, and I was no longer in panic mode.

Despite my best efforts to stay organized, I still lose things. I had a distinct memory of writing a scene for one of my manuscripts last year. But no matter where I looked, I could not find it, and I spent hours looking through my notebooks, files, and boxes.

After I worked through the frustration, panic, and devastation, I realized I hadn't written it. I had made notes about it in an outline I'd written for the book. I've had this happen at other times, too. Usually it means I've thought about the scene. It's vivid in my mind, and I end up believing I've already written it. It's quite shocking to learn I haven't. The banker's box is my safety net.

Author's Note:

I love hearing how people organize themselves. I'm the person who enjoys looking at pictures of beautifully organized rooms, clean desks, and reading nooks. Don't worry, I know many of those pictures depict rooms and areas that aren't lived in, but used only for show.

So I'm nonplussed by a few quilts being thrown around (I have one on me, one beside me and one behind me as I write), or books stacked in piles on the floor or the desk. My writing desk currently has a few stacked on it I'm using for reference points.

There's a banker's box beside my desk, too. Full of pieces to a story I wrote last NaNoWriMo. I haven't emptied and put my writer's bag away from the meeting I went to yesterday. My pocket boards are full of post-it notes, and there are fresh packets of them all over my desk, too.

Why do I mention all this? I'd hate for you to think I'm perfectly organized, or that I'd be uncomfortable if we met and your own desk was askew. The funny thing about my need for my stuff to be in a certain way is that when I'm in someone else's space, their order or disorder doesn't phase me. It's not mine to deal with, and so it's just background noise while I visit.