

# Getting a Life

Lisa Bell\* has a lot to deal with. The 22-year-old University of North Carolina graduate is adjusting to a new city, a new job, and soon, a new apartment.

“Going from a secure environment to being on your own is terrifying,” she says. “You think you’re going to be fine because you did well in college. Then suddenly you’re out there and you have to create your own world.”

Lisa means that there’s no school cafeteria serving your meals, no campus linen service for your laundry, and no syllabus telling you what to do. Instead of a dorm room, you’ve got an apartment, appliances, and annoyances like balancing your checkbook and paying your bills.

By systemizing and organizing you can prevent overload and more fully enjoy this exciting time of life. Here’s how to smooth the transition from college to the real world:

## Choosing an Apartment

Take your time. Consider finding a roommate for company and to share expenses. Don’t rent too far from work; commuting eats up time you’ll need for other new responsibilities. Also check the neighborhood for:

- **Convenience** to a supermarket, pharmacy, dry cleaner and service station
- **Close-by family members** or friends to leave keys with in case you get locked out
- **A sense of community:** churches, synagogues, community centers

## Moving In

Plan your move carefully and well in advance of starting your new job. Dealing with all there is to learn at work while living out of boxes quickly becomes overwhelming.

- **Create a folder** just for the move. Use it for telephone numbers you need handy, like the landlord and mover. Keep a “to do” list in the folder and check it often.
- **Activate utilities** before moving day and change your address with the post office.
- **If you’re moving out of state**, arrange to get your new driver’s license.

## Setting Up

Take time unpacking to put belongings in logical places. Don’t say, “I’ll put this here for now and deal with it later.” Later comes and it’s still there, still in the way, and still inconvenient.

- **Get the dimensions of each room.** It’s best to find out before the move that Aunt Edna’s couch is too long.
- **Set up a home office** with a file cabinet in a separate room or corner of any room.
- **Get a desk.** Curtains, plants and rugs can wait, but a desk is command central in the adult world and its paperwork and record keeping.
- **Maintain your desk** periodically by de-cluttering and filing.

## Staying on Track

Don’t procrastinate with bills. Pick two days a month (the first and 14th are easy to remember) to pay them so the rent is on time and you won’t miss grace periods. Also:

- **Streamline paperwork by using online bill paying** or pay some bills by automatic deduction from your paycheck.
- **Put wastebaskets in every room** and use them. Sort your mail each day over one of those wastebaskets to discard junk mail immediately.
- **Put magazine racks** where you like to read and find a place to store newspapers for recycling.
- **Always keep your keys, book bag, briefcase and/or purse** in the same place.

## Organizing Your Life

Once your place is organized, keep it that way.

- **Clean, do laundry and grocery shop** on specific days each week. Then you can plan and enjoy the fun stuff guilt-free.
- **Keep a calendar, planner or personal digital assistant** to organize your life. When you discipline yourself to use one routinely, life gets simpler.

Some with AD/HD need extra help from an organized friend or a paid professional organizer or coach. Whatever you do, don’t set yourself up for failure by ignoring your need for structure, organization, time management and routines. Remember, it’s your life.