Organizing Your Finances

A simple guide to determine what documents to keep and what documents are OK to toss!

Keep these documents forever

Ideally in a fireproof safe or in a safe-deposit box and backed up on the cloud.

- Birth/death certificates and Social Security cards
- Marriage licenses and divorce decrees
- Pension plan documents
- Copies of wills, living wills, trusts, and powers of attorney
- Military discharge papers
- Copies of burial deeds and plots
- Safe-deposit box inventory

Keep these documents for as long as you own the asset

Ideally in an organized and lockable filing cabinet and backed up on the cloud.

- Appliance manuals and warranties
- House and mortgage documents
- Insurance policies
- Vehicle titles and loan documents

Toss these documents

Ideally after running them through a document shredder.

- ATM deposit and withdrawal slips: Toss after less than 30 days
- Utility and phone bills: Toss after less than 30 days
- Credit card statements: Toss after 45 days
- Bank statements: Toss after 1 year
- Pay stubs: Toss after 1 year
- Medical records: Toss after 5 years
- Tax returns and supporting documents: Toss after 7 years
- Investment statements: Toss after 7 years

A good rule of thumb: If you will need to venture down to a government office, wait in line at a hospital or sit on the phone for an hour to retrieve a document, then it's likely best to hold onto it. If you can easily pop online and retrieve a document, then you likely don't need to keep a physical copy.

Sources: Jill on Money, Lifehacker.com, Mint.com, Suze Orman