



Inspector Ross™

Decluttering: Your All-weather Friend

An introduction to the
culture of decluttering
and
what it can do for you.

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Decluttering: Your All-weather Friend

This booklet is for those who are new to the sub-culture of decluttering – if you've never heard of it before, or are just starting out or only mildly interested in it, or perhaps just curious why others are interested in it.

Decluttering is not just for spring-cleaning – it can help immensely with everything you do, serving to clear the physical and personal space necessary for you to accomplish tasks, reach goals, solve problems, generate ideas, feel better, and so much more.

I hope the article in this booklet will inspire you to join in and make decluttering your all-weather friend.

[Note: When you see an instruction in square brackets, go ahead and do it.]

Here's some generalised terminology before we launch off.

Clutter

Junky, excessive, irrelevant, hindering or disorganised 'stuff', whether physical or otherwise.

Decluttering

Sorting out clutter to get rid of the junk, excess, irrelevance, hindrance or disorganisation.

Organising

Rearranging an area so it's orderly & functional, especially after decluttering.

Decluttering is the first phase, so organising can mean the whole process or just the end phase of rearrangement & tweaking.

Likewise, decluttering can imply organising in some contexts.

I've tried to use *decluttering* and *organising* in such a way that you'll know what level of action I mean each time.

Culture/sub-culture

In this sense, I mean a group of people who all share knowledge of and interest in a particular subject, and who practice it with that shared understanding. It's a culture or sub-culture depending how pervasive it is in your life and amongst the people you associate with.

There is one point you may have noticed I didn't mention above, and that's the 'beautiful' aspect. I know many decluttering writers advise you should only keep things you think are beautiful. To my way of thinking, that's a specialised type or level of decluttering which is perfectly valid for its purpose. I do that sometimes, although 'beautiful' on every count might be stretching it a bit. What I really want to emphasise here is how widely useful decluttering is, and then talk about a different specialised angle. Let's look at it generally first.

Good decluttering helps things happen

It may be that you've noticed the effects of decluttering in an off-hand way, or thought of them as pure coincidence. "I was sorting through some old photos last night, and then today I ran into an old school friend!" Has anything like that happened to you?

Perhaps you'd read how *organising* could produce these effects, tried it out, but then they didn't happen. A Professional Organiser, a coach or a keen friend may have worked with you but for whatever reason it failed to make a meaningful impact. That's one of the other reasons for this booklet – to better prepare you for getting great results from decluttering *and* organising.

You can help yourself and others by decluttering

Over the 9 years since I started working with clients professionally, we've applied the principles of decluttering and organising to do far more than tidy up. Besides the ever-needed sorting of paper piles & book-towers, we've addressed all manner of physical and less tangible situations. Clients have been male and female, aged 25-85, with a range of backgrounds and beliefs. Their concerns, feelings, standards of living and attitudes varied widely.

Sometimes they were more worried about other people or society than about their clutter. Whatever the situation, together we've set out to achieve a result, and sometimes outdone ourselves!

A few highlights, in no particular order or frequency:

- revitalise a beneficial hobby
- compile legal evidence
- save or make significant money (far greater than my fees)
- kick-start a business
- wind down a business
- effect a makeover
- gain qualifications
- switch careers
- find lost valuables
- lose weight
- improve health & fitness
- repair relationships
- obtain relief from negative feelings.

Compare this with the survey results I compiled while starting this business (as mentioned on my [Benefits page](#)), and you'll see that what people said they'd expect to get from decluttering and organising is mostly internal, and they saw that alone as being extremely valuable.

- A blessed feeling of peace
- Suddenly, more time
- Fewer impulses to buy off-list
- Be more relaxed & focussed
- Feel more content, in control
- Make life simpler, easier
- Endless value...priceless...able to just get on with it, without stress being a factor.

I found it true that clients see the above benefits in fairly early stages. From that more peaceful, focussed place, they are able to then go on and achieve external results as in the first list! It doesn't seem to matter whether we start with areas that *feel* bad or areas that *look* bad. Just pick a trouble spot and start!

*[Choose some things that interest you from both lists above.
What 'stuff' might currently be attached to these?]*

Decluttering has history

I wrote a little paper to give my understanding of where decluttering came from and how it fits in with today's arts and sciences. It's called [The Placement Arts](#) and now forms an appendix chapter in [The Everies Book](#).

The brief version is that it hails from the ancient Chinese placement art of Feng Shui ('wind & water' – think, *unobstructed curving flows*), which in turn hails from the earlier architectural science in India, Vaastu ('habitat/dwelling' – *straight lines & right angles*, with the idea of having a space *breathe easily*). There are other placement arts, too, but the one you've probably heard about is Feng Shui. If you know any fans of this practice, you probably know people often use it with the aim of improving luck, wealth, romance, success, and so on.

I found this fascinating and read as much as I could on the topic over many years, but my personal background and nature meant I had to be able to explain its results for myself. More about that later. I was also mildly concerned about Feng Shui's early use for grave sites, and thought its use for the living might involve different, or even opposite, criteria. I decided to formalise my existing knowledge with a certificate course before theorising more, and began that recently.

Meanwhile, modern usage of all these arts in expert hands seems routinely beneficial. The decluttering aspect alone is so powerful it is increasingly used on its own merits by placement arts consultants, POs, interior decorators, consultants, coaches, finance gurus, personal development authors and more to pave the way for particular benefits to transpire.

It is also used by individuals for self-help, spring-cleaning, clearing away backlogs, or as a way of life. It is so empowering yet so gentle that it can be used alongside any other way of life you have going.

However, the hazard of being embraced by such diverse users is that it has become associated with diverse ideas. This is not a *bad* thing when it comes to clutter, just a hazard – a *potential* pitfall. Not all of its practitioners will subscribe to everything you've heard and loved. Some approaches may not suit you at all.

If you are hiring a professional who provides decluttering as part of their service, it's therefore important to find a good match. All the Professional Organisers (POs) I've met are amongst the nicest, smartest, most industrious and caring professionals you could ask for. I haven't met a lot of decluttering practitioners in other industries, but the few I have were similarly impressive. Professionals will take the time early on – as you should – to clarify expectations for any one job.

I'll soon discuss a few points others have asked or raised from time to time, but now I want to explain how the Inspector Ross approach boosts the skill of how to get desired results by targeting the right clutter.

You can direct decluttering towards specific ends

This is where that specialised application I mentioned earlier comes in. It grew out of my need to make decluttering effects seem logical. While *decluttering* is loosely used to mean clearing away junky or messy 'stuff', *clutter* can embrace more types of inconvenience. Here's a definition you may not have considered but which really helps find an objective starting point for decluttering in any one session:

Anything that gets in the way of, prevents, undermines, or sabotages appropriate action; while clutter does interfere with appearances, thoughts and feelings, it's where it affects or prevents action that we can objectively call it clutter.

By this definition, it doesn't even need to be a *lot* of stuff. It could be an absence, or something unfit for purpose. Decluttering involves sorting through whatever clutter there is and doing a number of *re*-s with it: removing, relocating, recycling, re-employing or repurposing it. Technically, a couple more 're' functions would be done next at the actual organising step: rearranging and/or replenishing, but that's a technicality ☺ You get the idea. The process of decluttering requires that you, firstly, *recognise* that action could be improved; secondly, *look* at what is adversely affecting the action; and finally, *declutter* enough to bring action to (or back to) a level you can be pleased with and proud of.

With that in mind, you'll see that decluttering can have significant roll-on effects. Let's take the first highlight listed in the 'help' section – revitalising a hobby. Supposing you just made a hobby area look neat, beautiful or even inspiring. That may or may not get *you* revitalised. Using the above action theory, you would take a step back and plan before decluttering. You'd honestly consider what action or actions you'd need to improve to get that hobby going again. Note that this might expand your needful decluttering into other areas, like diarising or social media time management – not just the hobby corner. Once you've worked out what actions will allow you to be active in your hobby, you can identify what is compromising those actions and then deal with them as clutter until you are revitalised and steadily active at the hobby.

Done well, this sort of decluttering produces lasting *change*, whether internally, or in the physical space or the systems of action. Done on areas that have been neglected or mismanaged, its effects can jump right up and surprise you.

When you realise what a great friend decluttering is, it will be easier to make it a habit. Apparent magic may become a routine part of your performance.

I say 'apparent magic' because although my approach as outlined above is quite a mechanical process, you are very likely to notice bits of magic weaving through in the form of pleasant surprises and synchronicity.

Taking the above example, you may spot just the right piece of furniture for your hobby corner, or get presented with a gift that happens to serve your project – from someone who doesn't even know your interests! You could suddenly find yourself with a week free to indulge your passion where there seemed no time for it before. It *might* be that the universe is obliging your new sense of order – a popular idea I find no argument with.

On the other hand, maybe these things were available all along, obscured by a cluttered and clouded view of what luck and support were on offer. Imagine being able to turn this skill towards any topic you care to! If you think I'm getting all mystical now, make sure you visit the links in the history section ;-). Regardless, I kid you not: decluttering is confined to neither friend-in-need nor fair-weather status. When you learn to use it effectively, decluttering becomes your all-weather friend.

Let's now look at those common queries I mentioned earlier.

Do I have to hold onto each item and ask myself questions?

Not exactly. At least not with my methodology. Different practitioners use different approaches. What I ask in the early days is that you *face* each item for decluttering consideration. I know that many people love to chat about this and that while decluttering but, certainly in the beginning, this will prevent you from getting best results. A kind of communion with the *items* is needed. Handling and looking at them as you work allows the reasons why you *do* hold onto clutter to surface – at first obviously ("thought it might be useful one day"), and later more profoundly. What is found at the base of a pile or the core of a clutter pocket often comes as a shock, fortunately soon followed by a small or large catharsis – a healing change of mind or heart as some previously uninspected burden lifts.

Talking about why you *think* you hold onto clutter, especially without physically sorting it, is not very helpful. Hands-on interaction with it is. If you throw boxes of uninspected storage out wholesale or let someone else declutter your belongings, you might be inclined to accept what another tells you about your cluttered condition, or never get any of the powerful realisations that make it possible to end the clutter cycle and begin your new lease on life. You'll simply fill the empty space with a new round of clutter.

It's also important to not let yourself get maudlin – pace has a lot to do with this. Remain active, alert and looking outward at the stuff. Just make contact with a piece, look at it, assess its relevance, decide where it *now* belongs, action that and move onto the next thing. If you're doing it well, the sudden emotions and revelatory ideas will occur close to the end of any one cluttered area – a pile, drawer, cupboard, box or 'clump'. These experiences may be slight but, as I say, are generally cathartic. You'll grow lighter, fresher and happier as you persevere.

If they're really too uncomfortable at first, put a 'Decluttering in progress' sign over the incomplete mess, take a refreshing walk and then get someone else to help you finish the task As Soon As Possible! Half-finished decluttering exaggerates that 'worse before it's better' stage, so make it a priority to clear it away properly.

Most times, though, you'll find the experiences pretty interesting! You'll get to know and like yourself better when closely-examined 'things' reveal your caring, anguished or sometimes amusing reasoning. Your job is then to simply let the emotion or idea pass with neither interruption nor overthinking – just let it wash over you, and let it go. Then re-look at the 'thing' in front of you as it relates to present day. One useful question you *could* ask at that point is, "What action(s) with this thing before me, or here in my hand, will best serve my interests now and into the future?" Then act on the answer!

Don't be afraid of getting into decluttering. These emotions and careening ideas are popping up all the time in life – we just don't have time to assign them to the right cause before the next distraction claims our attention. With decluttering, you get a chance to pin the right tail on the right donkey.

You can safeguard yourself against potential upsets in a few ways:

- Stock up for easy-to-assemble meals & nutritious snacks, and eat well beforehand.
- Get enough sleep the night before a decluttering session.
- Choose times when you'll be undisturbed, especially by critics.
- Sip clear (non-alcoholic) fluids at regular intervals.
- Take breaks to come up for air – literally, away from dust and enclosure, as well as to refresh your attention.

E.g.,

- Go for a pleasant walk.
- Take some exercise.
- Do everyday housework.
- Chat with an upbeat friend about something *else*.
- Read an engrossing novel, etc.

Most importantly, always see a decluttering project through to the finish, even if you have to call in help to keep you at it.

[Practice on a few innocent items now, using the sorting guide below]

Main decluttering actions, from the slideshow on my [DIY page](#)



How do I keep clutter from coming back after I get rid of it?

The key is in the word 'keep'. While you can hire a team of POs, or rally friends and family around to do a busy bee, you'll then need to learn the skills of decluttering and organising to actively manage clutter as a way of life. There is no way around it – *someone* in your household needs to know these skills and be allowed to use them.

The great news is, learning the skills is easy. Forming the habit by directing decluttering toward desired ends is a great way to cement them in, because you'll reap encouraging rewards. If you think you have to do a major overhaul repeatedly, that's *discouraging*, but once you develop the habits and mindset needed, they kind of take on a life of their own. Major backlogs become a thing of the past. These habits and mindsets can be refined into *systems*. In time, you'll wonder how you could ever have entertained so many counter-productive elements.

[Walk around now and find some clutter that's recently come back to roost.

What would be a good habit to make it stay in its place?]

For example, if you have overdue tax reports, the first sort-out is a tough slog. It can produce illness-like symptoms: headaches, exhaustion, mood swings or actual ailments such as colds. If you then think that keeping paperwork clutter from coming back will involve the same agony, you won't want to face it, and will begin to neglect next year's paperwork almost immediately. That's why a PO, a tutor or a coach – or at least this article ;-) – is so vital in the beginning of your journey into the world of decluttering. They will help you know what to expect so you don't give up and rob yourself of its magical potential.

People you know who are super-organised are that way usually because they've been doing it for a long time. Maybe they have a knack for it or they grew up in a home that happily ran that way or they've been involved in some discipline such as the military, martial arts, etc. but it still takes continuing practice and vigilance to keep clutter at bay. I was casually training myself for years before I earnestly researched it with the object of doing it for others. I don't consider myself 'super-organised', just further along in parts of my journey.

For results-oriented decluttering, perfection isn't the goal – unless that's the result you're after ☺ By learning how to set priorities (toward goals and selected to-dos), you can form the most useful habits for your purposes. If I'm super-busy (as I am in writing this booklet for you), I adjust my ideas of what else I need to do while meeting a deadline. Some Everies™ – as I call those every-so-often tasks life demands of us – will need to wait. Managing clutter shouldn't be your life's focus but clutter is not going to automatically stay away just because you sorted it once. (Everies are described more fully in [The Everies Book](#) .)

What, people actually pay for that?

True, only one associate has said this out loud to me, but it was often enough and so astonishing I thought I'd settle it here & now ;-)

Those who have never heard of decluttering, or who have been blessed with an orderly mindset and upbringing, can find it hard to believe that anyone would need professional help with clutter, or that clearing clutter away would deliver real value. It's a small irony, really, because it seems they cannot imagine what it would be like to be overwhelmed by clutter. By the same reasoning, being clutter-free must be desirable and thus valuable.

And it is! I've already pointed out that I've been able to help clients make money (through improved jobs, better property arrangements, efficient office setups) or save money (through tax or interest management), but even saving on groceries and repairs (through kitchen economics & timely home maintenance) can soon pay for the education and early coaching needed to groove in the decluttering habit.

There's another benefit often overlooked, and that is the value of having an informed, sincere & unbiased friend. For just that agreed-upon time, you can hire someone to behave like a model friend: someone who treats your matters confidentially and gives you her or his best advice directed at nothing more nor less than helping you accomplish what it is you want to accomplish, with no unspoken agendas.

We can all be poor friends sometimes, but when you hire a professional, we are bound by certain rules and codes to deal ethically with your information and use it to serve *you*, not ourselves or an outsider.

When you share a private idea or disclose something personal, my whole focus is on how this relates to the decluttering work we're engaged in or embarking on. It helps that I'm trained as a librarian, among other fields. I'm able to refer you to appropriate information and help you consider the consequences of options, then guide you in acting safely and ethically towards the outcome you need, not – important to note – the outcome I think you should want. Clients report this as an invaluable aspect of my coaching style that's very hard to replicate in everyday relationships. To be helped to go forward with increased confidence in your own ideas of problem-solving returns value many times over. (Teach one how to fish, and all that...)

[Take some confidential matter that you'd like help with, and declutter its related household parts using the Rapid-Sort diagram given earlier.

Did it lighten the burden a little? (If not, do more on-topic decluttering until the weight lifts slightly.)]

In summary, then, I do believe a terrific option is to hire the right professional to help you cultivate the decluttering habit. Having said that, I know it can be a leap for many to invite a comparative stranger in to look at your stuff or hear your personal difficulties. Add to that the fact that I have two of my own reasons for wanting to minimise hands-on appointments (a hearing loss and – contrarily – a desire to help greater numbers of people), and you'll see I had a dilemma about how to deliver a better option.

Come down to The Station

My solution? I'll be conducting online training and coaching down at The Station – my new online course facility. This means huge savings for you, as the hourly-rate issue is removed, but it does mean you'll have to learn the subject more so you can work alone between contact times. I'll cover decluttering and the specialised applications touched on in this booklet – these could eventually grow to cover some 200 situations! All you'll need to do then is come down to The Station where I'll 'take your statement' about what area you feel is troublesome, and I'll give you an appropriate project! For now, though, my offerings are humble:

- 1) A **decluttering course** that *could* run without my input at all, available for a very modest choice of fee; and
- 2) You can follow that up with a completely coachable – yet still potentially self-running – **decluttering project** tailored to any area.

Both services will be self-paced within reason, bearing in mind the need to stay ahead of encroaching clutter.

The *advantages* of my physical absence are that you can retain your privacy and conveniently schedule your own lessons or organising sessions. The precise details of your situation can be kept completely confidential, as I'll only need generic information to assist you, and the same [codes and rules](#) that applied before still apply online.

The overall cost of tuition and coaching will be, as I say, drastically lower than it would be under an hourly rate for personal attendance. I really want this shift to online services to work for you, and will do everything in my power to bring you a valuable experience.

If you haven't read [The Everies Book](#) yet, I recommend doing so first (though it's not absolutely essential), then sign up for the [first course](#), which teaches one small section of it.

October 2018 note: This article now forms part of the Finish Your Pet Project (FYPP) Program; that service is additional to those listed above. Minor edits have been made to the article, especially for participants in the FYPP Program.

Preview the book, course and project at these links:

The Everies **Book** (eBook) only **\$11**

<https://www.inspectorross.com.au/the-everies-book.html>

Nutshell Decluttering **Course** – **\$49** (less than a first appointment!)

https://www.inspectorross.com.au/store/p15/Nutshell_Decluttering_Online_Course.html

Nutshell Virtual Coaching **Project** – **\$97** base rate (must do the **Course** first, then obtain your tailored project from Inspector Ross via email)

+ additional **fixed** fee depending on the result you're after.

You can buy **all 3** at only **\$140** for the entire *base* package.

You can also do away with any extra (+) fees by
negotiating a minimal coaching project.

I'll do my best to set you up for a great result within your budget.

Come down to The Station and make decluttering your all-weather friend today!

<https://www.inspectorross.com.au/The-Station.html>

Want more information first?

Website: www.inspectorross.com.au

Social media: [@InspectorRossUpdates](https://www.instagram.com/InspectorRossUpdates)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/inspectorross/>

Questions or comments?

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Thanks for reading!

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

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