

Disorganized

To be disorganized is to lack the will or skill to make orderly units out of the flow of daily plans. The good cook will be thinking, while riding the bus to his restaurant, of the sequence and composition of the dishes he will be presenting to the diners that afternoon. When he gets to work he will simply be laying out the plans that are in his mind. If he is experienced, he will know that glitches are bound to intrude on his planning, so that he needs also to organize sets of contingencies. The disorganized chef will be thinking about his girlfriend or his ill mother, while he rides to work. He will, consequently, have to improvise in the kitchen. He may make some big mistakes. It is just possible, though, that he will create a masterpiece in his confusion.

Examples

1 Disorganized academic

I have a European academic friend who is disorganized. In order to survive, she has given priority to her university responsibilities, but outside of those bread and butter areas, she is so disorganized you would say her life was divided into two distinct sections. Her office is a never never land of piled up newspapers, student reports, academic journals, textbooks, and personal documents. Entering her space your first concern is where to sit. You have to make a place for yourself on the edge of a chair. Nor is Jeannette the kind of instinctual person who knows just where to find this or that, in the confusion. She is rather the kind who has to dig around, who mutters in the search, and who tells you she will find the material and get back to you promptly. You have to like her, which I do, to enjoy spending time in her space.

2 Book reading

1 My reading habits have always been disorganized. I have a weakness for big books, like Gibbons' *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* or Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism*, which occupy me for weeks at a time. But I am not organized when it comes to plotting future readings. As I approach the end of one vast read, I begin to feel the pressure of a still unannounced next text. I consciously don't let myself formulate that text—will it be a life of Ataturk, of Genghis Khan, or a history of the sewage system of Ancient Rome? (Two of those did actually make it into my list, and got read.) New choices are often heralded by the chance of what is to hand, and new to me. Why am I reading Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley*? It was on a free book trolley at the local library last summer just as I was finishing *India since Gandhi*.