

Moving is always an adventure. Whether this is your first move or your 14th, no one knows everything about moving. I sure don't! Every single move, I open boxes at the other end and wonder "why in the heck did I move *that!*" I've been collecting moving wisdom from friends and family for years, and I've put it all together here for you.

This series includes a lot of things that you can do to make your move smoother. If you've not moved before, don't let this list scare you. You don't have to do them all! Pick and choose the ideas that seem like they'll help you the most. When it comes right down to it, there is only so much of your move that you can control. Regardless of what you do or do not do, your items are going to be packed and sent to your new location. Do not make yourself, or your family, crazy! The important thing is that your family gets to its new home safely. Stuff is just stuff.

Most of this information is applicable to all moves, but some of it is specific to having professional movers handle the actual packing and moving. I do not cover specifics for Personally Procured Moves (PPMs), previously known as Do It Yourself (DITY) moves. I've only done one partial DITY ever, and it wasn't a great experience, so I am absolutely not qualified to give any advice on that!

Note: A large wall calendar can keep you from feeling overwhelmed with all the little tasks. One item per day is completely doable. A million random to-dos on a list is a recipe for frustrating. I've tried to break these tasks down by timeline and category, I hope that helps a little.

While no PCS move is ever perfect, working through as much of this list as possible will help you have the smoothest, and least stressful, move possible.

You can do this!

As soon as you know you are going to move

If you are lucky enough to have advance notice of your move, and if you have the enthusiasm to start working on your move earlier, there is a lot of stuff you can do months ahead of time. Don't worry if you don't have months – all this stuff can be done on a compressed schedule, if necessary.

I've highlighted in blue the items that are most important.

Errands and Paperwork

- Think about when you'll share news of the move with your family and friends, considering carefully when and how you want to tell smaller children.
- Decide whether you will have military-contracted movers handle your move, if you will do a Personally Procured Move (PPM), formerly known as a Do It Yourself (DITY) move, or a combination of a military-contracted move with a partial PPM.
- [Register with the Defense Personal Property System \(DPS\) and complete counseling, as required.](#)
- Investigate moving classes at your installation's family support group (Fleet and Family Service Center, Airman and Family Readiness Center, Army Community Service, or Marine Corps Community Service.)
- [Verify your family's weight allowance for your household goods](#), and start getting an idea of whether you're going to need to get rid of items so that you don't exceed your weight allowance. The general rule of thumb is to estimate 1,000 pounds per room, then add for large items such as pianos, appliances, book collections, and large furniture. You can also use the weight of your last move as a guideline, and then consider how much you have added to your household since the last move.
- Look into housing options at your new location.
- Consider ordering an [address stamp](#) or making labels with your contact information. Stamping or labeling each box before it leaves the house will increase the chances that your items will eventually make it to you if they are misplaced along the way. If you want to use a stamp, [order it now](#).
- [Put together your moving binder, including a calendar to note important dates.](#)
- [Make sure all family members are up-to-date on their immunizations.](#)
- Consider scheduling dental exams, eye exams, and physicals before you go. If kids will need sports physicals for new schools, try to obtain their forms (from the office or athletic department.)
- [Find out how to obtain your medical and dental records. Make a note on your calendar for the time frame when you will need to request them.](#)
- [Find out the process for retrieving any digital medical files, including mammograms, x-rays, CT scans and MRIs.](#)
- Figure out where to order the largest size zip-top bags. You can usually order them by the case on [Amazon](#) for very reasonable prices.
- Schedule vet appointments, and [plan out special paperwork if required for overseas moves or airline travel.](#)
- Book kennels for pets at both ends of trip, if required.

- Decide whether you want to move your grill's propane tank, or if you'd prefer to get a new one. In most situations, you can move a tank if it is certified empty, but it is often easier to get a new one at the new location. Options for the old tank include selling it on Craig's List, giving it to a friend, or seeing if there are any local rebate programs (check with the Exchange, Home Depot, Lowes, or Blue Rhino.)
- Decide whether you are going to clean your house yourself, or hire a cleaning crew after you've moved out.
- Update powers of attorney and other legal paperwork, particularly as required for your spouse or other friend or family member to handle the shipment and/or storage of your personal property, including vehicle.

Inside The House

- Make a list of the rooms in your house, and then subdivide each room into a section (closet, refrigerator, toy box). Systematically go through every single thing in your house and make a thoughtful decision about whether it needs to go with you. Have a trash bag, a recycling bag, and a donate box handy. If you have enough time, you can take clothes to the consignment shop, sell items on a local Facebook buy/sell page, and unload your books using [BookScouter](#). If you don't have time, donate things that you don't use, love or need. Throw the rest out. Be ruthless!
- Use this same list of rooms for your inventory. You can use a home inventory program, make your own list, or make a videotape. Inventorying a house is overwhelming; start with the easiest method or just the most important/expensive items first, then keep adding. If you inventory in a document, you can hopefully eventually just update it with each move.
- Consider moving your most important computer files, including pictures, to a [portable hard drive](#) to travel separately from your computer. (Maybe you carry the computer and your spouse carries the hard drive.)
- Measure your large furniture, so you can organize its placement before you have your household goods delivered at the other end of the move.
- Eat down the contents of your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer. I like to [focus on one area \(shelf of pantry, drawer of freezer\) each week](#) as I make our menus.
- Put a large box near the front door of your house, and mark it "donations." Put another box next to it and label it "return to owner." Tell your family members about these boxes.

Special Considerations For OCONUS Moves

Moves Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS) are typically more complicated than regular moves. In almost all cases, your belonging will be packed in large wooden crates for shipment. The moving truck will pull up with crates loaded on the back, the crates will be filled and then nailed shut. In theory, they remain nailed shut until they are delivered to your new home. In reality, they are often opened for customs or agriculture inspections, or other reasons.

- Begin process of obtaining [no-fee passports and visas](#) for each family members.
- If you do not have regular (tourist) passports, begin application process for each family member.
- Look into [requirements for moving pets](#) to your new location. Many locations require certain shots, examinations, or paperwork within particular timeframes.
- Make [reservations for temporary lodging](#) at your new location. It is easier to book for longer and shorten your reservation than to make a shorter reservation and have to try to extend it.
- Check your orders to see what shipments you are authorized, and think about how to organize them: Unaccompanied Baggage, regular Household Goods, and non-temporary storage.
- Find Facebook groups for your new location. These are great resources for finding out the details for your new location.
- Consider whether you want to sell, store, or ship your vehicle(s.) If you plan to ship your vehicle, and you have a loan on it, contact your lender to see if they will grant you written permission to take the vehicle out of the country. If they will not, you need to either pay off the loan, sell the vehicle, or put it into storage in the United States before you go.
- Start researching if there are things that you don't want to take, or things that you want to buy before you go. This can be challenging because there are so many variables, including not knowing what size housing you will have. Beds are a particular concern, as are US-sized linens. Both can be difficult or expensive to obtain overseas.
- You will probably be authorized an unaccompanied baggage shipment. There's an entire section devoted to this topic below!

The Moving Binder

For every move, you need to have a single location to house all your essential documents. I use a [large, zippered binder](#) with a handle and a variety of pockets inside. I use dividers and page protectors inside, and a colored ribbon on the handle just to make sure that it stands out. In the pockets, I keep tape, scissors, extra loose leaf and printer paper, and extra page protectors. I also include some blank thank you notes since I always have to write thank yous during the moving process. A printable list of things to put in your moving binder is at the end of this document.

Your sections might include:

Orders: These go at the very front, with multiple copies in a page protector to distribute to the many people that need them. It also helps to have a copy easily accessible on your phone, so that you can email a soft-copy quickly. For overseas moves, also keep your command sponsorship or dependent entry approval paperwork, plus copies.

Family: Keep your birth certificates, marriage certificates (and divorce decrees), custody, adoption, or guardianship paperwork, naturalization paperwork, social security cards, and photocopies of passports, driver's licenses, and other identification cards. A zipper pencil pouch that clips into the binder is great for keeping passports from sliding around. Also include Information for your insurance policies, mortgages, credit cards, and other bills. Vehicle title, copies of registration, and other vehicle information. If you are a single parent or dual military, keep a copy of your family care plan here.

Old House: Lease, moving-in checklist, utility company information including account numbers and contact info, move out appointment time and contact telephone number.

Transportation: All transportation confirmation numbers and contact info: airlines, hotels, rental cars, shuttles, etc. Airline tickets.

New House: Include the contact information for the housing office at your new location, reservation confirmation information for temporary lodging, and all paperwork related to house-hunting or a house that you have already leased or bought.

Property: This includes information and documents about your various shipments, contact info for the old and new personal property offices and your carrier, your inventory, and a list of the sizes of your largest furniture (for organizing room layouts before your delivery happens.)

Medical: Include copies of all immunization records, eye glass and contact lens prescriptions, and medication prescriptions. You may be carrying your medical charts separately, but they typically don't fit in your binder. If you have family members enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), keep your EFMP paperwork in this section.

Legal: Keep your wills and powers of attorney here.

Pets: Include all pet immunization records, licenses, and other pertinent information.

Vehicles: If you are shipping a vehicle, keep your shipping paperwork, title, and registration papers here.

Money: Have a sleeve or folder for all receipts related to the move. Many items can be claimed on your travel claim, and other items can be deducted from your federal income tax return as unreimbursed moving expenses. Keep contact information for each credit and/or debit card. Include income tax returns.

One Month Before The Move

About a month out from your move, it is time to move into high gear. Once again, do not make yourself insane about trying to do it all. Pick and choose the items that are most important for your particular move, and then do what you can.

One important thing that you need to do is schedule a survey with the moving company. This is when a representative comes out to look at how many things you have to be packed and shipped. A survey is an important part of the process because it ensures that the movers bring the right number and sizes of boxes. Be sure to point out anything that need special boxes, such as mattresses or wardrobe boxes for hanging clothes, especially if the item isn't obvious (such as a spare mattress hiding underneath a bed.) Also be sure to point out any unusual items, like large instruments, taxidermy, and exceptionally fragile items. During the survey, ask for their estimate of how much weight you have, and if you have any responsibility to prepare appliances for the move. Some companies may require that you obtain the necessary hardware to secure certain appliances, such as front-loading clothes washers.

Occasionally, the moving company will do the survey via telephone. If this happens, you have even more responsibility to ensure that they know about any special situations.

Then, continue working through the following list. Once again, I've highlighted in blue the items that are most important.

Inside The House

- Start assembling your "first night box" with whatever you think you will need for the first night in your house. This is going to vary a lot depending on your individual situation. Items you might want to include: a set of sheets for each bed, a pillow for each person, a towel and washcloth for each person (if you're not carrying them in luggage), a plastic shower curtain and shower curtain rings (you can skip this if you know your new home has a shower with a door), a double bagged set of basic shower toiletries, a small lamp and a few light bulbs, a basic tool kit including a regular screwdriver, a Phillips head screw driver, a hammer, a tape measure, and a bottle opener. If you have children, throw in a new game, toy or book that does not require parental assistance.
- Consider these [military spouse recommended labels](#) to keep your boxes in order. I haven't tried them yet, but I have several friends who swear that they made the move so much easier.
- If you don't have heavy plastic linen bags (the type that comforters come in), consider purchasing [space bags](#). This keeps your linens clean and dry, and prevents the packers from using your linens as packing material.
- Consider whether you want to put your mattresses into specially designed bags before the movers come. Movers have to protect your mattresses; they may use bags, boxes, or paper. I've heard reports of shipments picking up bed bugs during moves or storage. This makes me nervous, and I'm wishing that I had packed all our items in [these bags](#) before shipping.

- Sort out the items that should not be shipped, and start moving these items to new homes. [For items that you want to keep to the end, make sure that they don't end up accidentally being packed.](#) No one wants to have their dining room table ruined by leaking laundry soap, or their clothing destroyed by sesame oil! The packers will try to not pack anything dangerous or prohibited, but it is ultimately your responsibility to make sure those items are not available to be packed. This includes candles, batteries, opened liquids, lighters, matches, and whatever other items that your movers have indicated.
- Gather similar items together to make the packing more organized. For example, if you keep office supplies in the office, the study, and the kitchen, gather them all in one place. Do the same thing for any items that you have in multiple locations: books, toys, toiletries, clothes (by person). If you have children sharing bedrooms, separate their items.
- Gather small, breakable items together so that they will be packed together and properly.
- [Gather high value items](#) so that you can supervise their packing.
- Start bagging small items: toy parts, office supplies, toiletries.
- Start separating your and your spouse's [professional gear](#), and keep them in their own area.
- [Sort your jewelry, and decide what needs to be hand-carried and what can be packed.](#) This is a very individual decision, and it depends on the value of your jewelry and how much you would care if it were lost or damaged.
- Take down curtains, wash, and thoroughly dry. Remove curtain hanging hardware, putting small pieces in a zip-top bag and securing it to the larger pieces with painter's tape.
- Empty and thoroughly clean fish tanks. Keep open with parts spread out to dry completely.
- If you have any items still packed from a previous move, unpack them and discard the packing materials.
- [Pull everything out of crawlspaces, and bring items down from the attic.](#)

Outside The House

- Disassemble any large outdoor pieces such as swing sets, trampolines, etc.
- Start cleaning outdoor items such as furniture, grills, etc.
- Clean lawn tools such as lawn mowers, pruners, shovels.
- De-cobweb or wipe down items in garage.

Errands and Paperwork

- [Have your doctor/clinic print out immunization records.](#) Scan and upload to online storage, and put originals in your moving binder.
- [Have your doctor/clinic print out hard copies of all prescriptions.](#) Scan and upload to online storage, and put originals in your moving binder.
- [Retrieve your digital medical information](#), such as xrays and MRIs, and put the discs in your moving binder. A disc page or zippered pencil pouch will help keep it/them from getting lost.
- [Have your eye doctor make copies of your eye glasses and contact lens prescriptions.](#) Scan and upload to online storage, and put the originals in your moving binder.

- Find out contact information for both your old and new Tricare regions, and what you are supposed to do if you require medical care en-route. Put this information in the medical section of your moving binder.
- [Inform your landlord of your move](#), per the terms of your lease or the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act.
- [Contact utilities and other service providers to schedule the end of your services. Find out the procedure for returning your cable box and/or modem](#) to the company, if required. Request letters of credit from the utility providers so that you maybe won't have to pay a security deposit at your new location.
- [Cancel subscriptions or local delivery services.](#)
- [Cancel gym or club memberships.](#)
- Talk to bank about process for closing accounts, if required.
- Identify items that need to be dry cleaned before more. This includes clothes, coats, blankets, curtains, dry clean only linens. Take them to the dry cleaner, note the pick-up date on your moving calendar.
- Inform your child care provider of your move.
- Make arrangements for child care on moving days, if appropriate.
- [Determine process for obtaining school records.](#) Submit school withdrawal paperwork and records requests, as necessary. Inquire with your children's teachers if you can get schoolwork to be put into shipments versus having to mail or carry work that is sent home on the last day of school.
- Purchase a wide variety of [zip-top bags](#), [painter's tape](#), and [Sharpies](#), as necessary.
- Make appointments for vehicle maintenance.
- Verify that you have spare keys to each vehicle. If not, make spare keys. Put them in your moving binder.
- Begin process of selling vehicles.
- Gather or purchase items for [car emergency kit](#), if driving.
- Purchase drinks and snack foods for travel days.
- Identify items that you will want for the drive, including spares of items like [earbuds](#) and batteries. Purchase them now.
- If you have decided to use labels, print out labels with your name and some contact information (email, cell phone, command, etc.) to be places on each box as it is packed. This will increase the chances that your items will be returned if they are somehow misplaced during the move. This happens far more often that you might think!
- Print labels for each person or room. This will make it easier to get the items to the correct room at the other end. Another option is to have colored or patterned duct tape or electrical tape for each room or person.
- If you won't have time or access to a printer later in the move, print out "bingo sheets" for delivery day. These sheets are numbered 1-100, and you'll probably need 3-10 of them. Put them in your moving binder. Printable "bingo sheets" are at the end of this document - you'll have to make enough copies for all your items.

OCONUS Moves

Moving to a location Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS) means that you have special considerations. Checking and double-checking every single item will decrease the number of surprises along the way.

- Verify the luggage allowances for your flights. Print out the airlines policies, including military policies, and put it in your moving binder. Consider bookmarking the page on your phones, too.
- [Make an appointment to ship your vehicle.](#) Determine if special cleaning is required before shipment, and make appointment for cleaning, if required.
- [Learn about restrictions on moving food, alcohol, guns, taxidermy, knives, or other items.](#) You might be surprised by the things that are forbidden in certain countries!
- [Find out if there are agricultural requirements for having your items cleaned a specific way.](#)

One Week Before The Move

The last week before the packers arrive can feel like a whirlwind. Schedule some down-time so that you don't exhaust yourself with moving-related chores.

I've highlighted in blue the items that are most important.

Errands and Paperwork

- **Confirm dates with carrier** and/or personal property office.
- Program in your phone the contact information for your carrier and for your personal property office's quality assurance person.
- Contact insurance company to update coverage and contact information.
- **Close out safe deposit boxes.**
- Verify account transfer or closing information with bank.
- **Make sure that you have all documents that you need to hand-carry with you:** passports, insurance cards, immunization records, school documents, and travel paperwork.
- Refill prescriptions that will end during move.
- Decide whether you plan to provide food for the movers. If so, place order or buy groceries now. Buy water and other beverages if you plan to provide them. Think about whether you will be able to stow the cooler in at the very end of the shipment, or if you have an old one that you can donate, or if you want to borrow a cooler from a friend.
- Decide if you plan to tip the movers. If so, get the cash out of the bank now. Put it in the refrigerator, your glove box, or your *do not pack* room.
- Return everything that doesn't belong to you: library books, school items, borrowed tools, that jacket that got left at your house.
- Pick up items that need to be moved: dry cleaning, school work, etc.
- Inform your neighbors that the street may be blocked during your packout.
- Submit change of address information to the US Postal Service.
- Ask a friend (or friends) to be available to help with errands, pick up lunches on moving days, or be available to take one last load to the thrift store or dump. Say yes to the people who ask to help.

Inside The House

- Consider disassembling furniture. Put small items and hardware in zip-top bags and secure to item with painter's tape. Do not let the movers tape the hardware directly to the furniture - this often ends poorly.
- Remove pictures and other wall decorations from the wall. Remove the hangers from the wall, put them in tiny bags, and tape them to the back of the wall decoration with painter's tape.
- Start packing your suitcases or car.
- Pack your toiletry bag.
- **Designate your *do not pack* room(s)** with large, clear signs (in multiple languages, if appropriate.) Begin moving items to this room.
- Start bagging everything you can imagine: clothes, linens, office supplies. I open each dresser drawer, put the contents in a large zip-top bag, squeeze it flat, seal, and put it back in the bag. I do the same with linens, office supplies and toys. If you are

uncomfortable with the movers touching or seeing your personal clothing, like lingerie, you can wrap it in tissue paper before putting it into the zip-top bag.

- Put zip-ties around your hangers to keep them straight and organized during the move.
- If you have any items that you don't want the packers to find or touch, decide how you're going to have them moved.
- If you have items in small boxes, wrap them in plastic wrap or with painter's tape. Some packers will dump small boxes into a larger box, or sometimes they just come open during transit.
- Start pre-packing your kitchen ware. As I empty and wash each large plastic food storage container (like flour and sugar containers), I refill it with kitchen items. This includes utensils, kitchen linens, and small appliance parts. If you hope to ship your spices or any other open food, place them in zip-top bags and then put them into plastic containers. Put anything small in a container or zip-top bag to prevent the "one bamboo skewer wrapped in six sheets of paper" problem. It will make the move easier, and prevent loss when things get lost in all the unpacking paper.
- Mark cabinets that you do not want packed, such as food cabinets.
- [Mark appliances that will not be moved.](#)
- Tape remotes to electronics, or gather remotes into a single bag and hand-carry. Use painter's tape so that you don't damage the remotes or the items.
- Remove batteries from all items.

Outside The House

- [Drain your lawn-mower of gas and oil.](#)
- Drain garden hoses.
- Have your propane tank certified empty, sell it, donate it, or return it to a store for credit.
- Clean grill, fire pit, and other outdoor items.
- Scrub and disassemble large outdoor toys.

The *Do Not Pack* Room

During every move, you need to have one room that is designated for items that should not be packed. Bathrooms or walk-in closets make great *do not pack* rooms. Make large, clear signs for the door, and put it in multiple languages, if appropriate. I like to make a large X of painter's tape across the door so that you have to duck to get under the X. (But test to make sure that the painter's tape won't actually damage your paint. I know it isn't supposed to, but we had a bad experience last move.) When the movers arrive, show each and every mover the *do not pack* room during your tour of the house. Make sure your kids understand, too. Check on the room throughout the day, ensuring that it hasn't accidentally been entered (or packed!)

Items that need to go in your *do not pack* room include:

- Your moving binder, including passports, orders, airline tickets, medical records, school records, pet records, etc.
- Camera
- Car Keys
- Suitcases with clothes for move
- Required childrens' items (dolls, stuffed animals, blankies)
- Medications
- Toiletries
- Jewelry
- Chargers and power cords
- Laptops, tablets, iPods, cell phones.
- Cleaning Supplies
- Guns or other weapons
- Cable box and/or modem, if they need to be returned
- Pet items, including crates, food, medications, paperwork, maybe even the pets themselves
- Items you intend to hand-carry
- Pillows!
- Linens that you'll need until you leave
- Air mattresses
- Small toys and other children's entertainment

A list of items to put in your *do not pack room* is at the end of this document.

One warning about the *do not pack* room: it is probably larger than your vehicle, or your luggage allowance. It is very, very easy to put more stuff in the *do not pack* room than you can take with you. Try to find the balance between holding out everything you need and the amount of stuff you can physically transport. Thankfully, mailing expenses can be claimed on your travel claim.

Moving Day

The most important thing to remember on moving day is that all your belongings are just stuff. Yes, we'd all like our stuff to get to our new home safe and sound, and it probably will arrive without a hitch. But if something goes wrong with the shipment, it won't affect the important thing: your family. It's vital to keep the right perspective as you watch strangers pack your things.

If you've never had professional movers pack and move your things, you will probably feel overwhelmed by the speed at which they work. Depending on the size of your move, you may be allocated a few days to pack the items, and one or two days to load the truck. Most military moves take 2-3 days total, divided between packing and loading.

Moving day is going to be busy. Expect to get up early and be on your feet all day. Wear something comfortable, and load your pockets with sharpies, a box cutter, scissors, a notepad, stickers, and your phone with a camera.

On the first packing day, a crew will come and start boxing and wrapping all your items. There may be many workers, and they may be working in different rooms. This is when all your pre-organizing and staging makes things run smoothly. While you can request that they all pack in the same room at the same time, sometimes there just isn't space for that happen.

While they are packing and wrapping, the moving team will be labelling items and inventorying them on the inventory sheet. The packers will note the condition of items while they are packing or wrapping them, and put that notation on the inventory. You may want to stay near the person doing the inventory so that you agree with the noted damaged. If you do not agree with the packer's notes, request that they change it. It becomes overwhelming if you wait until the end to dispute the notes made on hundreds of items on the inventory. If you have any questions or issues with the way the condition of your items is being noted, speak with the crew leader and call your personal property office's quality assurance person. Photographs are also helpful.

Before The Movers Arrive:

- Gather children's lovies and put in do not pack room.
- Wash last sheets and towels.
- Empty the dishwasher, and wash everything left by hand.
- Wrap your silverware tray in plastic wrap, or put in a zip-top bag.
- Move all suitcases to car or do not pack room. Ensure that you have your moving binder, passports, and other valuables secured. Store your car keys at a neighbor's house, in your freezer, in your pocket or on a lanyard around your neck.
- Remove light bulbs from lamps.
- Put cable box and/or modem into do not pack room.
- Put do not pack signs on your trash cans, or wash and dry them thoroughly.
- Set up a bathroom for the movers to use. Stock it with plenty of toilet paper, paper towels, hand soap, and a plunger. Put a sign on the outside so that it is easy to identify, and show the bathroom to the movers when they arrive.

- Put ice over drinks in cooler.
- Move pets' water and food bowls and litter boxes to the do-not pack room.
- [Take pets to board, or lock them in a room that is well-labelled. Verbally tell the movers not to go into that room because there are animals. We've had good luck shifting our pets between rooms by letting the movers pack up a room, then pulling everything out and moving the animals to the now empty room. It isn't a perfect situation, but it works.](#)

When The Movers Are There:

- When the packers arrive, take the entire team on a tour of the house. Point out the bathroom and the do not pack room(s.) Show the professional gear areas, fragile items, high value items and any items that will require special packing.
- If you want to be very careful, take a videotape of each electronic item functioning with a mover in the tape.
- Request that high value items be packed and inventoried first, or move them to a secured area until they are packed.
- During the packing, have a child or friend go behind the packers and affix contact information labels and room/person labels (or colored/patterned tape) to each box. If necessary, you can do this in the evenings between packing days.
- Make sure that your "first night box" is well-identified. Ideally, have it put at the opening to the truck or the outside of crate #1. It might get moved along the way, but you can try.
- Check every inch of the house before you let the movers leave. This includes inside all cupboards and closets, inside the dishwasher, refrigerator, and washer and dryer, behind doors, inside medicine cabinets, in the attic – everywhere!

OCONUS Issues

If you've never seen someone's things be packed up for an OCONUS move, then you might be surprised when your moving truck contains huge wooden crates. Using crates minimizes the number of times that your items are touched during the move, and therefore minimizes the chance of damage or loss.

Your household goods are packed into these crates, which are then nailed shut, and they remain in the crates for the entire move. Items that do not fit in a regular crates will be boxed in speciality crates, or may have crates built for them.

Once the crates are nailed shut, you will sign a bunch of seals that will be put on all the sides of the crates. This is to ensure that the crates are not opened in transit. However, even with the seals, there is the distinct possibility that the crates could be opened by customs officers or agricultural inspectors at your destination. This may be required by local laws. Don't be surprised if your crates have been opened before they get to you!

Unaccompanied Baggage

Unaccompanied baggage (UB), often erroneously called express shipments, are the small shipment that you may be authorized to ship separately from your regular household goods shipment when you are moving to or from an Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS) location. Usually limited to 1,000 pounds, but sometimes a different amount, UB can not contain furniture but may include baby equipment. Check your Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders to ensure that you are authorized an UB shipment and to verify the amount authorized.

The biggest misconception about UB shipments is that they are sent using a faster method than regular shipments. In most cases, UB is sent the exact same way as your regular shipment. There are exceptions, such as when your UB shipment is small, or if you are going to a particularly unusual destination. These exceptions are rare.

Since they're sent the same way, UB shipments can take just as long as regular household goods shipments. Plan for your UB shipment to take three months to arrive. If it comes sooner, that's a bonus! Most importantly, remember that unexpected delays in the shipping process may mean that your UB and household goods don't necessarily arrive in the order you expect.

When Should You Send Your Unaccompanied Baggage?

The benefit to an UB shipment is that you can send it ahead, or send it at the very last minute, timing your shipment to the specifics of your move. The common advice is that if you're moving away from the United States, you should send your UB first and household goods later, and if you are moving back to the United States, you should send your household goods first and your UB later.

Why is this? Two reasons: first, you're likely authorized a longer temporary lodging allowance during the overseas portion of your move, and second, most overseas locations have loaner furniture available. Therefore, when moving overseas, you would send your UB first, and your household goods at the very last minute. This would mean that you'd have your household goods in your old house for longer. When you arrive at your new, OCONUS location, you'll be authorized temporary lodging for a period of time (30 to 60 days is common), then you will be able to get loaner furniture to use until your household goods arrive. If you send your household goods ahead of time, you'll be unnecessarily camping out in an empty house without access to extended temporary lodging allowances or loaner furniture.

The same logic applies in reverse when moving back to the United States: send your household goods early, use loaner furniture while still OCONUS, and then send your UB at the very last minute.

While these are great guidelines and can help you understand the process and figure out where to start, your situation may be entirely different. Perhaps there is an intermediate duty station en-route, or you know that you'll be spending the entire summer visiting your family before you land at your permanent home. Maybe you're going to a place where you know that there is not temporary furniture available, but you have friends who can lend you items at your US location.

Could be that you hate all your furniture and you're going to donate it before you head out of town and hope that you can buy new furniture at your new location. Possibly, you're going OCONUS to OCONUS. There are an infinite number of reasons why the general advice won't work for your situation.

As you can see, there is no "typical" move, so there is no typical best way to figure out your shipment schedule. Do some research on your new location and the amenities and allowances available, look at your specifics, and figure out what is going to work best for you.

Ideally, you want to assume that your shipment will take three months to arrive, and plan accordingly. If you don't have three months, organize your shipments as fast as possible once you have orders.

Regardless of the order of your shipments, gather your UB in a clearly defined space to decrease the chances of packing confusion. Clear out a large portion of a room, mark the floor with painter's tape, and use painter's tape to put a sign on the wall noting that the marked off area is for UB. Make sure that everyone in your family understands the process and what should and should not go in this area. If your kids are too young to understand, it will be easier if that area is off-limits to them.

What To Pack In Your UB

UB is often the hardest shipment to organize, because few people do enough UB shipments to become great at it, and also because each move is so very different. When planning an UB shipment, I think of it as an "insurance" shipment. I pack a small amount of each type of essentials in each shipment (kitchenware, clothing, linens, etc.), so that we'll be able to start our new life regardless of which shipment arrives first. This is a great time to use up those old but still functional items that you've been considering discarding. Use them for the move before getting rid of them!

What you need to pack will vary widely depending on your family, your situation, and your preferences. Think about what will help you be comfortable and allow you to cook meals for your family. Ideally, you'll be able to avoid buying things that you already own just to get you through the move. However, if you are moving somewhere that you know that you CAN purchase certain items, that might affect your choices. For example, when moving back to the US, I find it easier to purchase a new shower curtain and liner.

A list of things to put in your unaccompanied baggage is included at the end of this document.

Use this list to give you ideas, and then pare down to get under your weight limit. A bathroom scale is handy to figure out how much things weigh. Pro tip: if it doesn't weigh well on the scale itself, weigh yourself holding the item and weigh yourself alone. Subtract. Magic.

Kitchen

How much kitchen stuff you want to put in your UB depends on how you cook and how picky you are about your tools. Also, if you already have a fairly pared down kitchen, then you might not have duplicates to send in your UB. If you only have one of something, and you are passionate about it, then it needs to go in your suitcase.

At many locations, including most overseas locations, you'll have access to a kitchen box from a lending locker at the family support center. These usually include pots and pans, cooking utensils, dishes, glasses and silverware. However, the contents and the quality of these boxes can vary dramatically.

I like to look at PCS moves as an opportunity to live a little more simply. It makes life easier during the transition, and it makes me appreciate my things even more when they finally arrive. There's a balance between shipping things that will help you get by comfortable and shipping the entire kitchen! Also, keep in mind that some items (like disposable plastic food storage containers) might be easier to purchase rather than ship.

Basics

- Pots and pans, at least one decent sized pot (3 quarts is pretty versatile) and one medium size skillet (10 inches),
- One or two really good knives, preferably with their own cases, and a cutting board,
- Small appliances (indoor grill, slow cooker, toaster oven, griddle.) Keep in mind that your temporary accommodation or overseas housing may not use regular, US 110 volt electricity, and many temporary lodging facilities have restrictions on the use of small appliances. Whatever information you can learn before you leave will help you know what you should pack. Thank goodness for the internet!
- Cooler. Collapsible is ideal. If you are using a hard-sided cooler, wheels are a bonus,
- Bottle opener, can opener, and wine opener,
- Vegetable peeler,
- Pitcher,
- Duplicates of any cooking tools or utensils that you use daily, such as spatulas, wooden spoons, or mixing bowls,
- Plates, cutlery, glasses, and serving utensils. We keep a Rubbermaid tub of lightweight dishes and glasses for just this reason,
- Lightweight plastic food storage containers,
- Aluminum foil and plastic wrap, and selection of zipper bags,
- Dishtowels,
- Potholders,

For The Foodies

If you will be sad if you can't cook elaborate meals while you are in temporary lodging, then you might want to allocate more of your UB weight allowance to kitchen tools. Your choices might include:

- Garlic press,
- Coffee maker,
- Colander,
- Cookie Sheets,
- Loaf Pans, and
- Measuring Cups and Spoons.

Linens and Bedding

- Sheets. Large flat sheets are the most flexible for different sizes of beds,
- Towels and bath mat,

- Shower curtain liner and shower curtain rings, and a collapsible shower curtain rod,
- Pillows, unless you're in the market for new ones and you know that they'll be available at your new location. Keep in mind that not all countries use the same size beds and pillows as the US, and
- Thin blankets to throw over sofas, in case they are kind of gross.
- Air mattresses and/or sleeping bags.

Clothing

- Seasonally appropriate clothing – make sure to have a generous amount of the right clothes in both your suitcases, UB, and household goods,
- Backpack or tote bags,
- Clothes for job interviews,
- One set of every uniform that isn't being carried in luggage,
- Clothes for any special events (ball gowns, Change of Command, picnic clothes, etc.), and
- School clothes.

Household Items

- Iron and small ironing board,
- Clock,
- Radio,
- Extension cords,
- Dustpan and broom,
- Corded phone,
- Folding table and chairs,

Kids Stuff

- Outdoor toys (balls, chalk, jump ropes),
- Games, puzzles, and books, and
- Sports Equipment (cleats, swim caps and goggles, lacrosse sticks).

Office Things

- Printer/Scanner with the appropriate cords. Check to see if it is dual voltage if you're going to a 220 volt location.
- Small stash of office supplies, unless you are itching for some new things. I somehow end up buying thank you cards every single time we move. You'll probably also want small scissors, envelopes, tape and a stapler.
- School supplies: especially when moving overseas, school supply options can be limited and expensive.

Miscellaneous

A small tool bag with basic tools such as screwdrivers, hammers, and wrenches can be valuable. If you don't have enough tools to divide them, this is a great time to buy one of those small all-in-one tool kits. They're handy for UB and to keep in the trunk of your car.

Many items only need to be carried either in your suitcase or in your UB, or have a plan to purchase these items shortly after arriving: box cutters, clipboard (for delivery day), permanent markers, painters tape, duct tape, zip ties, post-it notes or index cards, super-glue, twine, and a first aid kit.

If you're moving to a location that has 110 volt electricity and has a warm climate, small fans can be a nice addition!

Unaccompanied Baggage Travel Hacks

Most temporary furniture includes only double or twin beds. If you request all twin beds, you can push two twins together to make a king-sized bed.

Spare sheets can make a shower-curtain if you use safety pins, staples, or tape to make a casing for the curtain rod. Spare sheets also work as curtains, room dividers, tablecloths, and forts for bored children.

Non-Temporary Storage

Non-temporary storage, sometimes called NTS, is a valuable benefit when moving overseas or to housing that is considered inappropriately small. I encourage you to think long and hard about putting things into non-temporary storage. There are many reasons why you shouldn't put things into non-temporary storage: damage during storage, the chance that you'll need replace those items while they are in storage, the likelihood that an item will become obsolete while in storage (like the entertainment center designed for an old-style TV.) In addition, it is not uncommon for a two -year overseas tour to turn into two, three or four consecutive overseas tours. By the time you get your items back, two or ten years later, you've likely either replaced them or moved beyond the need for them.

When considering non-temporary storage, keep in mind that these locations are rarely climate-controlled. This may impact which items you choose to store.

What To Put Into Non-Temporary Storage

Choosing which items to get rid of, which items to ship, and which items to store is an imprecise science. However, the more you can learn about your new location, the greater the chance that you'll be able to make the right choices. For example, I have known people who put all their 110 volt appliances into storage when moving overseas, and then ended up living in housing that had 110 volt electricity available. I've also known people who shipped all their 110 volt appliances and then didn't have the right space to store them.

Things that make sense to store include:

- Small appliances that don't have the right voltage for your new home. Many small appliances can be successfully used with transformers to adapt the electricity to 110 volts. Depending on the particular appliance, it may work well or it may damage the appliance. (It shouldn't, but it happens anyway.) For items that you use daily, such as coffee makers and hair dryers, it is typically easier to purchase items that use the local voltage and plug type.
- Appliances the military will provide when overseas (check with the housing office at your new location for details.) This may include washers and dryers and refrigerators.
- Lawn mower and other gardening tools, if you won't be responsible for lawn care overseas.
- Large tools, particularly of the wrong voltage.
- Items that are not permitted at your new location.
- Larger furniture pieces.
- Mementos, both yours and your children's, that you can live without for several years.
-

Once you've made the decision to put items into non-temporary storage, make a thorough inventory of every item that you're storing. This will come in handy when you can't remember whether you've stored a particular item, whether it was lost in shipment, or whether you donated it before the move. This inventory will be invaluable in the rare case that you have loss or damage to a non-temporary storage shipment.

If you have items that you would be truly devastated to lose or have damaged, consider asking a trusted family member or friend to store them for you. You can't ever guarantee that your items will be safe, but they are likely safer in a secure, lived-in home than a storage unit.

When To Pack Out Your Non-Temporary Storage

Once again, this is an individual decision. On one hand, it is great to get these items out of your house so that you have space to sort your other shipments and be organized. On the other hand, very few people want to send their washer and dryer to storage weeks before they move. Figure out what is going to work best for your particular situation, considering which items are going into non-temporary storage and what other resources you have available to you.

Once you've planned your non-temporary storage shipment, designate a place in your home to gather these items. Ideally, you'll have an otherwise empty room. Realistically, use painter's tape to designate a section of a room for your unaccompanied baggage items.

One final thought about non-temporary storage shipments: Almost every person I know thinks that they put too much stuff into storage, and that most of the items that were stored should have been either a) brought with them to their new home, or b) donated or discarded before the move. It is hard to evaluate your things when faced with a big move to a strange location. You're unlikely to guess right for every item, but critical thinking can increase your odds.

What To Pack In Your Suitcase and/or Car

Congratulations! You've made it to the day when you're actually going to move!

What To Put In Your Suitcase

Obviously, the contents of your suitcases will depend a lot on whether you're flying or driving, whether you expect to be without your household goods for a long time, and whether you're authorized an unaccompanied baggage shipment.

Here's where to start:

- Small sewing kit,
- Kitchen knife and small cutting board,
- Nightlights, battery operated if you're moving to a location with different electric voltage,
- First aid kit,
- Duct tape and painters tape,
- Two large flat sheets, to be used as shower curtains, room dividers, or forts,
- Laptops and tablets,
- Bluetooth speaker if your family enjoys playing music,
- External hard drives with backups of everything,
- Cords, plugs and adaptors,
- [Jewelry](#),
- A selection of zip-top baggies,
- [Diapers \(at least twice as many as you think you'll need\), wipes, ointment,](#)
- [Pet food, collars, old towels or puppy training pads, collapsible bowls for water and food,](#)
- [your Moving Binder.](#)

OCONUS

When flying OCONUS, you have multiple issues to consider. First, you need to know your luggage allowance. Your orders may specify an allowance, and many airlines give more generous allowances for military families on Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders. Check both the number of bags you are authorized, their dimensions, and their maximum weight. If you are short of suitcases, base thrift stores often have a wide selection of bags for sale.

Second, decide which items need to be hand-carried and come on to the plane with you, and which items can be trusted in the checked baggage. Your carry-on bag(s) need to contain at least:

- one change of clothes,
- basic toiletries,
- your moving binder, including orders, tickets and passports,
- your hard drive backups, and
- your valuable jewelry

If you have small children, it is also essential that you have twice as many diapers and wipes as you think you'll need, and multiple changes of clothes.

Think about mixing up the contents of your suitcases: instead of putting one person's items in each bag, put 1/2 your items in another suitcase. This way, if one piece of luggage is delayed, no one is clothes-less. Landing in a new country and having to buy clothes is not fun.

When flying to a new country, you will have to retrieve your luggage, including checked baggage pets, as you go through customs in your new location. If you're continuing onto another flight, you will re-check your bags after customs. This gives you a great opportunity to switch some things between your checked luggage and your carry-ons. Place one or two outfit changes, in zip-top bags, right inside the zipper of one of your suitcases. When you retrieve your bags to go through customs, you can easily swap out for new clothes. If travelling with pets, put fresh puppy pads, a zip-top bag and/or cans of food, collapsible water bowl, and paper plates in a large zip-top bag, also right inside the zipper of one of your suitcases.

When travelling with a pile of suitcases, get a roll of brightly patterned duct tape and apply a large piece to each suitcase. This will make it easier for everyone in your family to identify which luggage is yours.

Once your bags are packed, weigh each piece of luggage to ensure that it doesn't exceed the weight limit. It is a lot easier to juggle items between suitcases *before* you get to the airport.

What To Put In The Car

If travelling by car, try not to stuff the car as fully as possible. You want to be comfortable, and you also want to be able to find the things that you need.

Items you may want to include:

- Suitcases,
- Snacks and drinks,
- Kitchen box,
- Linen box,
- Air mattresses and/or sleeping bags,
- Tool box,
- [Car emergency kit, including jumper cables, flares, gloves, ponchos, safety vests, small compressor, and fix-a-flat,](#)
- [Cold weather emergency kit, including chains, sleeping bags, and emergency food,](#)
- Things to entertain the children, including audio books, DVDS/Movies, dry-erase boards and markers, stuffed animals,
- [Pet items, including food, water, crates, leashes, beds,](#)
- Cleaning supplies, if you want to move them,
- Anything else that the packers can't pack but you want to move.

Envision the length of your drive and the fullness of your car. It might be better to leave certain items, such as cleaning supplies, with a friend and purchase new ones at the other end of the drive. No \$2 bottle of cleaner is worth being squinched in the car, or having to clean up a spilled bottle of stinky product mid-drive.

Things To Include In Your *Moving Binder*

- Orders, multiple copies
- Command sponsorship or dependent entry paperwork
- Birth certificates
- Marriage certificates
- Divorce decrees
- Custody paperwork
- Adoption and/or guardianship papers
- Naturalization papers
- Social security cards
- Passports
- Photocopies of passports, driver's licenses, and other identification cards.
- Insurance information
- Mortgage information
- Credit card information
- Other bill information
- Vehicle titles
- Copies of vehicle registration and inspections
- Family care plan
- Old house lease
- Old house move-in checklist
- Old house utility company information
- Move out appointment information
- Travel itinerary
- Airline tickets
- Rental car confirmation numbers
- Hotel locations, telephone numbers, and confirmation numbers
- Temporary lodging contact information and confirmation numbers.
- Contact information for housing office at new location
- List of the sizes of your largest pieces of furniture
- Immunization records
- Eye glass and contact lens prescriptions
- Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) paperwork
- Wills
- Powers of Attorney
- Other legal documents
- Pet immunization paperwork
- Pet licenses
- Pet paperwork
- Pet passport
- Vehicle shipping information
- Place for receipts
- Income tax returns

Moving Bingo

How to Use These Sheets

Use these “bingo” sheets to keep track of the items as they are unloaded off of the moving truck. You will need three to ten of these sheets, depending on the size of your shipment. Use one sheet for the first 100 items, then use a second sheet for items number 100 to 200, then 201 to 300, etc. As each item is unloaded off the truck, the mover will call out the number. It is your responsibility to mark them off of your list. It can be very time consuming to flip through all the pages of your actual moving inventory. Keep it nearby, for reference, but actually mark the items off on this page so that you can check things off as fast as the movers are calling the number.

The best ways to hold these sheets are either stacked on a clipboard, or spread out on a makeshift table (card table, two boxes stacked together, etc.) A pen with a color other than black will help your tired eyes as the day progresses.

Whenever you see anything with damage, or have questions, make lots of notes so that you'll be able to figure things out and note the correct damages or missing items at the end of the day.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120
121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140
141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160
161	162	163	164	165	166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180
181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200
201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220
221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240
241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259	260
261	262	263	264	265	266	267	268	269	270	271	272	273	274	275	276	277	278	279	280
281	282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300
301	302	303	304	305	306	307	308	309	310	311	312	313	314	315	316	317	318	319	320
321	322	323	324	325	326	327	328	329	330	331	332	333	334	335	336	337	338	339	340
341	342	343	344	345	346	347	348	349	350	351	352	353	354	355	356	357	358	359	360
361	362	363	364	365	366	367	368	369	370	371	372	373	374	375	376	377	378	379	380
381	382	383	384	385	386	387	388	389	390	391	392	393	394	395	396	397	398	399	400

Numbers _____ (1-100, 101-200, etc.)

Damage, spare numbers, and other notes:

Things To Put In Your **Do Not Pack Room**

- Your moving binder, including passports, orders, airline tickets, medical records, school records, pet records, etc.
- Camera
- Car Keys
- Suitcases with clothes for move
- Required children's items (dolls, stuffed animals, blankies)
- Medications
- Toiletries
- Jewelry
- Chargers and power cords
- Laptops, tablets, iPods, cell phones.
- Cleaning Supplies
- Guns or other weapons
- Cable box and/or modem, if they need to be returned
- Pet items, including crates, food, medications, paperwork, maybe even the pets themselves
- Items you intend to hand-carry
- Pillows!
- Linens that you'll need until you leave
- Air mattresses
- Small toys and other children's entertainment

Things To Consider For Your *Unaccompanied Baggage*

- Pot(s) and pan(s)
- Knife or knives
- Cutting board
- Slow cooker
- Toaster oven
- Griddle
- Indoor grill
- Cooler
- Bottle opener
- Can opener
- Wine opener
- Vegetable peeler
- Pitcher
- Utensils
- Mixing bowl
- Dishes
- Cutlery
- Glasses
- Food Storage Containers
- Aluminum foil, plastic wrap, zip-top bags
- Sheets and pillowcases
- Blankets
- Pillows
- Towels
- Bath mat
- Shower curtain liner and rings
- Collapsible shower curtain rod
- Seasonally appropriate clothing
- Uniforms
- Interview clothing
- Special event clothing
- Backpack or tote bag
- Small outdoor toys
- Games, puzzles and books
- Sports equipment
- Printer/scanner with appropriate cords
- Office Supplies
- School Supplies
- Tool bag