



SECURE SHRED NEWS

News For The Information Management Professional

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FILING METHODOLOGIES

In records management, as in many other disciplines, there are many different types of filing and information organization systems. This article explores some of the most common methods of filing and their uses.

Alphabetical filing systems are very frequently used, particularly among small file volumes or in small business applications. Two common approaches are to file by the name (last name of an individual or the name of a company) or by subject.

Filing by last name might be applied to personnel files. Customer files or vendor files might be filed by company name. An index or filing guide is optional in this method since the method of retrieval is intuitive, but indices or other finding aids can be very helpful when subject filing, since employees may need guidance in placing files under the proper category. (Example: would a copier lease be filed under “Copier”, “Office Equipment”, “Leases”, “Legal” or under “Vendor”? These types of distinctions can be clearly articulated in the index which can then be updated as needed.

There are other distinctions when applying alphabetical filing systems. Letter by letter arrangements provide for alphabetizing of files in strict alphabetical order ignoring word breaks or punctuation. A word-by-word arrangement treats each word as a separate filing unit. Alphabetical systems might also arrange files in a dictionary form (which mixes various file types such as names and subjects in a single alphabetical order), or an encyclopedic arrangement where files are first ordered under broad headings (finance, marketing, legal, etc.) and then under sub-headings (accounts receivable, advertising, contracts, etc.).

Chronological filing systems are based upon a key date. A very common example of chronological filing in widespread use is a “tickler file” where items are placed in folders labeled with a date, month, or year, and are recalled when the corresponding folder is opened. Invoices, correspondence, or deposit files are all samples of items that might be filed chronologically.



Sometimes one filing method can be used within another method. Depositions might be filed under a client matter number, for example, where a numerical system is used first. Within the matter number depositions might be filed using a chronological system.

Where large volumes of records must be maintained, numerical methods are frequently utilized. Law firms frequently file under a client matter number. Legislative tracking systems may file under a session number and bill number. A numerical filing method familiar to most people is the Dewey Decimal System in use at public libraries.

Numerical filing methods are also used when file subjects must remain shielded – in the case of medical records which contain protected health information, or in the handling of classified documents, for example. Numerical filing systems can also be combined with alphabetical systems such as subject files, which might use the first three alpha characters of the subject and then number corresponding files in sequence. Numerical methods are also popular because each file number is unique.

A specialized type of numerical filing is called "terminal digit filing." This type of filing method is frequently used in hospitals and other large file rooms in order to provide for an equal growth and activity level across the entire work area. ARMA International's "Glossary of Records and Information Management Terms" defines terminal digit filing as, "A system of numeric filing using the last two or three digits right to left of each number as the primary division under which the record is filed." This method is very helpful for very large filing areas, or for records that are frequently purged leaving gaps in other file groupings.

HANDY TIP

Here are some basic tips for establishing a terminal digit filing system in your workplace:

- Divide the filing area evenly into 100 sections numbered 00 to 99.
- Assign sequential numerical values to each file
- Read numerical sequences from right to left in groups of two digits
- File in the corresponding numerical section of the filing area.

Natural order filing systems are groups of files that seem to indicate their own organizational grouping. Purchase order files might indicate a numerical order, even though an alphabetical subject filing method may be in use elsewhere. This illustrates one of the most important considerations in designing a filing system. Keep the system as simple as possible. The easier it is to train employees to use the system effectively and accurately, the more effective the system will be. This is especially important when considering the cost of a misfile. 14% of all files are misfiled at some point during the information lifecycle and at a cost of \$165 per misfile.

TOP 10 REASONS COMPANIES OUTSOURCE:

Strategic

- Improve business focus
- Access to world-class capabilities
- Accelerate reengineering benefits
- Share risks
- Free resources for other purposes

Tactical

- Reduce and control operating costs
- Make capital funds available
- Cash infusion
- Resources not available internally
- Function difficult to manage or out of control

RECORDS CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS: IDENTIFYING THE RECORD SERIES

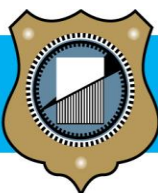
The National Archives and Records Administration offers the following definition of a record series. "A series is the basic unit for organizing and controlling files. It is a group of files or documents kept together (either physically or intellectually) because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt or maintenance.

"Each record series must be scheduled for appropriate disposition. The series concept is a flexible one, and programs should create series by organizing documents in ways that facilitate management of the records throughout their life cycle. For example, each record series in hard copy should be physically separated from all other record series. Electronic records should be managed in ways that link records to their disposition authority, within the context of a recordkeeping system."

Information that is organized by record series assumes the identification of the particular subjects, functions, activities, transactions, etc. Records managers might use any number of methods including records surveys, inventories, or interviews with business units to derive the information necessary to assign such grouping.

Once identified, the various records series are then arranged into an index of records series to aid in the retrieval of information. Many central records depositories require departments depositing records to provide extensive information on any new records series. **Secure Shred Inc, for example, asks the records owner to provide the barcode number, as well as detailed information about the box/file, e.g. description, dates and department, in order to assist with storage and retrievals.**

Once each record series is defined and indices or other finding aids are created, the series is then managed according to the system design methodologies selected by the records manager. Each records series may be assigned a numeric value, an alpha-numeric value, a subject label, etc.



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