# State of Florida

# *FILES MANAGEMENT*

# *HANDBOOK*

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# INTRODUCTION

Files are expensive to create and maintain and managers and administrators are especially concerned with the costs of filing operations. Managers are also concerned with having the correct information at the correct time and place, regardless of the cost.

This handbook blends and adjusts the means of reducing costs of filing operations while increasing efficiency. The goal of this handbook is to show that finding records when needed is what filing is all about; filing operations should be more streamlined, easier to access, compact and more cost efficient.

The goals of the Bureau of Archives and Records Management is to assist State and local governmental agencies in designing a working filing system and in managing the filing system from records creation to records disposition.

**CHAPTER 1**

**FILING ARRANGEMENTS**

There are three commonly utilized types of filing arrangements which are designed to file and reference records in different ways: alphabetical, numeric, and alpha-numeric. Each has advantages for certain types of records and reference needs and possesses distinct patterns of arrangement and indexing. The most efficient and economical method is the one that works for the organization and which is easily understood by its users. All most always, the simplest method is the best.

Once a filing arrangement is chosen, the following determinations must be made to establish the files:

1. What the filing units are
2. What the arrangement of filing units must be to create the system
3. What information is placed on the guides
4. What information is placed on the folders.

Once the proper arrangement has been selected, it is suggested that a file procedures manual be established. The file manual is used by everyone working with the files and it maintains the integrity of the filing system.

Alphabetical file

The most commonly used filing arrangement is the alphabetical file. It is arranged in alphabetical order with a file guide for each letter of the alphabet.

The alphabetical arrangement is commonly used for correspondence. It is estimated that 90% of all filing is the filing of correspondence, and that 90% of this follows the alphabetic arrangement of names. As long as the name is known, anyone can have direct access to the file without an index. Retrieval and reference are rapid when all requests for information are made by name. Alphabetical filing systems are very flexible. (Refer to Chapter 4 , RULES FOR ALPHABETICAL FILING).

Numeric file

In a numeric file the records are classified by number rather than name.  Numeric files originate where the number is part of the record itself or where a number is added to facilitate processing and filing.  When a number is part of the record, reference will often be by number.  When numbers are added, reference will usually be by subject.  Numeric files are usually  divided into three basic types:   serial number filing,  used basically  for fiscal records; digit filing , which is the best method for filing and referencing extremely large file series; and numeric coding of subjects and names, in which number are assigned to replace the subject or name titles on the folders.

Alpha-Numeric file

Alpha-numeric filing is the classification of records by codes.  The codes should give information about the contents of the folders.  Alpha-numeric filings are divided into two types; subject files and name files.  Subject files follow an encyclopedic arrangement with numeric coding of records and folders.  Name files are usually filed alphabetically with names arranged in sequence according to exact spelling, and are dependent on the accurate interpretation of the spoken or handwritten name.

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**CHAPTER 2**

**FILE EQUIPMENT**

The cost and efficiency of filing operations are directly affected by the type of equipment used. A major aim in filing equipment management is to purchase only necessary filing equipment that will provide the most efficient data retrieval at the lowest cost and use the least amount of office space.

Office equipment manufacturers offer numerous types, sizes, styles, and price ranges of filing equipment. Some filing equipment is available which accomplishes many office efficiency requirements. The accurate filing equipment can:

- save 40% in manpower
- require 25% to 45% less space
- improve filing and retrieval productivity by as much as 40% to 60%
- cost less initially than other equipment.

CRITERIA IN EQUIPMENT SELECTION

Accessibility - A particular piece of equipment should provide quick and easy access to the records it houses. Since records are filed for future reference, retrieval of the information should be the foremost consideration. The records should be as open as possible to authorized users, located near their work area and have the potential to be used by several people simultaneously.

Cost - Soaring office costs require selection of the most economical equipment that provides accessibility of records and speed retrieval. Equipment is compared in terms of cost per inch of actual filing space.

Space Utilization - Office space is a recurring cost. Equipment requiring excessive space could be more costly over the long range than the original cost of more expensive, but more compact, equipment. Filing equipment should consume minimum office space.

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Security - Most filing equipment can be equipped with locks to provide controlled access.  The addition of locks is the least effective method of providing security.  Quite often locks on filing equipment can be readily opened with a paper clip or nail file, and master keys are available which will open practically all locks made by one manufacturer.  A locked piece of equipment will only keep out the curious.  If security is of paramount consideration, the best and least expensive method is to secure the files area and restrict access to the files.

Mobility - Filing equipment should be evaluated for its mobility.  Offices that move often should procure relatively mobile equipment.  Equipment should also be mobile within the organization itself.


TYPES OF FILING EQUIPMENT

In today's office environment, most of the filing equipment used is vertical, lateral, shelf or mechanized.  To choose the right equipment for the job, the advantages and disadvantages of each type must be considered.  A comparative analysis of which type of equipment will best meet requirements of the proposed data retrieval system is then performed.

Traditional pull drawer files -   Drawer files are:
- one third more expensive (on a linear-inch basis of space for the cost) than shelf filing systems
- records cannot be accessed visually
- retrieval costs are high
- they consume excessive amounts of space
- and restrict use of color coding and bar coding



Lateral rollout cabinets - Used in many offices as an alternative to traditional drawer files, these cabinets have essentially the same limitations as pull drawer cabinets.
- It is impossible to expose all records in a system at once for visual searching
- it is challenging to use color coding and bar coding to speed filing, retrieval, and tracking
- they are difficult to adapt for alternative records media
- and usually only one person can use them at a time.
Lateral rollout cabinets are now only rarely advocated as viable choices when filing system upgrades are planned.

Mechanical (power elevator) files - These files offer potential floor to ceiling high density storage of records housed in carriers which may be accessed by the touch of a key or a few keys, the mechanical carriers rotate the desired record tiers to a comfortable workstation level.
 Major advantages of mechanical files include:
- use of only a moderate amount of floor space while making excellent use of often wasted high space
- they are designed for use with end tabbed, color coded, bar coded folders.

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Major disadvantages include:
- only one person being able to access records at one time
- visual searching of an entire file is limited because only a small portion of the files are exposed at any time
- when considered on a per linear inch of storage space available basis, their cost can be high.

Mobile files - These files are designed to provide high density storage for paper and other records media. Mobile files are shelf files constructed on tracks to allow easily accessible storage for large quantities of records in a minimum amount of floor space. Space savings of 40% may be realized over conventional shelf files and about 80% over pull drawer cabinets. Personnel access needs must be very carefully determined and weighed against the need to save floor space when evaluating the potential of these systems.

Open shelf files (lateral shelf files) - These files are strongly advocated for today's and tomorrow's most efficient and cost effective paper document filing systems. They are available either as basic shelf units without any covers, as self contained units with covers and locks for each tier, or as "data box" units which may be easily expanded and contracted by adding or deleting individual click in boxes. Major reasons why conversions should be made to shelf based systems include:
- these systems allow visual access to records
- are readily adaptable for use with color coding and bar coding
- conserve floor space
- use often wasted high space
- are approximately one third less expensive (on a per linear inch capacity basis) than drawer files.

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## ESTABLISHMENT OF A FILE SYSTEM

Paper-based information is an asset in every organization, but only if we know where the information is located and how to make it immediately available for use.  All organizations acquire and produce paper records and  all organizations must maintain and manage them.  The positive or negative management of records can have a major impact on an organization's overall success.

Paper files make up the majority of files in an average office and there are numerous tools used in the filing process.  Typical filing tools are folders, guides, tabs and labels, all of which make it possible to organize records systematically.

FOLDERS

The most common type of filing tool is the simple paper file folder.  Basically, file folders are containers.  The average folder holds only 75 sheets of paper.  File folders can be scored on the bottom edge and this prevents overcrowding.  The scoring allows for expansion and the risk of the file bending and/or sliding under other folders is reduced.

HANGING AND SUSPENSION FOLDERS

Hanging and suspension folders are not considered efficient in the utilization of cabinet space.  Suspension folders filled with file folders could use more than 30% of the space in a file drawer before a single document is filed.  These folders are expensive and are not time efficient when removing files for disposition.  The one exception is when bulky forms, such as computer printouts, are filed.

BINDER FOLDERS

Folders with prong fasteners should be avoided.  While these folders do hold paper securely, regular folders do a satisfactory job.  The fastener folders slow production considerably.  Each folder must be retrieved and taken apart, then the papers punched and inserted and then the

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folder reassembled.  In the same time it takes to do this, three papers could have been filed in loose paper folders.  Along with the time consuming process concerning the prong folders, these folders are more expensive.

GUIDES

Guides are file drawer dividers that point the way to sections of the file being sought.  They can be thought of as signposts and are the key to efficient filing.  Guides direct the eye to desired sections in a file drawer.  They serve two purposes,  first, they divide a file into distinct labeled sections that permit quick and easy location of a specific record.  Second, their sturdy construction supports the files and prevents sagging.  When used in shelving, guides are available with side tabs that can be read from either side.

Active files usually contain from 5 to 20 guides per drawer.  These should be divided into primary and secondary guides.  Primary guides indicate a principal division of the file.  Secondary guides indicate a subdivision of the file and are used with larger file series.

TABS

All folders and guides should have a tab.  They provide a space for a label or caption.  File content is listed on the tab.  Tabs can be constructed of the same material as the folder or guide or of metal to give additional strength, or of transparent plastic which protects label printing.

Tabs can be straight, slanted, printed or blank depending on the need of the filing operation or system.  Folders are available with tabs of various widths or cuts.  The most common widths are described as the first, second, or third cut.  Guides also have tabs in first, second or third positions.  Since most individuals perform operations from left to right, guide tabs should be positioned on the left while the folder tabs are positioned on the right.  As the left hand searches for the guide, the right hand locates the desired folder.

LABELS

Labels provide identification for guides and folders and identify the contents of the records.  Guide labels identify the records filed in a specific section of the file.  Guide labels denote where each section of the file begins and ends.  The records filed after each guide are those beginning with the caption on the guide tab up to, and not including, the caption on the next guide tab.  As the file expands, more specific guides can be added.  Fast location and identification are the goals.

Label uniformity is important.  One style label and one color should be used for a particular application.  Handwritten labels are inefficient and should never be used.  All labels should be typed from the left edge, with successive labels typed in the same position.  All first words on a tab of like position will then form a straight line when placed in a file drawer, helping in the location of folders and allowing for easier reading for file location.

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COLOR-CODING

As technology advances and the information age matures, one fact remains very clear, rapid access to information on all media is essential for use in serving people, making decisions, and doing business.  The usage of color coding and color-coded filing systems is now very popular.  The human eye can usually distinguish over 11,000 color variations.  Color plays comfortable and important roles as the use of color helps identify, classify, and recognize objects around us.  An ideal business application for the use of color is the development of color-coded filing systems for business records.

In filing systems, the assignment of color for each number and letter aids in filing and retrieval of all types of files.  The assignment of colors to letters, numbers, or other identifiers in a particular position on a file folder results in the formation of a color block pattern.  When these patterns of color are broken, it is easy to see that a misfile has occurred.  Color coding is a natural development to accompany shelf filing because the ends of the folders are readily visible.  Color coding of files almost eliminates hidden misfiles, confirms accuracy in filing, offers fast filing and retrieval, works with any filing sequence, allows rapid presorting by color recognition, guides users to within an inch or two of records being sought before even touching cabinets or records, and substantially speeds important file management functions.

BAR CODING

Bar coding can easily be accomplished in back file conversions with procedures as simple as sticking a pressure sensitive press apply bar code label on a folder, or other record container, and recording the number of the bar code in the database to make computer based tracking and management of that file immediately possible.  By using a computer based system for on demand automated printing of labels with bar codes, folder identification information can be made machine readable by a handheld bar decoder or it can be connected to a computer.  These developments now make it easier than ever to convert existing systems to color coding and to quickly and efficiently develop barcoded systems making possible computer based management and tracking of files.

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**CHAPTER 4**

**INDEXING AND FILING STANDARDS**

The decision on where to file a record is called indexing.  Some of the more common suggestions for selecting indexing references are:   the name of the firm or individual; subject or name within the body of the letter; special file section title where maintained, for example, *Job Application*; or, for personal letters, the name of the writer.  Reference to the relative index for the files may give some clue as to selecting a category for an item that is difficult to index.

Standards for filing should be developed and followed for active records control.  The records manager should periodically determine if the standards are realistic, and whether or not accuracy suffers when employees are aware that production is being measured.  For this  reason, it may be best to have an evaluation committee that can give its appraisal of filing accuracy and the standards developed.  A committee approach has the advantage of generating ;more interest in the filing problems and of getting suggestions for improvements from the file operators.

Standards will vary among companies because of the differences of types of records and working conditions.  There are infinite problems related to filing.  See  COMMON FILING PROBLEMS for possible solutions to many filing difficulties.

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## COMMON FILING PROBLEMS

| Trouble | Solution |
|---|---|
| Too many filing places | Centralize filing of records of common interest in one location under one supervisor. File specialized records in departments where handled, but follow established handling procedures. |
| Everybody a file clerk | Centralize authority with responsibility. Allow only designated persons to use files except in emergencies. |
| Files don't keep pace with agency's progress | Check size of alphabetic breakdown to see if it is adequate. Check type of alphabetic to see if it fits customer name patterns. |
| Files disordered; show no particular plan or arrangement | Pick a ready-made, engineered system that best fits the agency's needs. Adjust it, if necessary, as time goes on. |
| System doesn't fit the way material is called for | Study the possibilities of using subject, numeric or alphabetic filing for certain specialized materials. |
| Filing decisions erratic | Start a filing procedure manual and then use it. Don't depend on snap judgment or the opinions of others. When a problem arises, make a ruling, then write it down. |
| Takes too long to find a folder | Have an index guide for each active file drawer. |
| Drawers jammed too tight | Allow 3 to 4 inches of working space in letter files. |
| Bulging folders slow down filing speed | Have no more than twenty-five sheets per folder for best efficiency; do not exceed fifty. |
| Folder tabs difficult to read | Use gummed labels; they strengthen and add legibility. Use reinforced tabs when reference is frequent. Use a good grade of material for active files. |
| Folders out of sight | Use stiffer folders. Use scored or bellows folders for better expansion.<br><br>12/98 |

| Folders wear out too soon | Use at least an 11-point folder for frequent use out of the file; 14-point or pressboard for heavy use. |
|---|---|
| Trouble finding material before it is filed | Hold the material arranged for filing in a sorting device. |
| Getting papers into the folders takes too long | Use sorting devices to completely arrange the papers. |
| Trouble finding missing papers or cards | Keep track of removed papers and cards with out guides or folders. |

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# RULES FOR ALPHABETICAL FILING

| SITUATION | RULE | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Names (Nikki B. Schultz) | Alphabetize according to the last name first, then the first name, then any initial. | Schultz, Nikki B. |
| 2. Initials (A.E. Richards) | Alphabetize an initial before a name beginning with the same letter. | Richards, A.E. *before* Richards, Ashley E. |
| 3. Names with prefixes (Mary LeBarbra) | Treat a surname with a prefix the same as any other surname. | LeBarbra, Mary *before* Lebeuf, Michael |
| 4. Abbreviated personal names (Wm. J. Klebsch) | Alphabetize as though the names are spelled out. | Klebsch, William J. *after* Klebsch, Whitley |
| 5. Hyphenated names (Julie Melius-Tiff) | Alphabetize the surname as one name. | Melius-Tiff, Julie *after* Melius, Jean |
| 6. Professional titles with the name (the Rev. Tom K. Stone) | Disregard the title when alphabetizing. | Stone, Tom K. (the Rev.) |
| 7. Personal titles (John G. Richards, Jr.) | Alphabetize after other units in the name. | Richards, John R. Jr., *before* Richards, John R., Sr. |
| 8. Single letters in business names (J & M Computers) | Index each letter as a single unit, disregarding prepositions and conjunctions. | J & M Computers *before* KM Computers |
| 9. Married titles (Mrs. Alfred Lee, or Mrs. Margaret Lee) | Alphabetize according to the name provided. | Lee, Alfred Mrs., *before* Lee, Margaret Mrs. |
| 10. Abbreviations in business names (Pryor Resources Inc.) | Alphabetize as though abbreviations are spelled out. | Pryor Resources, Inc. *after* Pryor Resources, Co. |
| 11. Articles and prepositions (Burton on Trent) | Small words and symbols are disregarded when alphabetizing. | Burton on Trent *after* Burton Supplies |
| 12. Hyphenated business names (Klapp-Lapp Grocery) | Alphabetize each word as one unit. | Klapp-Lapp Grocery *before* Klapp-Mars Auto Service |
| 13. Compound business names (Inter-State Cab Co.) | Index compound names as one unit. | Inter-State Cab Co. *after* International Glass Co. |
| 14. Compound geographic names (Los Angeles Supply) | Alphabetize each word in a compound name as one unit. | Los Angeles Supply *after* Las Vegas Supply |
| 15. Possessives (Smith's Candy) | Alphabetize each unit, disregarding the "'s". | Smith's Candy *before* Smith Grocery |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 16. Numbers in names (59th Street Salon) | Alphabetize in numerical sequence. | 59th Street Salon *after* 42nd Street Theaters |
| 17. Federal government (Department of Defense) | When alphabetizing departments or agencies, start with "United States Government". | United States Government Department of Defense *after* New Jersey Department of Agriculture |
| 18. Foreign government (Republic of China) | Alphabetize by the country name, then the department name. | China Republic *before* Denmark Department of Education |
| 19. Schools (King Elementary, Bensalem, Pa.) | Alphabetize by the name, then by city and state. | King Elementary, Bensalem, Pennsylvania *before* King Elementary, Chicago, Illinois |
| 20. Colleges and universities (Princeton University) | Alphabetize by name, then by city and state. | Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey *before* University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa |
| 21. Hospitals (Morris County General) | Alphabetize as written, then by city and state. | Morris County General, Morristown, New Jersey *before* Morris County General, Newtown, Alabama |
| 22. Financial institutions (Summit Bank) | Alphabetize as written, then by city and state. | Summit Bank, New York, New York *before* Summit Bank, Tallahassee, Florida |
| 23. Subjects (Bookkeeping) | Alphabetize by topic, then by subtopic. | Bookkeeping *before* Insurance |
| 24. Geography (South Dakota) | Alphabetize by topic, then by subtopic. | South Dakota *after* North Dakota |
| 25. Foreign names (Bing Ho Yung) | When surnames and given names cannot be distinguished, alphabetize as they appear. | Bing Ho Yung *before* Lin a Ho Yung |

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**CHAPTER 5**

**<u>ELECTRONIC  RECORD KEEPING</u>**

Electronic documents are records just as much as paper documents, and their creation, maintenance and use, and disposition must be managed accordingly.  The most common types of document-based electronic records are word processing files, spreadsheets, presentation files and e-mail messages.

All systems require that new files (documents) be given names in order for the computer system to save them. The document name usually consists of  a drive identity, a directory, subdirectories, the document label, and a software extension.  Let's look at the document name F:/Admininstration/Budget/1998/Final.doc and identify each part.

| | |
|---|---|
| F | = drive |
| Administration | = directory |
| Budget | = subdirectory |
| 1998 | = sub-subdirectory |
| Final | = file name |
| doc | = software extension |

Agencies should develop standard naming conventions for their electronic records.  A combination of subdirectory and file naming conventions should capture enough information  to find, identify, and access each electronic document.  There are many advantages to standardizing the naming conventions for electronic documents. Standardized file names allow agencies to

- access files easily and rapidly,
- reduce redundancy of files,
- avoid loss of information,
- find the latest draft or the desired version of a document,
- name files quickly and easily,
- share files easily.

Naming conventions should be based on factors such as business processes, retention requirements, location of users and retrieval requirements.  If the office already has a well

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established filing system for its manual files, directories and subdirectories can be established using categories that are similar to the major file classifications in the manual files.

If no good filing system is in place, careful consideration should be given to the development of convenient categories for filing and retrieval of electronic documents.
An agency may want to classify its records first by
− reviewing physical records file arrangements
− creating primary categories which are functional, not department-based
− creating secondary categories which reflect the business process of the company
− developing an index

If the office stores its electronic records on floppy disks, separate disks should be used to store documents that relate to the same function and have similar recordkeeping requirements (e.g., retention, disposition, access and privacy requirements).

**Electronic Records Example:**
− Human Resources
    − Benefits
    − Employee Training and Education
    − Recruitment
        − Resumes
        − Job Announcements
    − Performance and Recognition
    − HR Management
        − Position Descriptions
        − Planning
    − Disciplinary Action

**Indexing Example:**
Resumes                See  HR Recruitment
Job Announcements    See  HR Recruitment

**CHAPTER 6**

**RETENTION SCHEDULES**

Of prime importance in filing procedures is the determination of retention periods for the record series of the organization.  Retention schedules are timetables based upon administrative reference needs, fiscal, legal or historical requirements for the handling and location of records during their creation through periods of peak and diminishing reference use to their timely destruction or retirement for preservation.  Retention schedules specify how long, where and in what format a record will be kept.  The schedule controls the movement of records on a regular and continuing basis.  When implemented, the schedules will prevent old and obsolete materials from backing up in the files.

Records from one series may be combined with records from another series, the longer retention period must be observed.  For further information on scheduling activities, see "Basics of Records Management Handbook".

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