

**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
RECORDS MANAGEMENT MANUAL:  
BEST PRACTICE PROCEDURE No. 3**

**FILE CREATION AND MANAGEMENT**

This procedure refers primarily to paper records, but the basic principles also apply to electronic records. The procedure should therefore be read in conjunction with Best Practice Procedure No. 4: *Electronic Records Management*.

**1. Definition of a file**

1.1 A file is a container for information on a specific subject or process, irrespective of format.

1.2 A file can be physically stored in: a cardboard folder, a lever arch file, a ring binder, a plastic wallet, a box file, a video tape, an audio tape, a CDROM, a floppy disk, or within an electronic folder on the relevant drive of your PC.

1.3 Always remember: when deciding on informational value, the format of a file is irrelevant – it is the content that matters.

**2. Why we need a file creation and management procedure**

2.1 It will ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

2.2 It will mean better control of records in offices and quicker access to information, meaning office space is used more efficiently.

2.3 It will also provide for the efficient retrieval of information once the information has been transferred out of the offices and to a semi-current record store.

**3. Creating new files**

3.1 Every new file should be registered and maintained in an ordered, consistent manner.

3.2 Every file should have a unique title so that it can be identified later.

3.3 If your office uses a numbering identification system, then register your file accordingly.

3.4 Keep a list of the files created, in order that you can locate and retrieve them efficiently. Excel spreadsheets are useful, saving time later when transferring records (Best Practice Procedure No. 7: *Transfer of paper records to semi-current storage* requires all records transferred to be listed on Excel). See examples at Appendix II.

3.5 It may be useful to create two concurrent files, one for vital information, action, policy decisions etc. and one for information material, drafts and duplicates and ephemeral/routine material (e.g. dates of meetings). File management of this kind will make important information easier to find and ensure that file disposal is far simpler.

3.6 If an e-mail contains important information which needs action or will require later reference, save it in the relevant file either in hard copy or within an electronic file folder; if not of importance, or for information only, then delete it as soon as possible.

3.7 Files should be held in appropriate accommodation e.g. confidential material such as personal data must be in lockable filing cabinets. A clear desk policy should be aimed for (i.e. files locked away, or at least out of sight, every night).

3.8 Material on floors or piled on top of cabinets or shelves are a health and safety hazard. The University's Health and Safety Policy [https://intranet.london.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/staff/health\\_safety\\_policies/University\\_of\\_London\\_Health\\_and\\_Safety\\_Policy.pdf](https://intranet.london.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/staff/health_safety_policies/University_of_London_Health_and_Safety_Policy.pdf) and each Division's generic policy should be consulted to ensure compliance. 'Health and Safety – Top Tips' are also available at: [https://intranet.london.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/Policies\\_documents/HealthandSafetyTopTips.pdf](https://intranet.london.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/Policies_documents/HealthandSafetyTopTips.pdf).

3.9 Once a file is full, create a continuation file and number files accordingly (e.g. part 1, part 2). To help prevent a file becoming bulky and unmanageable, it may be advisable to create a new file every year.

3.10 When a file is closed, ensure that any relevant electronic information is printed and included. In the absence of an integrated electronic records management system, this is currently the only way to ensure that the file is complete and all relevant information is in one place.

3.11 Remove ephemera, duplicates and information material wherever possible and appropriate.

#### **4. Assessing old files**

4.1 If you are still regularly using the file then it should be kept in your current filing system irrespective of how far back in time the material reaches.

4.2 If the project with which the file dealt has been completed, or if you have not referred to the file for c.2 years, then it is no longer current. It should be disposed of according to your records retention schedule or in consultation with the University Records Manager.

4.3 If you do not have an agreed disposal provision for the file, it would be advisable to transfer to semi-current storage for review in 5 years.

4.4 Older files can contain a great deal of ephemeral material; if the file is to be transferred to semi-current storage such files should be weeded to remove ephemera and duplicates.

4.5 Many files contain copies of information material which has originated from another Office or from outside the University. All such material should be discarded as soon as reference ceases and not transferred to semi-current storage.

#### **5. Destruction of records**

5.1 Check to see whether destruction of records is authorised by a current records retention schedule; if it is not, then consult the University Records Manager.

5.2 Once destruction is authorised, check to see if the files are subject to data protection or contain other confidential material and then destroy according to Best Practice Procedure No. 6: *Destruction of Confidential Records*.

5.3 Update your own records, amending the spreadsheet or list to show that the files have been destroyed. This will save wasting time trying to locate the files in future.

## **6. Preparation of files for transfer**

6.1 If files are not designated for destruction upon closure, then they should be transferred according to Best Practice Procedure No. 7: *Transfer of paper records to semi-current storage*.

6.2 Disposal of records should be undertaken at regular intervals e.g. once a year or at quiet periods.

6.3 Dispose of files according to either your records retention schedule or in consultation with the University Records Manager.

6.4 Remember to amend your own records when transferring files by altering the excel spreadsheet to show that the files have been transferred and their new control number. This will save much time in future when trying to locate information.

University of London Records Manager & Freedom of Information Officer

Procedure approved 9/9/02; amended 10/12/02; 30/1/03; 07/7/06; 25/9/09

**Appendices:**

Appendix I: Schedule of harmful materials to paper files

Appendix II: Sample file lists

**Appendix I: Schedule of harmful materials to paper files**

<b>Post-it notes</b>	Leave a sticky, coloured deposit; better to use plain paper and paper clip if possible
<b>Rubber bands</b>	Break down, leaving a sticky, rubbery deposit; can damage papers by tearing; instead use unbleached tape (available from the Records Manager).
<b>Sellotape</b>	Adhesive breaks down, leaving a sticky deposit which destroys or damages adjacent papers. <b>DO NOT USE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES</b> ; if an adhesive is really necessary use archive quality glue.
<b>Staples</b>	Weaken and damage papers; make reading and copying files difficult; cause rust stains. All have to be removed by hand if the file is of permanent value (very time consuming). Use paper clips instead if at all possible.
<b>Plastic sleeves and covers</b>	Chemically degrade and often contain an electrostatic charge, which lifts information from adjoining papers. <b>REMOVE AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY.</b>

**Appendix II: Sample Excel spreadsheet file lists (lists may alternatively be kept in word tables)**

Vice-Chancellor and Administration: Records Manager's files:

<b>Folder</b>	<b>File title</b>	<b>File reference</b>	<b>Year opened</b>	<b>year closed</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Location</b>
Best Practice Procedures	No 3 File creation and management	-	July 2002		Hard copy; Electronic	Room 218 K:\ drive

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Estates Division: Building Services: Joe Blogg's files

<b>Folder</b>	<b>File title</b>	<b>File reference</b>	<b>Year opened</b>	<b>year closed</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Location</b>
Building programme	Minor works	ELD/E/12	Jan 1995	Mar 1997	paper	Transferred to Records Store 14/1/00

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Finance and Accounting Division: Director's Office: P.A.'s files

<b>Folder</b>	<b>File title</b>	<b>File reference</b>	<b>Year opened</b>	<b>year closed</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Location</b>
Committee files	Investments Committee	CC 12/02	Feb 2002	Mar 2003	Paper; electronic	Room 201; R drive