



UNIT-7

Keeping accurate Records

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

Unit 7

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A Critical Duty

Keeping accurate records and maintaining an up-to-date filing system are important responsibilities for most administrative assistants. Every filing system ever conceived requires the person maintaining it to approach the duty with a sense of pride. He or she must be confident that any file can be retrieved quickly, perhaps even as the employer is still requesting it on the telephone.

Most companies today, even small businesses, store their letters and documents in their computers or word-processing equipment and automatically maintain them there or on a network drive. (However—as administrative assistants know only too well— even with computers, the amount of paper correspondence and documents to be saved seems to grow daily.

Large companies often have a central file department where all papers are kept by competent file clerks. Other companies maintain files by division, and small companies may have only a few file cabinets for their entire operation. In these cases, it's the administrative assistant who is usually responsible for record keeping and maintenance. But no matter what your usual duties, you should be familiar with the various filing systems used in both small and large offices.

Getting Ready

It's often tempting, especially at the end of the day, simply to throw a file in its own folder. Don't. Filing is an important duty, no matter how tedious it seems. Instead of trying to get rid of that file or piece of paper as quickly as possible, approach it with these questions always in mind: Where could I easily find this tomorrow (or next week, or next year)? What's in this letter or document that would cause me to recall where I'm placing it in the file now?

Follow this checklist before you start to file:

- Prepare the papers by separating personal correspondence from business correspondence and documents.
- Check all stapled papers to be sure that only papers belonging together have been stapled together.
- Remove all paper clips. They not only crowd the file but also can catch papers that should not have been clipped to them.
- Mend any torn papers with tape.

- Underline in bright pencil or with a marking pen the name or subject under which the paper is to be filed.

On the file folders, use staggered tabs or one-position tabs. The straight-line tab, all in the center or in the far right position on the edge of the folder, is often preferred.

When various sets of files are used, it's wise to tab each set with a different color label. For example, use white for correspondence, blue for subject files, and green for case files. Each category then has its own color for quick recognition.

On labels, type the name of the folder on the first line beginning two or three spaces from the left edge. Use initial caps and lowercase letters, and abbreviate freely. Leave two spaces between name and any number.

Basic Filing Systems

Common or basic filing systems that might be used in a business office include the following: alphabetical, subject, geographical, numeric, and combination subject (though the office would probably be a very large one with many technical files to utilize the last). About 90 percent of offices use the alphabetical system.

Two less-used systems are the decimal filing system and the group name system (sometimes called the phonetic filing system). The decimal system, based on the Dewey decimal classification system, is used primarily in libraries. The material being filed must be organized under ten or fewer main headings numbered 000 to 900. In turn, each main heading is divided into ten or fewer subheadings numbered from 10 to 90 and preceded by the correct hundreds digit. Each subheading may then be sub-divided into ten or fewer further headings numbered from 1 to 9, preceded by the correct hundreds and tens digits.

The group name or phonetic system is used when there are a great many names involved, as in census surveys. Names that sound alike but are spelled differently are grouped together according to pronunciation rather than spelling: Allan, Allen, Allyn; Nielsen, Neilson, Nealson; Schneider, Snider, Snyder.

Alphabetical System

The alphabetical system is the most widely used filing method because it's the most efficient and least complicated. Material is filed alphabetically according to name. No cross-indexing is necessary. A label should be typed for each name and applied to the tab on each folder.

Papers are placed in the folder in chronological order, with the most current date in front. The folders are filed behind alphabet guides (obtainable in any office supply store). When there is heavy correspondence with one client, several folders may be needed to hold all current material. In this case, it's a good practice to separate the material into time periods: one folder for the year 2013, another for the year 2014, and another for 2015. If several projects have been handled for that customer, one folder may be labeled FLORIDA, another NORTH DAKOTA, another MICHIGAN, and so on.

If only the current year's files are kept handy (with previous years' files stored elsewhere), it's useful, for at least the first few weeks of the new year, to have the old year's files and the new year's files placed back to back or side by side. Of course, a different year will be on each file tab, perhaps a different color as well: red for 2014, for example, and yellow for 2015.

Subject System

This classification is used when papers are called for by subject, rather than by a person's or a company's name. Subject classification may be needed when dealing with, say, advertising, brand name products, or materials of all kinds.

You should be thoroughly familiar with the papers flowing through the office and across your desk before attempting to set up this kind of system. The list of subjects must be comprehensive, as simple as possible, and in alphabetical order or by number code. The alphabetical list is usually preferred so that a cross-index is not necessary. Papers in the subject folder are arranged chronologically, always with the latest date in front.

Subject Index

While an index of files is not required for a small filing system, it's imperative for large companies. And since most small businesses hope to grow, it's a good practice to maintain a filing system from the start. The subject index will prevent the filing of material under a new heading when a folder has already been set up for that subject, perhaps under a different title. It also permits a person other than the administrative assistant to trace information in the file.

An index card is made for each subject heading or subheading. Each subheading shows the main heading under which it is filed. Cross-reference cards are made if the subject is complex. The employer may indicate on the paper where he or she wants it to be filed, while the administrative assistant may have formerly filed that subject under another heading. A cross-reference enables both to find the paper later. The index cards are filed alphabetically.

How to Alphabetize for Filing and Indexing

Individual or Personal Names

The names of people are alphabetized by their surname. When surnames are the same, the position is naturally determined by the letters that follow:

- Smith, Mary B.
- Smith, Ned
- Smithson, John

When two or more similar names are of unequal length, file the shorter name first:

Smith, M. Smith, Mary

Smith, Mary C. Smith, Mary Charlene

Individual surnames with prefixes are alphabetized as each is written and are considered to be one word, whether or not they are written as one word:

- Mason, Tim
- McFarland, John
- Merrill, Jane
- Vane, K.
- Van Houton, Mae
- Vargas, Louise

A religious title or foreign title is alphabetized when it is followed by a first name only:

- Brother Thomas
- Burton, Francis (Rev.)
- Friar Tuck
- Queen Elizabeth
- Sister Mary Rose
- Tilton, Sarah (S.S.J.)

File Cabinets

A standard file cabinet has four drawers that accommodate material written on 8 1/2 inch by 11 inch typing or computer paper. An office with many legal-size papers (8 1/2 inch by 13 or 14 inches) will need a wider cabinet made specifically for these.

Your file cabinet should be near your desk, since you will go to it frequently throughout the workday. Label each drawer of the cabinet either horizontally (left to right) or vertically (top to bottom). If an alphabetical system is used, the top drawer might be labeled "A–G," the second drawer "H–M," and so forth.

Many secretarial desks have a built-in file drawer, handy for files used often so you can reach for them quickly without having to leave your desk to go to the larger cabinet.

Organizing Your Computer Files

As an administrative assistant, you will create and work with many different documents, presentations, and graphics each day. Most of these documents will be in electronic form and will be stored on your computer. After a while, you may be storing thousands of documents. To avoid losing documents and to save time finding the documents you need, a good electronic filing system is needed.

Just as you wouldn't store all of your paper files on your desk, to avoid file clutter you need to organize the files and folders on your computer. What follows are some tips to help you organize your computer files.

Using Documents Library

Start your filing system by taking advantage of the default folder in Windows named "Documents." If you click START > DOCUMENTS, you can view the Documents

Library. The folder already includes default folders for Documents, Music, Pictures, and Videos. You can customize the Documents Library to include other folders for different projects, customers, or tasks.

Use an upside-down tree structure to organize your file folders, with fewer folders at the top and more folders nested within. This structure will make it easier to locate files and to back them up by dragging the highest level folder to a backup location.

To create new nested folders, open the top-level folder and then right-click and select NEW > FOLDER. You can then name the new folder. **Figure 7.1** shows the Documents Library with its list of folders.

Naming Your Files

You should use a consistent method when naming files. Short names are best because long files names are more difficult to read. In general, avoid using punctuation or spaces in file names, as some programs are confused by special characters. You can use abbreviations for common topics such as MTG for "meeting" or PROJ for "project."

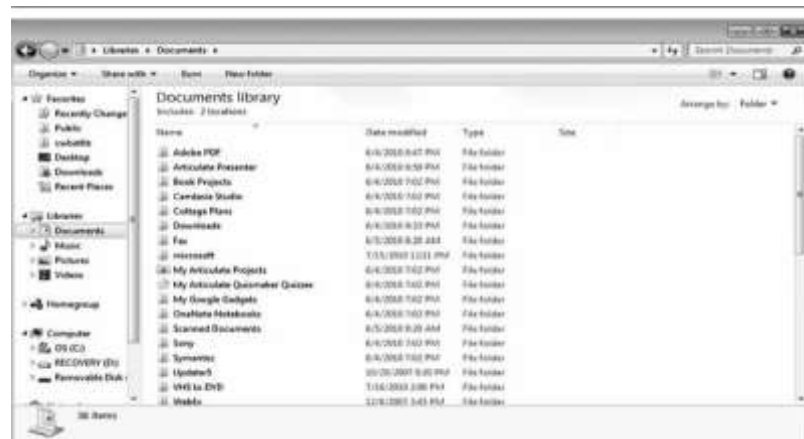


Figure 7.1

File names should include easy-to-remember names of projects, coworkers, customers, products, or model numbers.

It is a best practice to include the date in a numeric form (such as 100214 for October 2, 2014) along with your initials and a version number. Version numbers can be abbreviated as V1, V2, and so forth.

Storing and Grouping Files

It is a best practice to group files within folders by file type. For example, you should store all of your Word documents together for a particular project and keep them separated from any PowerPoint or Excel files.

For graphic files, use the Medium or Large Icon folder view in order to see a small version of the graphic.

If you use the Details folder view for viewing documents, you can view more information about your files by clicking the column headings to add or remove headings. For example, you can view the file name, size, date created, date modified, and author. You can also sort the files by any of the column headings. Click the heading for descending sort. Click the same heading again for an ascending sort.

It is a best practice to separate your ongoing work from your completed work. To keep your files better organized, search through your files once a month and copy old project folders and files to remote storage, such as a network drive, Windows SkyDrive, flash drive, CD, or DVD.

When a folder contains more than thirty documents, you should consider creating subcategory folders. For example, if you store meeting minutes in one folder, you should create subcategory folders for each month.

Using Shortcuts

You can store files temporarily on your desktop, but don't make it a habit. The best practice is to store the file in its appropriate folder within your filing system, and then create a shortcut and place the shortcut on the desktop. The shortcut is a pointer that points to the original file. To create a shortcut, right-click the file and from the pop-up menu, click CREATE SHORTCUT. You can then drag the shortcut to your desktop.

Backing Up Your Files

If you store all of your files within the Documents Library, you can easily back up your files by copying the contents of the library to another drive, a network drive, an Internet Cloud drive, a Flash drive, or a CD or DVD. You can schedule automated backups of your computer files by clicking START > CONTROL PANEL > SYSTEM AND SECURITY > BACK UP YOUR COMPUTER.

Viewing Files

As you create the file folders for your electronic filing system, you should create a folder view for each folder. After creating a folder, click the Change Your View icon and select a view. Icon view is best for graphic files, while List or Details is best for documents.

Using Recent Items

To find files with which you've just worked, you can use the Recent Places folder. This folder is available from the Start Menu on earlier versions of Windows; however, in Windows 7 you must manually add it to the Start Menu. To do this, right-click on the Taskbar and select PROPERTIES. On the Taskbar and Start Menu Properties dialog box, click the START MENU tab. Then click the CUSTOMIZE button. On the Customize Start Menu dialog box, scroll down and put a check in the RECENT PLACES checkbox. Then click OK to close the Customize Start Menu. Click OK again to close the Taskbar and Start Menu Properties dialog box. In the future, you'll be able to access recently used items by clicking START > RECENT PLACES

Using More Than One Computer

If you work on more than one computer, the best way to keep track of your files is to create a special folder that can be copied back and forth using a Flash drive. For example, you might create a folder called "briefcase" that contains copies of all your current work.

Another solution is to add dates and version numbers to your files, so that when you copy a file from one computer to another, you won't accidentally wipe out the latest version.

A third solution when working on more than one computer is to store your files on removal storage, such as flash drive. You can then share the drive between the two computers. However, when using a flash drive, it is a best practice to keep a backup copy of all your files stored on a more permanent medium, such as a network drive, SkyDrive, or hard drive. That way, if you accidentally lose the flash drive, you will still have access to recent versions of your files.

Further Reading: