

Section Four

Filing Correspondence and Papers

4. Filing Correspondence and Papers

4.1 The Registered File

The registered file is an organised assembly of documents kept together for use and relating to a specific subject, type of transaction or area of business. The registered file should have three components:

- A cover to protect the contents and act as a title page and a record of the file's circulation
- The contents
- A method of securing the whole together.

File covers (also known as jackets or folders) are usually made of rigid manila paper or board, cut larger than the dimensions of the documents to be filed, and folded to enclose the documents and minimise damage from handling and use.

The file cover should be pre-printed with the name of the agency and division or department if this is appropriate. It should include a space for the file title, file number, index headings or keywords, security marking, reference to previous, subsequent or related files, and file period (i.e. the date or year of opening, and closure) The cover should also have a grid (or ladder) for recording the file's circulation when in use.

Maintaining the order of documents within the file is a vital requirement of filing. This establishes the context within which decisions and actions were taken, and the sequence of those decisions and actions. Hence, papers should be filed in the same order as the transactions of which they form part. This is not the same as saying that the individual papers are filed in their date order. Place papers within a file in the order in which they are received in the Records Office for filing. For example, an outward letter dated 29th June, 2000 will be filed before an incoming letter

dated 26th June if the outgoing letter, with the later date, is sent out and a copy filed before the incoming letter, with the earlier date, is received.

Secure individual documents within a file so that they do not become misplaced or lost. The 'treasury tag' (plastic not metal) is still the cheapest and easiest method of securing documents within a file. There is a recommended method for using treasury tags. Holes are punched in the top left-hand corner of the front cover and inside back cover of the file, taking care not to lose information where the hole is punched. The tag is inserted through the front cover from the inside, passed round the 'spine' of the file on the outside and inserted through the back cover. Holes should be punched in the top left-hand corner of each document to be filed, three centimetres (one inch) down and three centimetres in from the edge. Documents are secured to the end of the tag which passes through the back cover to the inside of the file. (*See Chapter 12: Forms- Fig. 5*)

4.2 Identifying the Subject

Mail received in the Records Office after registration or on return from circulation must be placed on files as soon as possible.

If no directions on filing have been given by senior staff or action officers and if the correspondence does not quote a reference to a file in the Records Office, the officer responsible for filing must read the letter carefully to determine its subject and place it on an existing file, if one already exists, or open a new file if there is no appropriate file.

Determining whether an appropriate file already exists requires a careful search of the file index or of the file plan. The procedures for opening a new file and assigning it a reference number are described in **Section 5**.

4.3 Numbering Papers on Files

Documents and the accompanying enclosures must be placed on files in 'date of receipt' order (the most recent on the top). Number each paper on the file consecutively in the top right hand corner with the number being enclosed in a small circle. This is called the folio number. If a document runs to more than one page, the whole document, not the individual pages, is numbered. If the document has several attachments, these must be given alphabetic suffices, for example:

- Main document
- First enclosure = A
- Second enclosure = B

4.4 Using Minute Sheets

The split file system is the standard method of maintaining registered papers on files. In this system, papers are divided as follows:-

- Incoming letters, copies of outgoing letters, memoranda, and notes of meetings, statistical data and similar documents are placed on the right-hand side of the file and secured with a treasury tag.
- On the left-hand side of the opened file is a series of 'Minutes Sheets' secured with a treasury tag. The purpose of these sheets is to enable action officers and Records Office staff to bring attention to particular action points arising from correspondence on the right-hand side of the file, e.g. a request for additional papers, a bring-up date or to point out clarification. The instructions should be short and to the point, addressed, signed and dated.

(See Chapter 12: Forms- Fig. 6)

4.5 Cross-Referencing and Removing Papers from Files

If a single letter or other item of correspondence relates to more than one file it should be photocopied and the original placed on the file for which it has most relevance. Place the photocopies on the other files to which the letter relates. On the original letter note the file number on which additional copies have been placed. Similarly, note the location of the original on each copy placed on other files. Alternatively, if a photocopier is not available or photocopying is considered too costly, place the original on the file for which it has most relevance and put a note on each of the other files to which the letter relates, giving the date of the letter, its subject and the number of the file on which it can be found. Do not delay urgent mail by this process.

If a letter is received which refers to earlier correspondence, write the folio number of the previous letter on the new letter and then place it on the same file as the earlier letter.

Papers may be removed from files only in exceptional circumstances on the instruction of the Head of the Records Office. When this is done place a temporary note on the file at the point from which the paper (s) were removed and where they may be found. It must be signed by the member of staff responsible for the removal.

4.6 Sending Documents for Filing

The completeness of the files retained by the Records Office depends in large measure, upon staff in the Records Office, and departments sending documents for filing consistently and regularly. If this practice is not carried out key information may be missing from the file possibly resulting in poor decisions, inappropriate or inaccurate responses to correspondence, financial or other losses to Government and other negative consequences.

When documents for filing are not being sent regularly for filing and are being allowed to pile up in offices before being sent to Records Office, the Records Office cannot cope with the inundation when an accumulation of

documents is finally sent. This causes backlog of filing in Records Office and contributes to poor service. To prevent these problems, in cases when the recipient of a document needs to examine it for longer than two weeks from the date of receipt of the document, a photocopy of the documents should be made for reference purposes and the original forwarded to Records Office for classification and filing. Loose documents for filing should be placed in an inter-departmental mail envelope in the tray/dip designated for the Records Office.

4.7 What to Send for Filing

All documents which qualify as Government Records and which have been created or received by staff in Ministries, Departments/Units should be sent to the Records Office for filing.

Thus, all **incoming** Government mail must be sent for filing, regardless of method of transmission or receipt. Incoming documents which are in electronic form and qualify as Government records should be dealt with according to the procedures outlined in **the Policy for Electronic Records Management** or printed out and the print outs sent for filing.

In addition, a file copy should be made of all **outgoing** correspondence, including internal memoranda. All outgoing correspondence should carry the reference number of the file on which the file copy will be placed.

Write "F/C" (which stands for File Copy) on loose documents being sent to the Records Office to inform the staff that the documents are for filing, and placed them in an inter-departmental mail envelope. The inter-departmental mail envelope containing the documents for filing should then be placed in the tray/dip in the office area designated for pick-up by the attendant or /messenger.

4.8 What not to send for Filing

Government records, which have **not** been created or received by staff in the Records Office, Department/Unit and Ministry, should not be filed with the Records Office. For example, Library publications should not be filed with the Records Office but would instead be filed in the Library's own filing system.

Non-Government Records also do not require filing. Non-Government records include the following categories of material:

- Personal or private papers of Government staff
- Library system materials (e.g. journals and magazines)
- Superfluous copies of Government records (e.g. copies of circulars or notices, as a file copy would have been prepared by the person who is sending out the circular)
- Shorthand notebooks and drafts of Government records

4.9 Do not file

- Spare copies of letters, old drafts and so on, unless there is likelihood that they will be significant in the foreseeable future. Such documents should either be destroyed or, if there is a genuine need to keep them, stored away from the file.
- Published material and bulky reports. Much of the published material received in Records Offices has no relevance to the work of the agency. With the agreement of the line manager this material should be destroyed. Bulky published material or reports which are relevant should be marked with the file and folio number to which they relate, and stored separately. Mark the covering letter to indicate the location of the published material.
- Ephemeral material such as announcements of parties, greeting cards or advertisements of events that have no relevance to the agency.

4.10 Filing Checklist

Ask the following questions regularly:-

- Does the document belong on the file selected?
- Does the file reference on the document agree with the reference number of the file?
- It should, unless it is a copy being used for cross-referencing.
- Are all pages of a multiple page document present?
- Are all attachments present?



Filing Current Files