# Manual File Management

**H**AVE YOU EVER been to a doctor's office and noticed all the filing cabinets behind the office staff? These cabinets are full of important documents that must be properly filed to ensure the office runs efficiently. A good filing system is essential for a well-run office or organization.

## Objective:

☑ Plan and implement a system to permit easy storage and retrieval of files.

## Key Terms:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| alphabetic filing | filing cabinet | numeric filing |
| box file | filing shelves | steel cabinet |
| chronologic filing | folders | subject/category filing |
| date stamp | geographic filing | suspension file |

# Plan and Implement a Manual Filing System

Filing involves keeping documents in a safe place and finding them easily and quickly. Generally, cared-for documents will not easily tear, get lost, or become dirty. A filing system is the central record-keeping system for your organization. It helps you remain organized, systematic, efficient, and transparent. In addition, it helps authorized people access information easily.

## WHAT SHOULD BE FILED AND WHEN

All organizations have different policies regarding what should be filed. In general, records of all your organizational activities should be filed, including letters, memos, reports, financial records, policy documents, etc. Check your organization's policy on which documents should be filed and for how long.

620082

When filing takes place depends on the busy times in your office. In extremely busy organizations, filing is done at least every day—usually first thing in the morning. In a small or less busy office, filing could be done once or twice a week.

## FILING CATEGORIES

To make a filing system more useful, group files into categories. A category is a group or collection of things that belong together. When filing by categories, try to file in a logical way. You should put files together because they belong together (e.g., fundraising and donors). Also, you may need to file certain documents in multiple places to make it easier to access the information.

When forming categories, sort all your documents into piles that you think belong together. Then give each pile a category, and



FIGURE 1. To make a filing system more useful, group files into categories.

make a list of your categories. Look at your list critically to decide if you have too many categories. If there is a need to split a category, decide which subcategories you may need. Make sure you do not have too many categories; it should not be difficult for anyone to determine in which category the needed information will be found.

Once you have selected categories, draw a filing index so everyone can understand the system and find the desired information. This index is a filing key. You should write a filing key by listing all the categories and subcategories in the order in which they are filed. Make sure it is laid out so everyone can understand it, and put it in a place easily accessible for all people who will be filing documents. Ensure that everyone who does filing understands the key and uses it. Do not create new files unless the information does not logically fit into an existing file. If you do find that you need a new file, put it in the correct category, and write it in the filing key immediately. Give everyone a copy of the new categories as soon as possible.

## FILING METHODS

Five different filing methods must be understood. These ways of filing are called classification or organizing alike things together. Methods can be combined. **Alphabetic filing** is filing according to the letter of the alphabet. Many rules must be followed when using the alphabetic filing methods. See Table 1 for the rules of alphabetic filing.

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## TABLE 1. Rules for Alphabetic Filing

| | |
|---|---|
| Rule 1 | File by name in terms of the first letter. |
| Rule 2 | If the first letters are the same, file in terms of the second letter. |
| Rule 3 | File in terms of surnames. |
| Rule 4 | If surnames are the same, file in terms of the initials. |
| Rule 5 | Some surnames have prefixes and are filed in terms of the first letter of the prefix. |
| Rule 6 | When there are two surnames, file under the first surname. |
| Rule 7 | Mac, Mc, and M' are filed as Mac; St. and Saint are filed as Saint. |
| Rule 8 | When the file does not have the name of a person, file by the most important word in the name or by the name of the place. |

These methods could be combined to fit the needs of your organization.

♦ **Chronologic filing** is filing in order by date or time with the most recent on top.
♦ **Geographic filing** is filing according to place or geographic location.
♦ **Numeric filing** is filing according to number (e.g., invoice number or receipt number).
♦ **Subject/category filing** is arranging first by category and then by date or time.

## FILING SUPPLIES

You will use many supplies to implement a storage and retrieval system for files. For instance, a **date stamp** is a device that dates documents according to when they are received, enabling chronological filing. A **filing cabinet** is a device used to keep flat files and suspension or hanging files. Typically, multiple filing cabinets are present in offices.

**Folders** are items made of paper or cardstock and are used to keep loose documents together. They should be placed inside suspension or box files. These are commonly one of the most used supplies in an office. A **suspension file** is a device used to keep documents in filing cabinets. The files are put upright into the drawers, and the suspension file hangs down

## ON THE JOB...

### CAREER CONNECTION: Administrative Assistants

Filing is a large portion of the responsibilities for administrative assistants. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, you need a high school diploma to receive an entry-level job in this field. Also, the median pay is $34,660, and the jobs in this field are expected to grow 12 percent in the next 10 years.

620082

from the cradle. The suspension file always remains in the cabinet, but folders inside can be removed.

A **steel cabinet** is a storage and organizational device used to keep files that need to be locked up. These are common and typically contain sensitive, personal, and important information. **Filing shelves** are devices used to file box files. A **box file** is a big file used to keep large items (e.g., magazines and books) that cannot go into a filing cabinet. These supplies will be used frequently and are essential in implementing a successful filing system.

## Summary:

Filing is keeping documents in a safe place and being able to find them easily and quickly. Cared-for documents will not easily tear, get lost, or become dirty. A filing system is the central record-keeping system for your organization and helps you be organized, systematic, efficient, and transparent. All organizations have different policies regarding what should be filed. In general, records of all your organizational activities should be filed, including letters, memos, reports, financial records, policy documents, etc. To make a filing system more useful, group files into categories. A category is a group or collection of things that belong together. When filing by categories, try to file in a logical way. Many supplies will be used to implement a system for file storage and retrieval.

**FIGURE 2. A steel cabinet is used to keep files that need to be locked up.**

## Checking Your Knowledge:

1. Explain how to create file categories.
2. List three alphabetic filing rules.
3. When should filing take place?
4. Define chronological filing.
5. List and define two filing supplies commonly used.

## Expanding Your Knowledge:

Schedule a time to interview an office professional. Ask how he or she uses filing as part of the job. Are there various filing systems in place?

620082

## Web Links:

**File Management Techniques**

http://www.archives.utah.gov/recordsmanagement/files-management.html

**Secretary Job Description**

http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Office-and-Administrative-Support/Secretaries-and-administrative-assistants.htm

**Office Supplies Checklist**

http://www.staples.com/sbd/content/checklist/o-r/officesupplies.html

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