



Records Management Guidance: Filing Systems and File Naming

for both electronic and paper files

This document aims to help you name your files in a clear and consistent manner and to then file them in systems that meet your requirements in terms of accessibility, security and ease of maintenance.

Creating Files

- Only create records where necessary, and avoid duplication if possible.
- If you reuse old paper folders make sure the old titles are completely erased.
- Store appropriately; remember that different media may require different conditions.
- Do not overfill boxes or cabinets, and make sure that file titles are easily visible. With electronic records, ensure that folders are managed and do not get out of control.
- Consider format and style. Follow the University of Liverpool house style when creating formal records; refer to Marketing and Communications guidance [here](#).
- If possible, use the [University Retention Schedule](#) to decide how long to keep a file at the time of creation. At the least ensure that it will be reviewed in a timely manner. This will help to avoid any data protection concerns, and help facilitate responses to any freedom of information requests.

Naming Files

- Keep file names short, but meaningful.
- Titles such as 'general' or 'John's file' aren't helpful to others who may need to retrieve something while you are away.
- Be clear what is in the file such as 'Website changes 2013-10-31'.
- If appropriate, use abbreviations or other terminology that is specific to your area. Make sure those accessing the files will understand the abbreviations/ terminology.
- Order the elements in a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the record:
 - If using a date in the file name state the date 'back to front', and use four digit years, two digit months and two digit days: YYYYMMDD or YYYYMM. By doing this your files will be put into date order with the most recent at the bottom, e.g. '(acronym) committee 2013-06-12'
 - Avoid using unhelpful words such as 'draft' or 'letter' at the start of file names, unless doing so will make it easier to retrieve the record. All records with file names starting "Draft" will be listed together. When retrieving files it will be more useful to find a file next to a relating one, rather than next to an unrelated draft record.



Filing Systems

- Records must be arranged in a consistent, logical way to ensure they can be easily located and retrieved.
- Consider the following:
 - What will enable you to best carry out your work?
 - How can others access the files if necessary? (e.g. if you are off sick)
 - How can you avoid storing too much for too long?
 - How can you ensure that records are kept for as long as necessary? (e.g. to fulfil legal requirements)
- Keep your filing system consistent and simple. Avoid long, complicated numbering or coding that may be easy to misfile.
- Make sure everyone using it knows how it works, and that new members of staff are trained.
- Balance ease of access for staff with appropriate security arrangements such as computer passwords, locked filing cabinets etc. If necessary, contact [Computing Services](#) for help to protect electronic documents.
- Encourage individuals to follow the same filing structures in their own personal workspace.
- Consider developing a classification scheme which reflects the department's business functions and activities. Contact [Records Management](#) for help with this.
- Control of the department's directory tree/ file structure should be restricted to a small number of staff.

Linking Electronic and Paper Filing Systems

Try to follow the same structure for electronic and paper files as this will make it easier to manage and retrieve information. Consider the following points to help you with this:

- Look carefully at existing filing systems, and think about whether this would work well in an electronic environment before copying them.
- Alphabetical folder titles are normally easier to use than numerical schemes in the electronic environment.
- Paper filing systems often use long names which may not be suitable in an electronic environment.
- Be clear about who can create paper or electronic folders and who is responsible for ensuring that the paper and electronic filing systems are coordinated.
- Be clear whether records are to be held in paper or electronic format or both, and if both decide which format will be considered the master version and ensure that both versions are managed consistently.
- Also see the guidance notes on [Version control](#), [Electronic Records](#) and [Email](#)

Closing and Reviewing Files

- Closing a file does not mean that it must be removed from the filing system immediately. Rather, this should be done as part of a regular review of records (see our [office detox guidance](#) and the [guidance relating to the retention schedule](#) for more help in this area).



- Closing files regularly means they are more manageable and damage to the records is less likely. Closed files must only be used for reference, and no new records should be added.
- Triggers for closing different file types include the following:
 - the case or project it documents has been completed.
 - records have not been added to it for a certain length of time, e.g. two years.
 - the contents of the file span more than a certain time, e.g. five years.
 - the end of the calendar or financial year.
- When a paper file is closed, this should be clearly marked on the file cover. Electronic files should be renamed to make this clear. Closed files should be stored securely, for example in a locked filing cabinet or password-protected. Semi-current files can be sent to the University Records Centre, see [here](#) for more information.
- Sort files regularly, for example at the end of the year or the completion of a project.