

OFFICE PRACTICE (DES 1103)

LECTURE : 5

TOPIC : Office Record Systems

AIM : To understand why and how filing should be used in the office.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

After completing this chapter you should be able to understand:

1. The objectives of records management
2. The methods of classifications
3. The types of filing equipment
4. Electronic filing and microfilming

TOPIC OUTLINE:

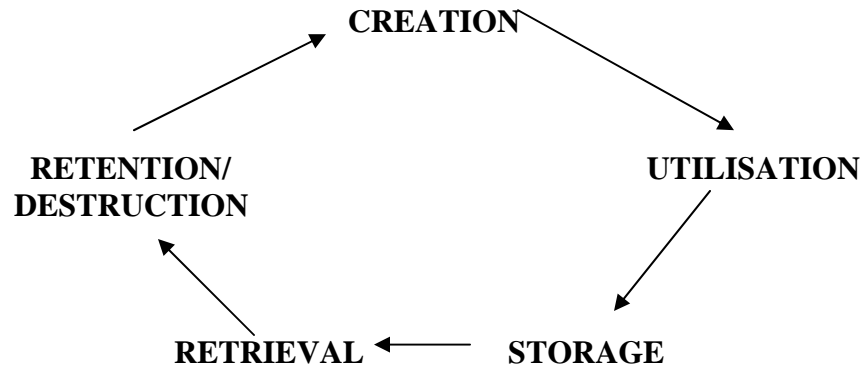
- 5.1 The Records Cycle
- 5.2 Definition of filing
- 5.3 Reasons for inefficiency in the filing system
- 5.4 Methods of classification
- 5.5 Simple rules of filing
- 5.6 Appropriate filing equipment and accessories
- 5.7 Appreciate the concept of electronic filing
- 5.8 Define microfilming, its features and what are the advantages and disadvantages of microfilming



NOTES:

5.1

THE RECORDS CYCLE



A cycle with sound procedures and methods at each storage.
Records could be held on paper, film, tape, or disk.

Creation Stage: - Length of time – for storing has to be determined– before destroying.

Utilization Stage:

- Kept in such a way that information retrieved efficiently and effectively.
- Appropriateness classification
- Quality of initial indexing
- Existence of adequate cross-referencing systems

Storage Stage

- Selection of suitable equipment
- Utilization of space and accessibility
- Desirability
- Physical Safety
- Confidentiality
- Unauthorized Access

Retrieval Stage

- Speed and Ease – on request
- Suitability of classification, equipment and authorized access.

Retention/Destruction Stage

- Microform storage
- Translated into computerized storage
- Transferred to archival storage
- Decision on method of destruction e.g. shredding/incinerator.

Records Management

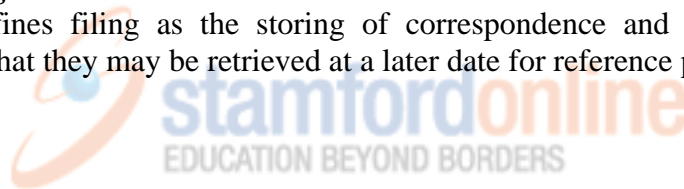
Supervision of the records to ensure smooth running with formal procedures and methods.

Objectives of Records Management

- Accurate – provision of information
- Control of records – through records and cycle
- Responsibility for operating the programme
- Development of sound system and procedures
- Standardization of procedures and equipment
- Staff appreciation – training and procedure manuals
- Safety and security of information
- Establish proper retention/destruction policies
- Eliminating unnecessary duplication of records
- Adaptability to future developments
- On-going monitoring and evaluation of existing procedures
- Cost of providing the service
- Increased efficiency of information storage and retrieval.

Definition of Filing

Helen Harding defines filing as the storing of correspondence and documents in a systematic way so that they may be retrieved at a later date for reference purposes.



5.2 PRINCIPLES OF FILING – 7 BASIC STEPS

- Collection:** Papers that are to be filed should be collected together in a filing tray or basket.
- Inspecting:** Prior to actual filing, each paper/document should be inspected for some sort of release symbol or mark – an indication that it is ready for filing.
- Indexing:** Indexing is the process of selecting the appropriate caption or name under which to be filed and of determining the order of the units that follow.
- Cross-referencing** Is a process designed to assist locate records that could have been filed or requested under more than one title or caption. A cross-reference card is prepared for insertion at the alternative location.
- Coding:** Process of marking every item to indicate how it has been indexed.
- Sorting:** Sorting in advance of actual filing so that it minimizes the need to re-enter drawers and folders.
- Filing:** The actual storing of the paper in files and folders of different sizes and design.

5.3 REASONS FOR INEFFICIENCY IN FILING SYSTEM

- a. Lack of proper training – little formal training is given resulting in people learning by default.
- b. No ultimate responsibility given for filing – the average organization often leaves the responsibility for the filing open ended. Very often it is left to juniors and even temporary staff.
- c. System of Classification is inappropriate – the simple maxim in selecting a classification system is to consider the way we think about documents, i.e. by name of customer, by subject, by date or geographical location.
- d. Absence of a retention policy – management must decide when documents are to be destroyed or transferred to long-term storage.
- e. Inappropriate location – sometimes documents are stored too far away from those who need them. This leads to loss of documents and failure to return them.
- f. Inadequate tracer/follow-up systems – documents are often removed from a file by an unknown person or department and either not returned or lost altogether. Hence there is no starting place when searching to retrieve the missing files.
- g. No system of cross-referencing are included to speed up retrieval – many systems are extremely cumbersome and slow to use unless they are adequately cross-referenced.
- h. Too many people may have access to the system – the more people who use a system particularly untrained ones, the more likely it is that documents will go astray or be misfiled when returned.
- i. Lack of regular filing – the failure to file on a regular basis can result in inefficiency resulting in time loss looking for documents.
- j. Failure to adapt to changing circumstances – many systems are permitted to remain static despite the changing needs of business and irrespective of rapid expansion.

Essential ingredients of a good system

- Simplicity
- Appropriate classification
- Accessibility
- Selection of suitable equipment
- Safety in terms of minimizing loss
- Safety in terms of avoiding damage by fire, water, dust
- Safety in terms of maintaining confidentiality and compactness – not taking up too much valuable floor space.
- Elasticity –capable to expansion as required.
- Trained staff
- Economical – in terms of time, cost of equipment and accessories
- Sufficient cross-referencing
- An ‘out guide’ or ‘tracer’ system should be incorporated
- ‘Thinning out’ should be performed on a regular basis
- Daily filing

5.4 METHODS OF CLASSIFICATION

a. Alphabetical

Documents are arranged in alphabetical order, files under the first name.

Advantages

- Convenience of grouping related documents
- Simple to understand and operate
- A direct method, requiring no index
- Useful for incorporating miscellaneous papers

Disadvantages

- Cumbersome in a large system
- Confusion may arise with common names
- Difficult to estimate space requirements, e.g. how many Hs, how many Ps.
- Possibility of material being filed under more than one letter, so necessitating cross-referencing.

b. Numerical

Documents arranged in number order

Advantages

- Unlimited expansion is possible
- Possible to give each document a unique number
- Encourages greater accuracy
- The file number can be used as a reference
- The index can be used in its own right for other purposes.

Disadvantages

- No direct access, need to consult an index
- Involves more work, both to set up and to operate
- Possibility of transposition figures.

c. Subject

Documents arranged in alphabetical order according to the subject matter, e.g. gas, income tax, telephone, etc.

Advantages

- Easy to understand, being based on the alphabet
- Convenient for grouping related matters
- Direct access, no index required
- Allows for unlimited expansion
- Can be more confidential than using individuals names
- Useful where only the subject is known

Disadvantages

- People may not think in the same way; hence the likelihood of individuals opening new files unnecessarily.

d. Geographical

Documents arranged according to their geographical location.

Advantages

- Convenient where location is known
- Element of direct filing is possible
- Useful where regional information may be required
- Useful for gathering statistics for comparative purposes

Disadvantages

- Weak knowledge of geography on the part of filing personnel can cause chaos
- There may be the need for occasional index
- Regional boundaries may be altered

e. Chronological

Documents arranged according to date.

Advantages

- Where a date has some special significance over all else.
- An essential aspect of most other systems.

Disadvantages

- Meaningless without an index
- Likelihood of cramming under certain dates.

f. Terminal Digit

The terminal digit system is a variation of the numerical system. Used in large organisations dealing with thousands of files, e.g. 654789, 89 would be the original digit and would indicate something to the filing clerk – drawer number, 47 the file number and 65 the position of the documents within the file.

Advantages

- Speeds up location in a large system
- Distributes the filing through several drawers, so overcoming crowding
- Capable of varied interpretation in different circumstances, e.g. the number groupings could be different from one system to another.
- High degree of accuracy possible.

Disadvantages

- More complex to learn and operate
- Requires special training
- Still needs an alphabetical index

5.5 SIMPLE RULES OF FILING

- Ensure that all papers are passed (or authorized) for filing.
- File neatly and methodically by:
 - Sorting and grouping all correspondence before filing and
 - Placing the papers on to the files squarely, so that all the edges are perfectly straight.

- Ensure that the correspondence is placed in the correct file.
- Files to be placed in sequence of dates so that the most recent documents are on top.
- Avoid large bulky files by thinning them out regularly as directed in a file retention policy.
- Do not remove individual papers from a file. If it must be removed, a note stating the date, name of correspondent, and name of the person holding the paper should be placed in the file.
- Provide cross-reference for files known by more than one name.
- If a file is temporarily removed, complete an absence marker or card.
- Seek guidance when in doubt concerning the filing of non-classified papers and any which are unclear.
- Always close filing cabinet drawers after use for reasons of safety and security.
- Seek to maintain the efficiency of the system and recommend modification or improvements to it as appropriate.
- Lock filing cabinets before leaving the office at night or for any length of time.
- File daily so that the filing system is always up to date.

5.6 APPROPRIATE FILING EQUIPMENT AND ACCESSORIES

The range of equipment available varies in terms of its design, materials, colour, facility and price.

Selection of appropriate filing equipment will be determined by:

- The nature of material
- The quantity
- Availability of finance
- Efficiency in accessing information
- Usage of system by personnel
- Duration of retention
- The existence of duplicate copies elsewhere
- Degree of safety, confidentiality
- Importance of physical appearance – siting the equipment

TYPES OF FILING CABINETS

a. Vertical Cabinets

- Between one to six drawers
- Available in a range of colours
- Fitted with suspension pockets – linked to form a continuous ‘concertina’ arrangement.
- Easy to use

Disadvantages – they occupy too much space.

b. Lateral Cabinets

- Space saving
- Suspended pockets – laid side by side – maximizing the use of space
- Different tabbing – angle the tabs downwards for high shelves upwards for low level shelves – protected with by a plastic cover
- Lateral, multi-purpose cabinets – storage of a variety of different, items in one cabinet.
- Various options – two door quarter folding doors, retractable doors, roller blind door.

c. Horizontal Filing Cabinets

- Storage of plans, maps and drawings
- Shallow drawers, sufficiently deep
- Materials – laid out flat, one on top of the other
- Excess floor space required
- Damage the edges from frequent handling
- Dual purpose – also operate as desktop.

d. Chest plan filing

- Storing plans and drawings
- Separated by upright dividers – to stand independently
- Suspended from rail/clip arrangement
- Mobile and fire proof
- High holding capacity

e. Rotary filing/carousels

- Rotate on central axis
- Several tiers holding lever arch files
- Files/index cards required
- Each tier revolves independently
- Located at suitable workstation

- f. Mobile filing
 - Single drawers placed on trolleys
 - Easily moved between stations
 - Useful in open plan layouts
 - Aisles can be closed up for protection and security

- g. Automated filing
 - Centralized
 - Reduction of operator fatigue
 - Locating and retrieval – efficiently carried out
 - Code number keyed in – machine activates and delivers appropriate file to the operator.

- h. Powered filing
 - Stored laterally on a conveyor belt
 - Rotates either direction
 - Easy retrieval

CENTRAL FILING

- All files are kept and controlled together in one room

Advantages

- Uniform filing procedures
- Development of specialist filing personnel
- Improvement of supervision of records
- Fixed responsibilities for filing
- Convenient – in terms of location
- Elimination of unnecessary duplication of files
- Management has better control over records
- Discourages hoarding (access storing)
- Easy incorporation of safety and security measures
- Staff educated – files and property of the company
- Feasibility – filing techniques

Disadvantages

- Staff – lack of knowledge of central filing
- Bureaucratic procedures – delays
- Higher storage – higher delays in retrieval
- No assistant/deputy if filing staff is ill or away
- Restriction for junior staff on knowledge about filing
- Location – distant from certain departments
- Similar to a library concept

Filing Accessories

1. Lever Arch Files

- Papers to be punched
- Documents secured on two arch shaped metal rolls, which are opened and closed via lever.

Advantages – Removable of single paper at any position in the file

Disadvantages – Bulky

2. Box Files

- A spring clip to keep papers secure
- Placed side by side on a shelf

3. Expanding Files

- Expanding ‘concertina’ files – divided into a number of pockets
- Useful bring – forward system/’tickler’ files

4. Multipart Files

- Manila dividers fastened together to form one comprehensive file for unpunched papers
- Used as quick referencing – held by elastic across the corners

5. Other Files

- Files and folders – with different clips and fastenings
- Flat files and envelope/document wallets

Compare and contrast various indexing methods

Indexing – process of selecting the appropriate caption or name under what to file and of determining the order the units which follow. Systems filing depends on an index and indexes are also useful in their own right. They come in card or book form. They are dependent upon the system of classification and it is difficult to provide specific rules.

a. Small drawers or boxes

- Index card arranged one behind the other with guide cards to facilitate selection.
- Available in different sizes, colours and line rulings.
- Simplicity – of preparation and usage.

b. Visible card indexing

- Cards placed on shallow trays
- Cards overlap where only the edges are visible
- Purposes - from personnel records to stock control to customer information.

- c. Visible strip indexing
 - Useful for non-confidential information
 - Easily prepared and updated instantly by the removal or insertion of the appropriate strip.
 - Available in a wide range of colours – useful for distinguishing between entries, hence speeding up location.
- d. Signaling
 - Signal or eye catching markers placed in files
 - Used for coding purposes

5.7 APPRECIATE THE CONCEPT OF ELECTRONIC FILING

ELECTRONIC FILING

Filing done by computer technique where the data is passed in the form of electronic pulses into the computer or word processor for storage on magnetic tape or disk.

- A step towards 'paperless office'
- OCR (optical character recognition) system converts text and graphics into images which can be held on computer disk
- Magnetic media storage – on floppy and hard disks or magnetic tape
- Disks have a much greater capacity and is at less risk from contamination
- The data should be perfectly safe on disks
- Access information stored via different types of terminal

Optical Storage

- One form of storage is the optical storage – a 12 inch optical or laser disk capable of storing vast quantities (500000 pages) of information
- The optical/laser disks are unaffected by dust and finger marks and highly suitable for typical office conditions.
- Majority of these disks are of the Write Once, Read Many (WORM) and cannot be erased.
- Suitable for archiving purposes.
- However, reading from these disks is slower than using magnetic media systems.

Outline the advantages and disadvantages of electronic filing

Advantages

- Space saving
- Paper saving
- Enables vast quantities of information to be stored for future retrieval
- Enables speedy location of information with no physical movement needed by the user who can search for data from the workstation.
- Records can be stored on screen or printouts taken.
- Links with other computer applications are possible, e.g. word processing
- More than one person can consult data held on file at the same time
- The system performs many filing routines automatically, e.g. arranging in alphabetical order, searching for data requested.
- Where information is centralized, tight access controls can be built into the system via passwords, thereby enhancing security and improving overall management control.

Disadvantages

- The time involved inputting data where there is no OCR facility
- The expense of establishing the system
- The likelihood of losing data, although this is thought to be minimal and certainly no more (probably considerably less) than with a manual, hard copy system
- The need to take back-up copies
- The tendency to overload a system with information that is not strictly necessary
- Systems breakdowns denying access to data held
- Computer fraud

5.8 DEFINE MICROFILMING, ITS FEATURES AND THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MICROFILMING

A convenient way of storing information for later retrieval is to photograph office records in miniature via microphotography.

Features

- The film is then processed on to small rolls of film or sheets of microfiche and stored.
- Film is available in various widths and lengths and the holding capacity depends on the reduction ratio used in filming
- Microfilms are stored in cylindrical containers and placed in labelled boxes and drawers, and stored in indexing sequence.
- Microfilm or microfiche can be used to transfer data from computer without printing.
- Advantages in terms of saving staff time, reduction in stationery costs and increased reduction ratio.
- Greater speed with which COM fiche is produced, enabling greater quantities of data to be handled, stored and moved around.

Advantages

- There is saving in terms of floor space
- There is saving in terms of filing and indexing equipment
- Storing original documents in a bank, for example, and using film for daily reference can ensure safety.
- Faster copying can be done on to film than by any other method.
- There is saving in terms of 'weeding out' – only important information need be maintained in their original format.
- Film, most of which is fireproof, has better lasting qualities than paper.
- Film and fiche can be easily sent through the post as they are less bulky and it will be safe and economical compared with sending originals.
- Images are accepted as legal evidence

Disadvantages

- Film or fiche cannot be referred without setting up a reader.
- Can be inconvenient to use a reader when tired or to refer to documents frequently or in a hurry.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to locate the precise frame (i.e. the document you wish to see) on the film.
- Processing can be inferior and cause problems due to illegibility
- Records on coloured paper can be difficult to reproduce.
- The preparation of papers for filming can be time consuming
- Difficult and costly to update.

Microfilm Storage

- Microfiche - A sheet of microfilm containing individual images arranged in a grid pattern. An eye-legible title strip identifies the contents.

- Aperture Card - A card which is normally an 80-column punch card containing a rectangular hole in which a frame of 35mm microfilm can be mounted. The aperture card is used mainly for drawing office applications and for patents.

- Roll film - Commonly used and suited particularly to sequentially filed documents, such as archival records where no insertions are required.

Microfilm equipment

- Camera - A camera, which is able to expose a number of, separate images on a piece of film; normally images are arranged in a series of rows and columns.

- Jacket - A channelled plastic carrier for strips of microfilm. Microfilm jackets are used in filing systems such as personnel records, where the individual files have to be updated.

- Reader - A device for projecting micro images that are eye-legible on to a front or rear projection screen.

- Reader printer - A device that incorporates the functions of a reader and an enlarger printer in a single unit.

REFERENCES:

1. Helen Harding, Secretarial Procedures – Theory and Application

TUTORIAL QUESTIONS – WEEK 5

1. The head of your department has asked you to examine some new systems of filing and recording information with the object of saving office space and at the same time having the records available for quick and easy reference. In a memo to your head of department explain the features of:
 - a) Microfilming
 - b) Lateral filing and
 - c) One other method which you consider should be introduced
2. How would you indicate in your filing system:
 - a) That you had removed a file from the filing cabinet?
 - b) That a letter filed in file 77 also referred to the subject matter dealt with in file 88?
3. Your company is expanding rapidly and you recognise the need for rationalising storage of different types of information – letters, memos, reports, personnel records, etc. You feel that an electronic filing system would be far more appropriate to the company. Suggest why a computerised system of filing should be introduced and mention the possible benefits of such a system.
4. Some documents cannot be found in the filing system. Draft a report to the Office Manager in which you:
 - a) Identify four likely reasons for this failure
 - b) Describe ways in which these problems can be avoided
 - c) Recommend appropriate action