

Office Filing Procedure - Introduction

Office Filing Procedure is a set of clearly defined and pan-organization followed practices in filing documents and important papers. In general, these are instructions to all the employees on what actions are to be taken in case of certain situations, likely or unlikely. Office Filing Procedures can include Employee Job Descriptions, Workplace Etiquette, as well as Certain Confidentiality Protocols.



The responsibility of writing office procedures and filing them properly lies often with the office managers or company owners. The following chapters are designed for those working professionals who have started working in document-dependent departments like accounts, general or office administration and human resources. They can learn how to file which document in what manner.



Depending upon the wide reachability or application of the procedure, some procedure filing can be done for the entire office, while others can be done for individuals or co-working departments within the same office.

Definitions of Official Filing

Most often, a wrongly-designed document can spread massive miscommunication and discrepancies between the working departments in an organization. Sometimes, such situations arise for which there was no clear procedure mentioned. Often, there might not have been a set of instructions written on how to deal with an irate customer walking into an office and venting their anger on the manager. However, these scenarios are supposed to be documented later and a filing done on it.

For example, after dealing with a specific customer, the company owner, or the manager might file a **protocol** that includes **informing the immediate supervisor, offering a grievance form**, and asking the customer politely yet assertively to remain calm, so that the issue is resolved.



Many official documents follow a certain methodology to file documents that is considered as universal standard in information filing. In such cases, some special

words are used that have a very specific meaning attached to them. Some of these words and their definitions are given below –

Appendix to Correspondence

The term 'Appendix to Correspondence' refers to the lengthy enclosures to a written communication mentioned or referred to in the file. This part is normally added to the end of the document as a correspondence portion, so that it doesn't come in the way of a smooth reading of the document.

Appendix to Notes

The term 'Appendix to Notes' refers to the lengthy summarization of all the details of the information that is given in the document on different aspects of the question as discussed. Such details could trivialize the main point or make the main message unnecessarily lengthy.

Department Manager

The Department Manager (i.e., Assistant Manager holding equivalent rank) oversees the Department and in that capacity, he has the right to exercise his power and control regarding the dispatch of information and maintenance of business processes. Work comes to him from the departments under his charge.

Case

A Case refers to the file that has all the important documents currently being considered or referred. It also mentions all the different papers and books that can be used as an accompaniment to the original document to be used as a complementary study, reading or reference.

Comeback Case

A comeback case is used to define a document or report that needs further re-examination and drafting, as the original document was found to be either incomplete or faulty. It is also a summary of the current issue.

Correspondence

Correspondence is the comprehensive and detailed collection of all communications both sent from the organization and received from the different parties. Correspondence can be used to include all three styles of correspondence, i.e. Official Correspondence, Demi-official Correspondence and Unofficial Correspondence.

Current File

A current file is a file that is currently undergoing detail-entry or modification. It differs from a comeback case in that it is a newly-drafted document and not one that is being revised and reworked on.

Dealing Hand

A dealing hand can mean any official such as the Junior Clerk, Senior Clerk, Executive Assistant, etc., who can be given the responsibility of initially examining and noting of the cases.

Demi-official Correspondence

A demi-official correspondence is the one that takes place between two managers or between an organization and the public, which doesn't follow the usual communication protocols and is conducted to get an opinion from the public on a product or service.

Divisional Manager

A Divisional Manager is a person who can exercise the powers of the equivalent rank to a manager in his absence, and is responsible for smooth functioning of the Department under his charge.

Docketing

Docketing is the action of making entries of serial numbers on the notes-taking area of a file. This is done so that the file can later be easily identified from the mark or the identification number.

Draft

A Draft means a rough copy of the document that is currently being prepared. The word 'Drafting', when used in a Company, usually means composing of official communications of all the notes or orders of the managers. These drafts are usually held for feedbacks and reviews.

File

A File means a collection of papers on a specific subject matter, which is recognized from a specific serial number, or a file number, and has many correspondence notes, and an Appendix to Correspondence.

Filing

Filing is the act of arranging some important documents in a readable and organized manner so that they can be referred to quickly and located in a short span of time without a lot of searching.

Fresh Receipt

A Fresh Receipt refers to the new information that is added to a document currently undergoing review so that its value and comprehensive quotient may be increased.

Issue

The term 'Issue' signifies the various stages of action that a draft goes through after it is approved. Some of these stages could be filing it under “Confidential” or getting it authorized by the signature of the manager.

Messenger Book

A Messenger Book refers to a book that is used to maintain a record of the different particulars of communication and marking the important ones with the responses they received.

Notes

Notes are used to keep a record of remarks made on a case once it was deposited to the body for a quick feedback. Notes include a set of the previous original documents, the questions raised on important parts of it, and the analysis of the changes needed and the final orders that were passed.

Official Correspondence

The Official Correspondence is the information shared with any public body or individual in accordance to the prescribed structure and mode of communication as per the company's procedure.

Paper Under Consideration

The Paper Under Consideration (P.U.C.) is a receipt of the case that is currently being discussed, so that there can be suitable changes and modifications suggested on it.

Receipts

Receipts are the records of all the communication that have taken on different levels, such as official, demi-official or unofficial received in the Company, or by any manager of the said company.

Recording

Recording of a file is the process of closing a file after all actions on it have been taken and the process of modification is complete. A record is the inclusion of all references, removals, and revisions made in the original document.

Referencing

Referencing is the process of connecting with the other related records to gain precedents, rulings of different countries and organizations, or any other document that can have any connection to the case.

Interdepartmental Correspondence

An Interdepartmental Correspondence is the one in which a file or a case is forwarded from one department of an organization to another department to get their opinions, suggestions, and remarks.

Constituents and Functions of a File

A file can be bifurcated in 2 parts, which are – **Notes** and **Correspondence**. Both these are put into a single file; however, they differ placement wise. Notes are generally placed on the lefthand side and correspondence on the right-hand side respectively.

Notes contain those records which are recorded on a **paper Under Consideration** and **fresh Receipt**. Similarly, correspondence contains all the incoming and outgoing official communication details.

Part File

Necessity of the part file arises in following two cases.

- In case a fresh receipt or note is needed to be processed under the absence of temporary non-availability of the main file.

(Or)

- In case the main file becomes bulky and separate note sheet is required to outsource only the essential papers for the disposal of point.

It is essential to merge the part file with the main files as quickly as possible and to remove the duplicate papers. In case of multiple part files, each one should be numbered separately. The person who is dealing these should maintain list depicting all files opened by him.

Collection Cover

It contains all other information which are not considered to be part of the main file. Some of such cases are –

- Notes of secondary information
- Reminders

- Acknowledgements
- Keeping up with casual correspondence exchanged for collecting further information from various sources

A main file consists of the necessary material collected in the collection cover. Most of the items present over the collection cover bear temporary importance.

At the time of recording, it is the duty of the Department Manager to delete all the papers those have lost their values. More importantly, the collection must remain inside the department to which it belongs.

Functions of a File

For each department/section/unit, it is essential to have a **File Register**. It is generally maintained in the form of **Appendix-I** and is used by the General Store Departments for Printing, Stock, Issue, etc. Each department's need may not be the same and hence, the number of sheets in a file also differs for each department. They are maintained as a permanent record.

Register of the file is filled with the number and subject allocated to it upon its opening. The register will enlist the details of all files those have been opened throughout the year. If the pages are allocated year wise, then entries for the next year will be made in that, otherwise a separate new file register will be opened.



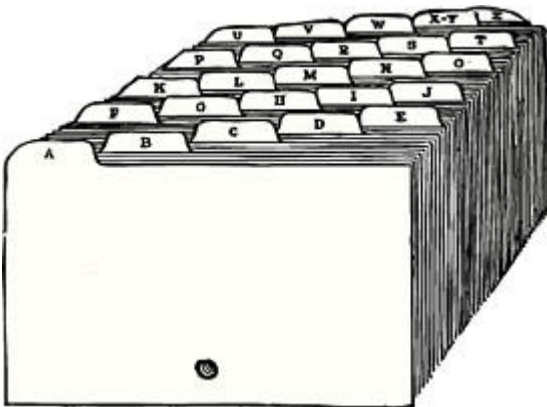
Entries into the file are made in blue ink only. It is ensured that all the entries have been made correctly and as far as possible deletion or overwriting is avoided. To avoid its misuse, the file is kept by the junior clerk of that respective department or section.

Opening and Numbering of New Files

For each new subject a separate file is created. Sometimes the file becomes too general or bulky. In this case, papers dealing with different aspects are infused into it, so that the file will now become shorter, but this obstructs the smooth progress of the work.

In the above chapter, we have discussed that the new files are registered individually for each department for general application, but their classification is based as per the type of their subject. If the subject is the main one, it will be called as **Standard Headings** and further classification of that will lead to **Sub-headings**.

During the process of file registration, an alphabetical list of contents will be prepared. This will indicate the **Standard Headings, Sub-headings** and the pages allocated to them. This makes those files easily traceable during the time of need.



At the beginning of every year the list is updated with proper inspection. The main subjects are always tried to be kept with the same standards – year after year. If found necessary, then with the permission of the Head of the Department any new heading may be added to that list.

Opening of a new file goes through a series of processes. The initial work starts with selection of Standard Heading under which it will be opened. Then the opening hand will add a suitable title for the new subject and will encode a number. This number is nothing but the serial number that is found in the file register.

Title of a File

The Title of a file gives a glimpse of the subject of the file and is tried to be made with a few combinations of words. The first word indicates the subject name under

which the file has been opened. The rest of the words describe the descriptive part of the title.

For instance, if the main subject name is 'Organizations (Recruitment and Conditions of Service) Rules', then its name of the file opened under it can be named as 'Organizations (Recruitment and Conditions of Service) Rules – Delegation of authority to impose punishment'.

Registering a File

The aim of proper titling is necessary to give a correct idea to the reader on the subject matter and to make it easily traceable among the others. **Its approval is done by the Head of the department prior to its opening.** The number of subjects are kept exactly same as shown in the file register.



A number given to a file is a combination of the opening year, initial letters used for identifying department/section/unit, “Standard Heading” number and serial number of file present under it.

If the file that we are opening is a Policy file, then it should bear a letter ‘(P)’ after the ‘Standard heading’. A separate file contains the routine action taken or matter dealt with because of a policy decision.

Dealing and filing of those papers is independent of the year to which the reference of that file pertains. For each file, the number of notes and correspondence is limited to 150. If the number exceeds that, a new file will be opened with the same number, but having a different volume number. The previous file will be renamed as **Vol-I** at present and the same should be quoted in the space provided for the previous and later references.

If the file is a Sessional one, it will be closed after the expiry of that Session and same is the case for a Committee too, where the file is closed after the terms of the committee comes to an end. In all the above such cases, termination of the file is made irrespective of the fact, whether the file has 150 number of pages or less.

Managing Procedures Using Files

Sometimes a manager may pass an order relating to any matter of the file. At this point, it is the duty of the concerned individual to carry out the order before the due date, otherwise the significance of that information will reduce.

If, however, there occurs a delay due to some situations which are beyond control and the concerned person finds himself unable to perform the task before the due date, he should make a request to the concerned head for the extension of the time with full and sufficient reasons.



Number of Pages

It is necessary to number each page of notes and correspondence desperately with serial numbers at the top right hand corner from bottom to top. As we want to distinguish the P.U.C from the enclosure, each blank page should also be numbered.

Generally, the enclosure consists of several materials, which are also numbered accordingly. During the recording of the file, the page numbers which were marked with a pencil earlier will now be inked.

Serial Number

Every communication of a 'Correspondence' is marked with a serial number in a red ink positioned at the centre of its first page. Anyone that comes 1st in the list of communication will be termed as 'Serial No. 1' and the rest will follow accordingly. When it comes to ensuring the completion of any file or referring to any paper, this serial number plays a significant role.

Process of Docketing Information

Docketing is the process of making entries in the 'Notes' portion of a file about each **Serial Number (Receipt or Issue)** in the 'Correspondence' for its identification. In a similar manner, a receipt will be docketed in writing using red ink, across the page, with the serial number of the communication followed by its number and date and the designation/name of the sender.

Docketing an 'Issue' is done by entering the serial number, date of its issue, along with the addressee's name and designation.

Docketing of Part Files

During the process of docketing, none of the temporary pencil entries should remain on the main file, and all the revised entries should be made in red ink. Docketing in the Part Files should be **done in Pencil** in the following manner –

- Serial Number..... (Receipt)
- Serial Number..... (Issue)

Referencing and Use of Slips

Referencing is the method of selecting and using connected Records, Precedents, Rules, Regulations, etc., that can have a similarity or bearing on a case. Such reference materials are made possible by the usage of appropriate Files, File Number and by Quoting the Right Page Number. Slip papers are used as temporary arrangements for quickly identifying the pages. They shouldn't be depended upon entirely for record-keeping purposes, and as such, the page numbers referred in a discussion should be put on record.

Cross-referencing of Correspondence

Books or Rules etc., which are being used for reference needn't be added to the original file, if the copies of the same correspondence are available. The latest reference should always be used by the manager who is referencing the source needs to also mention the limits of applicability while quoting the source.

For any P.U.C., the manager needn't go through the entire correspondence, but rather he should go by marking on all the previous references in margin with a pencil.

Linking of Files

In case there are two or more documents that are linked and on which action is needed simultaneously, the printed slip bearing 'please see also the linked file' should be attached to the top files' cover, and the number of the linked file should be given on the slip.



Generally, files should be arranged into one convenient file by a logical and structured selection and arrangement. Linking of files should be borne out of necessity and not for impressing others with the sheer volume of related information, that is why the Heads of Departments must be careful while linking files and do it when it is an unavoidable circumstance.

Pinning Together of Papers

When the papers in a file are pinned together, care must be taken so that the sharp point of the pin doesn't protrude and prick the fingers of any person who wants to access the file. To prevent injuries from pins, the sharp point of the pin must be kept under the surface of the paper.

Punching of Papers

Every paper shall be punched at the left-hand top corner to the correct gauge (3/4 of an inch from either side) before it is tagged to the correspondence or notes.

Flagging of Papers in a File

If a receipt which is being considered, then a flag bearing the words **Paper Under Consideration** (P.U.C.) should be attached. If there is a receipt that has been already dispatched, yet there are some other changes coming up on it, then the P.U.C. slip should be removed from the old receipt and affixed to the new one.

Quick Movement of Files

The files sent by the **Head of the Departments** must be delivered to the respective Department Managers on the same day. In some organizations, there is a procedure that states – If a file cannot reach the concerned manager on the same day, it must reach him the following morning by 10.00 O'clock.

Priority Marking on Files

The priority rating of a file can be gauged from the markings, 'ACTION THIS DAY' and 'IMMEDIATE'. The label 'ACTION THIS DAY' should be used only in cases of immediate urgency. The timings of disposal and receipt in such cases is always mentioned in the margin of the last note. The label 'IMMEDIATE' should be used in cases that have a lower priority than the other case that is marked under “ACTION THIS DAY”, yet needs to be done on the same day.

The Managers dealing with the files need to check the content and tally up the priority marking and see if it is justifiable. If the priority assignment is not fair, then he can change the rating accordingly. None of such files can be sent to the residence of the Manager unless specifically and clearly mentioned so by an authorized figure with a higher clearance than the manager.

It will be the duty of the Department to –

- see whether all the facts which are open are correct or not.
- point out any mistakes or misstatements of facts.
- draw attention, where necessary, statutory or customary procedure.
- point out the law and rules and where they are being found.
- supply other relevant facts and figures available in the Company.
- put up precedents or papers containing previous decisions of the policy.
- state the question or questions for consideration.
- bring out clearly the points requiring decision.
- suggest a course of action, wherever possible.

Action by the Head of the Department

The Department Manager will check the note, as they have the authorization to dispose their observation to their departments and lower departments. Such cases will often be related to these following actions –

- Issue of Office Orders, Routine Orders and Circulars of ephemeral natures.

- Any other case, Head of Department is authorized to dispose of independently.
- Grant of casual leave and compensatory leave.
- Issue of reminders and acknowledgements.
- Recording of files.

In the next chapter, we will discuss regarding the powers delegated to the Heads of Departments and how to authenticate them.

Authentication of Orders

The powers delegated to the Heads of Departments allows them to dispose of as many cases as possible within his own responsibility. Generally, these cases are related to sufficiently important natured orders or are policy matters. In situations where number of cases are too much, he can send them down to the assistant managers of the same department.

Even in those cases where he should make recommendations or pass important orders, he must confine his note to the actual points to be delivered, rather than repeating the points that were already on record with previous notes. Once all the recommendations and suggestions are done, he will put his signature on the original document and sign the agreement to the proposal as well.

In cases where a manager has approved a note, and has sent to another manager or a Department for comments or examination, it is the manager himself who should review it and give his suggestions. The reviewing manager may request the sending department to furnish all the factual information he needs. This calls for following a separate communication routine, so that the Department Manager can make a record of this note on the file.

Notes and Orders Given by the Divisional Manager

The Divisional Manager should, ordinarily, dispose off most of the cases coming up to him on his own responsibility. He should use his discretion in taking orders of the Joint Secretary/Additional Secretary/Secretary/ Secretary-General on the more important cases, whether orally or by submission of papers.

The oral method should be adopted as far as possible. Items of work which should ordinarily be sent to Secretary-General have been incorporated in the Brochure titled – **Items of work to be submitted to Secretary-General.**



In cases where a note has been written and approved by a manager and sent to another manager or a Department for comments or examination of the proposal or for similar purpose, a manager to whom the file is marked should invariably write the note himself. The receiving manager may ask his Department to examine the matter or furnish the factual information.

In such cases, the Departments should submit a separate routine note for the information of the Department Manager who shall ultimately record his note on the file. Departments should not write notes on files disposed of at the manager level.

Scope of Noting by the Management

Every department has a **scope of noting** beyond which they will not be authorized to take a decision. Based on that, the following instructions shall be observed by the departments in noting upon the cases –

- All notes should be clearly understood by everyone and be drafted in a simple language; they should be concise and to the point.
- All notes should be written with an objective point of view and should have justifiable reasons behind them, compared to having just personal opinions. All observations, criticisms and feedback from other departments need to be taken sportingly with courteous behavior.
- The manager who is responsible for the dealing of the case is supposed to go through all the 'paper under consideration' and the previous notes, so that the necessary reproduction and verbatim reports can be generated as per necessary situations.

- A **precis** (summary or abstract) of a single paper is often made when the original paper is of either great length and complexity, which makes it virtually unwieldable and a comfortable reference. As such a precis can cause the errors of quoting examples out of context, such precis is not prepared without the instructions from a manager.
- If the inclusion of any information in the note is likely to obscure the main point at issue or make the note unnecessarily lengthy, a separate statement or appendix giving the information should be placed on the file.
- When there are, in a single case, several points or orders which can more conveniently be dealt with separately than in a continuous note, each point should be separately noted upon in **Department Notes**. The Department Manager and/or higher managers will record their orders on each 'Department Note' separately and these notes will thereafter be amalgamated to form the notes on the file for purposes of issue of orders, etc.
- The sequence of noting generally follows the same sequence as that of the serial number in the correspondence, and in case there has been any interruption in the continuity of the notes, the papers should be amalgamated with the main file at the earliest opportunity.
- No note should be written on the receipt unless it is a routine matter. If any Manager has made any remarks on the P.U.C., these remarks must be first made in the notes and the department can use these as instructions.
- Sufficient space must be provided for signatures and observations of higher managers. Notes to be submitted to the Department Manager or higher managers should be placed at the bottom of the page. A fresh blank sheet should always be added to the notes in case there is too much content to be corrected.
- Whenever notices or requests are received from the Department managers or others on small pieces of paper, they will not be passed on as they are. This is done because of the likelihood of them being lost in transit. The first receiving Department will paste or clip the slip of paper, thus received, to a foolscap size white sheet before passing it on in a file cover to manager or department concerned for disposal.

The concerned department will raise the request and then take out a notice. After that they will dispatch the message and wait for the receipt. The practice of writing long notes in the sidesection needs to be reduced as much as possible.

The 80/20 Rule

An office without a properly filed and processed list of procedures is a den of chaos. Borrowing from the **80/20** Rule that states that 80% of our success comes from

only 20% of our actions. In simple words, it is important to focus more on the 20% which demands the actions to de-bone for the 80% success.



That is why it is very important to plan, prioritize and start working on the 20%. In one of the most important corporate decisions ever taken, **BIM Manufacturing** had stopped all important communications from being oral in nature, and even at the steep cost of having to document every single word spoken in paper, they did it so that their future officers can benefit from the wealth of discussion. Today every other company is following their footsteps.

Most often, a wrongly-designed document can spread massive miscommunication and discrepancies between the working departments in an organization. Hope this tutorial, designed for those young working professionals who have started working in an extensively documentation-related department such as Administration, Accounts, Human Resources, etc., learn how to file important documents that carry sensitive details.