



# Records Management Tip

Records management advice prepared for GNWT records professionals by the Records Management Unit, PWS

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*Active Filing Series*

## Subject Files and Case Files

When a person files a document, he will either file it in a subject file or a case file. The type of file will depend on purpose of the record. It will also depend on how the record is going to be retrieved. This Tip will look at the differences between subject files and case files, and will explore when you would choose one over the other.

The Active Filing series gives you tips on how to manage active records in your department.

### What are Case Files?

A **case file** is a file that contains documents that relate to a specific, time-limited entity or event, such as person, event, project, or organization. For example, a personnel file is a case file – all of the information in the file deals with one individual while they are employed. A **case file series** is a set of files that deal with similar types of cases, such as client files or project files.

Each case file within a case file series contains the same or very similar types of documents. The main difference is that each file deals with a different case or instance. For example, each case file in a series of application files may contain a copy of the application form, a document that was used to evaluate the application, and correspondence with the applicant. Similar information could be found in all of the files in the series. The main difference between the files is that each one would deal with a different applicant.

Case files are time-limited. This means that an event or action has to take place before the case file is opened. For example, a project file will not be created until a project is being planned. Likewise, a client file will not be created until a client shows up. Client files usually close because of a specific event. Project files close because the project ends. Client files close because something has happened that takes the client off of the caseload. While the case file is open, all of the information on a single case will be gathered into one file.

### What are Subject Files?

A **subject file** is a file that contains documents that relate to the same topic or subject matter. They are created because it is easier to retrieve records that are grouped together because they deal with the same subject matter. In practice, subject files are usually based on a topic, a type of document, or a source. For example, you could have a subject file dealing with computers, a subject file for all of your department's press releases, or a subject file of all of the information that a government agency sent to you.

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A **subject file series** can deal with a number of different, but related, topics. It can look at a single topic from a variety of perspectives. It can contain many different types of documents. For example, a subject file series on human rights may contain files on any number of human rights issues. The files may contain samples of policies, advice from experts, newspaper articles, and decisions by the Human Rights Commission, or information from other sources. This is very different from case files, which tend to be very homogenous throughout the series.

### **How are subject and case files handled in ARCS and ORCS?**

The GNWT Administrative Records Classification System (ARCS) and Operational Records Classification Systems (ORCS) accommodate both subject and case files. In ARCS, the majority of records series are subject file series, and filing is done by the subject matter. Some exceptions are committee files; building files; vehicle maintenance files; contract files; employee files and pay and benefits files; and system development files.

Depending on the department and the division, an ORCS may contain subject files, case files, or a mixture of both. ORCS tend to have more case files than subject files, since many operational programs and services are delivered on a case-by-case basis. Some examples of operational case files include client files and project files.

### **How to decide if you should create a subject file or a case file**

Use subject files when:

- You want to gather information on a particular topic or issue.
- It is easier to retrieve information by the topic.
- It is easier to retrieve information by the document type.
- It is easier to retrieve information if all of the information sent by a particular source is kept together.

Use case files when:

- You want to gather information together that relates to a specific person, project, client, event, location, or organization.
- When all of the files in a series will have the same information in them, which differs only by the person, place, event, or organization that it deals with.
- When all of the files in a series have identifiable starting and ending points. For example, a personnel file is opened when an employee is hired. It closes when the employee leaves.
- It is easier to retrieve information by the person or client.
- It is easier to retrieve information by the project name or number.
- It is easier to retrieve information by the event or action that was taken.