



Records Management Tip

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

No. 27 – June 2005

Active Filing Series

Files by Design

Choosing File Folders

If you look at any office supply catalogue, you will find dozens of different file folder options. There are letter and legal sized folders, end tab and top tab folders, and folders in many different colours.

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

Two things determine the kind of file folder that you choose: the kind of filing equipment that you have and your retention requirements. Choose the file folder that best suits your records, even if it is not the least expensive folder available.

- **Folder Weight:** File folders are made from different weights of paper. Choose heavier-weight file folders for files that are used frequently or will hold a large volume of material. Lighter-weight folders can be used for files that are not used frequently.
- **Acid-Free Folders:** Paper made from wood pulp contains acids that cause the paper to break down over time. Acids in the paper used to make file folders can do the same thing to the documents inside the folders. Archival quality acid-free folders should be used for files that have long (20 or more years) retention periods. Using acid-free folders will help prolong the life of the records.
- **Letter or Legal:** Most departments in the GNWT prefer using legal sized file folders. Documents are less likely to fall out of legal sized folders, and it is not necessary to fold larger papers. Letter sized folders are slightly less expensive than legal sized folders.
- **Accordion-Style or Pocket Folders:** Pocket folders are useful where you have large volumes of material that cannot be split up easily into volumes of regular style file folders. They are also useful when you want to file small pieces of paper, as the paper will not fall out of the folder.
- **Binder or Shannon Files:** Shannon files are typically used to file financial documents, such as batches.
- **Multi-Part or Classification Folders:** Multi-Part folders are folders that have dividers in them to separate them into several sections. They are useful for case files that contain many different types of information that needs to be referenced quickly. Each tab inside the folder can be used for a different type of information.
- **Suspension or Hanging Folders:** Hanging folders have little hooks on them to hang in filing cabinets. Hanging folders should be used as holders for regular style file folders, and re-used when the files are removed.

- **End Tab or Top Tab Folders:** Tabs are the part of the folder that extend beyond the edge of the folder and provide a place for a label. End tab folders have a tab along one side of the folder. Use end tab folders in shelf-style filing cabinets. Top tab folders have a tab along the top of the folder. Use top tab folders in drawer-style filing cabinets. Choose a tab style that is wide enough to display your file label properly.
- **Colour File Folders:** Some people like coloured file folders. Other people hate them. Coloured file folders can be used to identify different types of records easily and to help you find misfiles. However, coloured folders should be used with care. If you have too many colours mixed together you will lose folders in the blur of colour. When you are using coloured file folders, all of the folders in the same colour should be kept together. In general, we recommend that departments use white or ivory folders, rather than coloured ones. White folders are usually less expensive, the colour does not bleed, and they are easier to recycle.

For more information
For more information on using colour, see Tip #8.

Labeling Folders

Every file folder needs a label. The labels are used to identify the file and display information that is useful for managing the file. They should be put in the same spot on every folder, so that they are easy to find. Contact your Records Coordinator to find out if your department has standards for file labels.

At minimum, a file label should contain the following information:

- The ARCS or ORCS classification number (file number)
- The File Title
- The volume number
- The open and close dates of the file

Additional information can be put on the label:

- Name of department and/or division
- Retention schedule
- Access restrictions

Organizing Documents in a Folder

There are a few basic rules for filing documents into folders.

- Documents should be filed in reverse date order. When you open a file folder, the most recent document should be on top.
- Related papers should be stapled together. Paperclips should be removed.
- Staple small pieces of paper to larger sheets of paper and mend torn documents with tape.
- Fold oversized documents to fit inside the folder.
- Punch holes in the documents and attach them to file fasteners.