BSBINM201
Process and maintain workplace information

Release 1

Learner guide

aspire
learning resources

BSBINM201

Process and maintain workplace information

Release 1

Learner guide

Aspire Version 1.1

Aspire is committed to developing quality resources that meet the needs of our customers. However, occasionally Aspire finds, or is notified of, errors. Please refer to our website at www.aspirelr.com.au to see if there are any updates that may be relevant to you.

Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this book is accurate; however, the author and publisher accept no responsibility for any loss, damage or injury arising from such information.

Except where an information source is acknowledged, the names and details of individuals and organisations used in examples are fictitious and have been devised for learning purposes only. Any similarity to actual people or organisations is unintentional.

All websites referred to in this unit were accessed and deemed appropriate at time of publication.

Aspire Training & Consulting apologises unreservedly for any copyright infringement that may have occurred and invites copyright owners to contact Aspire so any violation may be rectified.

Contact details

Participant	
Name:	
Start date:	
Phone number:	
Email:	
Work location	
Name:	
Address:	
Postal address:	
Workplace supervisor name:	
Phone number:	
Fax:	
Email:	
Registered Training Organisation (RTO)	
Name:	
Address:	
Postal address (if different):	
Phone number:	
Fax:	
RTO contact name:	
Mobile:	
Email:	

Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBINM201 Process and maintain workplace information*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help
Summary	Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Reading	• Recognises and interprets textual information to complete tasks according to organisational requirements
Writing	• Records simple and routine content using an established format to organise information
Oral communication	• Uses listening and questioning skills to clarify and adhere to requirements
Numeracy	• Comprehends basic mathematical measurements relating to times and number sequences
Navigate the world of work	• Recognises organisational procedures and understands relevance of legislative requirements
Get the work done	• Follows clearly defined instructions and monitors own progress to achieve timelines • Solves problems directly related to tasks, and makes low-impact decisions • Uses digital technologies following instructions regarding data entry and retrieval

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcome	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Collect workplace information	1A Collect information that meets the organisation's needs	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
	1B Use equipment and technology to obtain information	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
	1C Maintain security and confidentiality when handling information	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
Topic 2 Process workplace information	2A Use business equipment and technology to process information	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
	2B Process information according to time lines and guidelines	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
	2C Update, modify and file information	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
	2D Collate and dispatch information	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
Topic 3 Maintain information systems	3A Maintain information and filing systems	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
	3B Identify, remove and relocate inactive or dead files	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
	3C Establish and assemble new files	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident
	3D Update reference and index systems	❏ Confident ❏ Basic understanding ❏ Not confident

Topic 1
Collect workplace information

Each workplace relies on the exchange of information to carry out its daily business. Information is passed from employee to employee, customer to employee, supervisor to team member, supplier to customer, and so on. Dealing effectively with information and records is necessary and important for all organisations.

The quantity and variety of information kept by an organisation can be huge. Information needs to be sorted into related groups so that it can be stored easily and found when needed. An organisation's success depends largely on how well it manages its information.

You need to be familiar with the type of information used in your job and the way records are organised so you can collect, file, store and find information quickly and easily. Finding and using information is a large part of many jobs, so knowing how to deal with it is an important workplace skill. Being confident and efficient in this skill helps you and your organisation succeed.

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A   Collect information that meets the organisation's needs

1B   Use equipment and technology to obtain information

1C   Maintain security and confidentiality when handling information

1A Collect information that meets the organisation's needs

Every workplace is different and requires different types of information to keep it running smoothly, efficiently and profitably. Different businesses collect and use different types of information. For example:

- a medical practice has records on patients, accounts and medical supplies
- a manufacturing company has customer databases, invoices and sales records
- a school or training centre has records relating to students, employees, equipment and training materials.

Where you find the information varies according to what you are looking for and the business tasks involved. For example, a small business may have one central paper filing system, while a large organisation may have archived paper and electronic files stored away from the office.

Regardless of your job role, you need to be familiar with the type of information you will be using in the workplace.

Types of workplace information

The types of records held by an organisation vary depending on the business. Music stores have a large amount of information on products, such as CDs, and prices. Local government bodies responsible for public facilities, such as parks and public toilets, keep records of money spent on public works, contractors and financial transactions.

Common types of workplace information include:

- messages such as telephone and email
- correspondence such as letters, memos, faxes and email
- computer files such as reports and research
- sales records such as monthly forecasts, targets achieved and sales reports
- product information such as price lists, catalogues and brochures
- forms such as claim forms, membership forms, order forms and leave forms
- electronic databases such as customer records, financial records and library catalogues
- accounts records such as invoices, credit notes and statements (from suppliers and to customers)
- personnel records such as employee details, salary rates and annual leave
- cash handling records such as petty cash receipts, cash takings and register readings
- a library collection which could include books, magazines and reports
- promotional material such as catalogues, order forms, brochures and posters.

Paper-based records

Paper-based records are one of the most common ways of dealing with information.

Examples of paper-based records include:

- reports
- magazines, journals and newspapers
- project files
- contracts
- minutes of meetings
- business letters
- email messages and memos
- faxes
- forms
- diaries and other note-taking methods.

Example: paper-based records

Rosanna runs her own small business. As she is the only employee, she is responsible for all the paperwork required to keep the business operating. Once a month she pays her electricity and phone bills at the post office. The post office stamps the bills 'paid' and gives her a receipt. She files the original copies in her filing cabinet so she can refer to them later for bookkeeping and tax purposes.

When Rosanna sends completed work to her customers with a courier, the courier signs Rosanna's register for each parcel they collect. If there are problems with missing parcels then Rosanna has a record.

Rosanna stores all the correspondence she receives. She even prints out some emails she wants to read later. There is a software database that she uses to record all of her customer information, as well as recording all the correspondence, emails and faxes sent to them.

At the end of each month, Rosanna completes an activity statement form for the government detailing the GST (goods and services tax) that she has collected. This form must be sent to the tax office and a copy stored in her files. To complete the GST form, she refers back to the information in her records. These are all kept in the computer database, with a hard copy kept in the filing cabinet in case of computer problems.

Electronic records

Many organisations store records and information electronically. Storing information electronically can save space and paper.

Information can be easier to access if it is stored electronically. You can search through records and copy information easily into other documents or files. The information in electronic records can also be updated, deleted or changed more easily than hard copy records can.

Examples of electronic records include:

- computer databases such as library catalogues, customer records, sales records and financial records
- electronic correspondence such as email and faxes
- computer files of letters, memos and other documents.

Example: electronic records

Marius is responsible for processing telephone orders and adding new customers to his organisation's customer database. When a customer calls him to order a product, he quickly searches his database to find the customer's record. He checks that the customer still has the same delivery address, then takes the order. When the organisation has a special offer for customers, Marius uses the customer database to compile a list of names and addresses. He copies the information into a document that he can use to create and print out mailing labels for a special offer mail-out.

v1237

Image-based records

Image-based records (for example, on DVD or hard or solid state drives) allow large amounts of information to be stored in a small space. Image-based records are easy to access, but they may need to be read with specialised equipment.

Examples of image-based records include:

- records of bank account transactions
- indexes such as a list of journals held by a library
- old records electronically reduced for efficient storage or to protect fragile or valuable documents.

Archived records

The amount of information that must be kept by a business can be immense, particularly if gathering information is one of its main activities. For example, the public records office in each state and territory collects and stores millions of records annually. They have huge warehouses (archives) to store all their records and sophisticated systems to keep track of them. Here are some of the main reasons an organisation will archive records.

When to archive records
• When there is no more space in day-to-day storage areas. • When records are not used due to their age, but must be kept for legislative or organisational reasons.

Retrieve archived records

When a record is archived, it is important to know how to retrieve it. Some businesses simply write the reference names and/or numbers on the box that contains the records. This allows anyone looking for a particular record to find it easily, as long as the information is stored in the right box and boxes are stored in a particular order such as chronologically, alphabetically or geographically. Other organisations use this system to keep track of their records but also record the archived information in their index or database to show people the exact location of the information. Information stored electronically also requires archiving. Hard drives in computers eventually fill up with records, documents and other information. Often, much of this is not needed for daily activities.

v1243

Information sources

Information comes from many different sources. If it is your job to collect workplace information, you need to know where to find it so that you can collect it and pass it on promptly to the relevant people.

Information sources vary from workplace to workplace. Every organisation does things differently. Part of finding your way around any new workplace is learning where to find the various types of information you need. The more familiar you are with your organisation, the more efficient you will become.

Information sources include:

- colleagues such as team members or other staff
- individual computers
- computer networks or an intranet (a private computer network inside a company or organisation)
- electronic archives

- disks, tapes and other electronic storage
- paper filing systems in drawers, filing cabinets, cupboards and rolling storage shelves
- answering machines and services
- newspapers, magazines and journals, in a library, in a newsagency or delivered
- mail and courier deliveries
- noticeboards.

Collect information

You may be asked to collect specific information on a regular basis such as retrieving orders from emails and distributing them to relevant people, or collecting and storing forms, applications and other documents sent to the organisation.

At other times, you may be asked to obtain a particular piece of information for a colleague's project. These responsibilities will differ according to your job role and the type of organisation you work for.

The most important thing about collecting information is making sure the material you collect is what people need. Is it the right information? Is it relevant?

You also need to collect information efficiently. People usually require information within a certain time frame. This means you must locate it and forward it to the appropriate person promptly.

Always check that you know:

- what information you are collecting
- who the information is for
- when the information is needed.

Policies and procedures for collecting information

There are many things you need to know before collecting information. For example, every organisation has policies and procedures related to collecting information. Make sure you familiarise yourself with these before you begin. Remember to ask your supervisor or a colleague for help if you are unsure.

As a quick reference guide, you should note important aspects related to collecting information, including the organisation's policies and procedures, where information is located, the people you need to deal with to obtain certain information and any other information vital to your work.

Policies and procedures related to information collection will generally outline the following guidelines.

Information-handling policies and procedures
• The type of information to be kept and what should be discarded
• When and how specific types of information are collected
• Restricted access to records
• Library check-out system
• Who to circulate specific types of information to
• Records maintenance

Legal requirements

The *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) safeguards people's privacy by restricting access to personal information. Individual states and territories have regulations in regard to information and privacy. While you don't need to know the regulations in full, it is crucial that you understand how these laws affect the way you collect and process information.
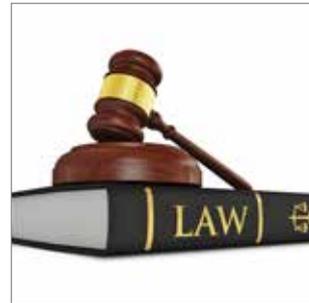
Another law you should be familiar with is copyright. This restricts the way information can be copied or used.

Other significant legislation with regard to information handling is the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth). This Act is important because the requirements of privacy and information protection laws must be considered against your employer's responsibility to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees and those visiting the workplace. WHS legislation is also applied to ensure safe work practices are followed when performing tasks; for example, not carrying large loads of material for filing.

Anti-discrimination laws require you to ensure that no information contains derogatory comments about a person's age, abilities, physical or mental capabilities or ethnicity.

Ethical requirements

Ethical principles and codes of practice must also be followed when collecting and processing workplace information. Organisational policies and procedures will outline consequences, such as disciplinary action, when ethical principles and codes of practice are not followed. Below is a list of some ethical principles and codes of practice that may apply in the workplace.

Ethical principles

Ethical principles require you to:

- clearly explain to people why you want the information
- understand what is meant by 'restricted access'
- only show information to authorised people
- ensure that all information provided is accurate
- not share information you have collected for the organisation.

Codes of practice

Codes of practice require you to:

- collect only the information you have been asked to
- meet time lines
- use encryption codes or passwords to maintain security
- always follow organisational policies and procedures
- ensure files aren't left unprotected or open on a computer
- not take files from the premises
- not copy files without permission
- understand which files are restricted.

Requests for information

You might be asked to retrieve paper-based or electronic information by a range of different people. Some people want the information as soon as possible. Others may need the information within a few hours for a meeting, by the end of the day, by the following day or in a month's time.

When you are asked to collect material, make sure you know exactly what has been requested. Use your communication skills and repeat the request back to the person. Then both of you will be clear about what it is you are collecting. Always ask for clarification if you are unsure. For example, if your supervisor asks you to get 'the Anderson file', you need to clarify which 'Anderson' they are talking about, as there may be more than one Anderson in your files. Write brief notes if necessary, so you can refer to them while you are searching for the information.

v1238

Requests for information may come from:

- your supervisor
- co-workers in your area or department
- co-workers outside your direct area but within your organisation
- someone outside of the organisation
- yourself.

Locate information

The information you need might be located in a number of different places; for example, in the organisation's central filing system, the library, a database or a staff member's filing system. If you have any difficulties finding the information, let someone know immediately. Don't waste time trying to handle the problem yourself. Don't wait until the last minute to ask for help – it may be too late.

You should become familiar with all aspects of your organisation's filing system as well as other areas where information is stored, such as a manager's office or the stock room. Knowing exactly where to find the information ensures that it can be delivered on time to the person who needs it.

When locating information, you need to think about:

- how urgent the request is
- what level of security the information comes under (for example, confidential, high security or general access)
- what information is required
- where the information is located
- the best way to deliver the information.

Record requests

It is useful to keep a record of any requests that have been made, in case you need to retrace your actions. There may be a specific procedure to follow for recording requests and actions. You may need to write down what someone asked you to do and when it was done.

If there is no common procedure, you should write the details in your notes or daily work plan. This way you will know when you were asked for the file, who asked you, when they wanted it and what you did.

Try to record:

- the file/record/information requested
- who requested the information
- the date and time of the request
- the date and time you delivered the information
- any problems you encountered.

File request forms

Some organisations use a formal system for information handling, especially for centralised, paper-based records. There may be a form to fill out when you need to obtain a file or other type of information. This might be:

- a paper form to be kept as a record

- an online form for external web-based access

- an intranet form for internal web-based access

- a CD or DVD form to be printed and given to the designated person.

Example: file request form

This is an example of a paper-based form for the records department.

Records department
File name:...   Date: ____/____/_____
File number (if known): ....
Requested by:...   Dept:
Processed by:...   Date: ____/____/_____

Practice task 1

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Jeb works at the head office of a national company. Jeb's job is to answer the phone and deal with any emergencies as they arise. Jeb's other responsibilities are to collect the daily newspapers and financial papers for the firm and compile and distribute meeting agendas for daily meetings. He must also provide files from the centralised paper filing system upon request. As well as this, he has to compile the daily sales figures from each state and send them to the national sales manager.

1. What type of information is Jeb collecting every day?

2. How should he deal with each type of information?

1B Use equipment and technology to obtain information

Information can be collected in a variety of ways. For example, you may receive a report by email, post, printer or fax, or through the internal mail. You may have to collect information from the internet, libraries, newspapers and television. In order to do all these things, you need to be familiar with a range of business equipment and technology. You need to know what is used so you can process information quickly and efficiently.

To find and collect particular information and complete your tasks efficiently, you may need to use a wide range of business equipment and technology, some of which are described below. You must also know how to operate equipment safely and effectively.

Computers

You may use your computer for a number of tasks such as:

- searching the library catalogue
- using a customer database
- accessing the internet
- sending and receiving email.

Be sure you know how information is stored on the computer network so you can use the file paths to locate it.

Email is a quick and effective way of asking for and receiving information. Make sure you let the person you contact know the type of system you are using, so they can send you material in an appropriate form. Your computer system needs to be able to read the information being sent so that you can download it. You might also have restrictions placed on your email system regarding the size of documents you can receive. If someone tries to send you a large document, you may not be able to receive it.

Printers

A printer takes electronic information and turns it into paper-based information. There are several reasons you might need to do this. One is to create a hard-copy backup of the electronic information you have received. Another is to make reading a large file more manageable. It is often difficult to read files with lots of information on a computer screen.

Printers vary in type and usage. Some can print on many types of paper or other media such as transparencies or card. They can print in colour or black and white. Some can print large posters, maps and engineering or construction drawings referred to as blueprints. Learn the various functions of your printer so you can reproduce the information you have collected in an appropriate format.

Filing systems

Paper-based and electronic filing systems include registers, out cards, databases and passing slips. Be familiar with the way the systems are set up and how to access and retrieve information. It is important to follow the correct procedures.

Telephones

The telephone is a useful tool for receiving and sending information quickly, and for leaving messages. Telephones allow people to be contacted in and out of the office, at any time of the working day. Replies can be immediate, which is essential if you have a tight deadline.

Voicemail

Voicemail is useful if the person you want to speak to is unavailable or if you are busy when someone calls you. An answering service takes messages on behalf of the person you are trying to contact and passes your message on to them. A message bank is a type of answering machine. Make sure you record times when you have tried to contact someone and left a message for them. You will need to follow it up if they don't return your message.

Fax machines

A fax machine converts paper-based information into electronic information for transmission. It is useful for transmitting and receiving information that requires people to check data, read a report or confirm information. Staff are usually shown how to use the fax machine during their induction session, as different organisations have different sorts of machines. Asking people to send information by fax rather than by post can save time.

Photocopiers

You may need to copy the material you have found so you can distribute it to a number of people. Perhaps you only need a portion of the information you have collected. Or you may be in a situation where you cannot take the whole document with you, such as in a library, so you need to copy the portion you want. Photocopiers copy documents quickly and efficiently. Machines vary so you need to learn how to use the one in your organisation. Functions include double-sided printing, colour copying, collating and copying onto card. Remember that copying is restricted by copyright law. It is wise to check with your supervisor or manager if you are unsure.

Scanners

A scanner is a machine that converts printed material into images. Scanning is very useful for converting paper-based information into electronic information; for example, pictures from a book can be converted to an electronic file for your computer and then added to other documents. Some scanning programs also convert the text in a scanned document to text that can be word processed. Ask for help if you are having trouble using a scanner, as models vary.

Mobile devices

Mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets are rapidly becoming an integral component of office business technology. With the appropriate application software, they can perform many of the tasks previously dedicated to single devices such as scanners, computers and telephones. Their portability also enables these functions to be performed beyond the office environment.

Practice task 2

Explain how the following three pieces of business equipment and technology can be used to obtain information:

1. Computer

2. Scanner

3. Telephone

1C Maintain security and confidentiality when handling information

It is extremely important that you understand and follow your organisation's requirements when handling confidential information.

Know your workplace's policies and procedures on:

- maintaining data security
- sending confidential information
- collecting, capturing and updating confidential information
- filing secure information.

Keep information secure

Most organisations have at least some files that are not appropriate for general circulation. These may include personnel files, performance appraisal documents and sensitive material such as the business's strategic plans. For example, files containing personal information about employees should not be available to everyone. The only people who need to view these files are managers, human resources staff and the employee the file is kept for.

Files that are confidential, or have restricted access, are generally kept separate from the main filing system. Sometimes they are tagged to indicate their security rating (for example, general, personal, restricted, confidential, secret and top secret). Electronic files are more difficult to store separately, especially with a networked computer system, so other measures are used such as password protection.

If you require access to confidential or restricted files, you will need to understand the policies and procedures for accessing such files. It is particularly important that the movement of these files is accurately recorded to ensure they are not accidentally released into the wrong hands or lost.

Below is some information on methods to keep confidential and restricted files secure.

Keep hard-copy files locked.

Use encryption, a method in which the computer file is coded and requires a decoding key to open and translate the file.

Use passwords to access restricted computer files.

Obtain signed authorisation from a manager to access files.

Store confidential computer files on a CD or other storage device rather than on the hard drive (the CD can then be stored in a locked cupboard).

Practice task 3

1. List three examples of confidential information.

2. List three ways to keep confidential or restricted files secure.

Summary

1. Workplaces rely on the exchange of information to carry out their daily business. Dealing effectively with information and records is a necessary and important task for all employees.

2. Common types of workplace information include messages, correspondence, computer files, sales records, product information, forms, computer databases, accounts records, personnel records, minutes of meetings, library collections, promotional material and printed products.

3. Information sources may include colleagues, computer networks, individual computers, electronic archives, electronic storage, paper filing systems, newspapers, magazines and journals.

4. You need to know where information is stored and how it is organised so you can collect it and pass it on promptly to the relevant people.

5. When collecting information, you need to understand what you have to collect, who the information is for and when the information is needed. The information must be relevant, current and appropriate.

6. Understand and follow relevant legislation and your organisation's policies and procedures for collecting information. For example, be familiar with the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth). This Act safeguards people's privacy by restricting access to personal information.

7. You will be more efficient in the way you handle information if you plan how to meet your deadlines, record and prioritise your tasks, keep track of information and monitor your progress.

8. It is crucial to maintain security and confidentiality at all times when dealing with information.

9. To process information quickly and efficiently, you need to know how to use the business equipment and technology in your workplace.

Learning checkpoint 1
Collect workplace information

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in collecting workplace information.

Part A

1. List the organisational policies and procedures you need to follow when collecting information.

2. Describe how you use business equipment and technology to obtain information effectively.

3. List five reasons why it is important to understand policies and procedures for accessing confidential material.

3. List five reasons why it is important to understand policies and procedures for accessing confidential material.

4. You are given the following requests for document retrieval:

    • During the morning, your supervisor asks you to locate a document for a report she is writing.

    • The receptionist asks you to retrieve and photocopy some information about your organisation's products that needs to be sent out with the afternoon's mail.

    • A colleague wants you to print out a record for a particular client by tomorrow.

    • After lunch, a manager urgently requests a file on your organisation's sales performance. The manager needs this information for a 2.30 pm meeting.

    Prioritise these requests and explain why you would attend to them in this order. List the business equipment and technology you would use.

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Cari works in an office that provides legal advice to people. The office is extremely busy and she has limited supervision. She is responsible for the centralised paper filing system and the library, which is constantly used by the legal professionals in the office.

Colleagues frequently request case files, client files and account files. These are handed to Cari on forms that give her the file reference or client reference she needs to find the file. These requests also come to her via emails from colleagues who are either out of the office or are in an office in another city.

Cari must find the required files using an electronic index system that allows her to search for reference numbers, names or other information. She must also return the files to the correct place when they are no longer needed. Quite regularly, urgent requests for files or information come from colleagues.

Cari is also responsible for finding information on all sorts of subjects in the library. This can often take some time to locate using indexes in books or looking for specific cases.

1. What tasks must Cari complete to collect the different types of information she requires?

2. Write a work plan for Cari taking into account all the things she needs to do in her job.

3. How should Cari keep track of all the requests for information?

4. How should Cari prioritise her work?

5. How should Cari deal with the urgent requests she receives?

6. How can Cari use business equipment and technology to help her work more efficiently?

7. How can Cari ensure the confidential information she handles remains secure?

Topic 2
Process workplace information

Once you have collected your information, you may need to process it before it can be used, passed on or stored for future use. An important part of joining any organisation as a new employee (or moving to a new department or area) is to learn how you are expected to process information.

Sometimes information processing is simple; for example, printing emails, sorting the pages and handing them to the appropriate person. Other information may require more processing; for example, copying information from one document to another, reformatting the document, then printing, copying, binding and distributing it to customers.

In this topic you will learn how to:

2A Use business equipment and technology to process information

2B Process information according to time lines and guidelines

2C Update, modify and file information

2D Collate and dispatch information

2A Use business equipment and technology to process information

In order to process the information you have collected, you need to know who needs it and in what format it is required. For example, a colleague may be satisfied with a photocopy of the information, while your supervisor may want the information to be word-processed, printed, photocopied and organised into a bound report with multiple copies. You need to clarify the requirements and then work out how you will process the information.

You also need to be familiar with the policies and procedures you have to follow. Always ask for help if you have trouble using any equipment or if you don't understand what you have to do. For example, you might know where to collect incoming faxes but be unsure of how to forward them to interstate branches.

Process information

Knowing how each item of equipment and technology is used will help you process information efficiently. Therefore, you need to be familiar with the different types of equipment and use the most appropriate form of technology to process the information you have collected. This will depend on:

- the type and amount of information you have to collect

- the person who has asked for it

- how soon it needs to get to the person.

Use your computer

You may need to use your computer to process invoices, record incoming journals on a library database, word process meeting minutes for distribution, update customer records, process order forms, record sales data or prepare correspondence.

A lot of the information you receive may have to be word processed or reformatted. Find out the kind of format that is required. Does the report need the organisation's logo on the cover page? Should you write a formal or informal memo? What sort of graphs should you use? How you process the information depends on what the person who has requested it wants and your organisation's policies and procedures.

Below are some steps to follow when entering and retrieving information from an electronic filing system.

Information entry

- Confirm the information you are to enter.
- Access the correct file or database using the index.
- Key in the information required.
- Check the information is correct.

Information retrieval

- Confirm the information you are seeking, who it is for and when they need it.
- Identify if there is any authorisation needed for access.
- Access the correct file using the index or use a search engine for the internet.
- Check the date of the information to ensure it is current or the correct date if it is an archived file.
- Print out relevant information.

Handle email

If you collect email messages, you should already know how to use your email software. To process email messages, you need to find out how the organisation expects you to sort, forward and file emails.

Examples of email handling procedures include:

- forwarding all messages from customers to a supervisor
- printing out some messages and not others
- filing messages relating to a particular project in a separate place
- seeking permission to delete a message.

Use other business equipment

Other business equipment that may be used to process information includes the following.

Telephone

If you need to pass on information immediately, the telephone is often the quickest way. This method is appropriate if the information does not need to be processed in any way. You may need to follow up a telephone conversation with a photocopied or printed version of what you have discussed. Remember that using a telephone is only appropriate if the person you are calling is willing and able to answer it. Try not to ring people you know are very busy; often they appreciate an email that they can follow up in their own time.

Photocopier

If you are asked to distribute information to a number of people, copying the information will save you time. It may also be an appropriate method if you need to send information to someone who does not have access to your organisation's computer network.

Fax machine

Faxing information to people is a quick and easy way to send information that cannot be emailed; for example, invoices or material you have photocopied. Many offices now use machines that have combined printing, faxing and scanning capabilities. If you are unsure about how to operate the equipment, always ask for instruction.

Scanner

Scanners are useful for inserting graphics or photographs into a document. If you need to have an electronic copy of paper-based information, scanning is quick and easy.

Binder

If you need to present the information you have obtained in a neat, manageable format, you can use a binding machine. Binding is often used for reports or presentations. Bound documents usually contain a lot of information on a particular topic. In your workplace, you may use a heat binder or comb-binding equipment. Both are quick and easy to use. Ask someone to show you how to use this equipment if you are unfamiliar with it.

Use equipment safely

You must always use equipment safely and follow all work health and safety procedures. Safety is paramount in any workplace and the correct and safe use of equipment within work health and safety guidelines helps avoid dangerous situations.

Be environmentally aware

How an organisation disposes of unnecessary information, such as waste paper, and the by-products of processing information, such as printer cartridges, is determined by procedures that reflect the environmental policies of the organisation. Make sure you are aware of any requirements regarding paper usage, equipment cleaning, replacing consumable items and any other environmental procedures. For example, you may need to use double-sided printing whenever possible and place used paper in recycling bins.

v1244

Practice task 4

Select three pieces of business equipment or technology and explain how you use them to process information.

2B Process information according to time lines and guidelines

Often information needs to be processed within a particular time frame, so you need to collect and process the information efficiently.

When processing information, use your planning skills and follow the relevant guidelines and procedures. You may be involved in collecting and processing different types of information simultaneously. Your work plan must take this into account. A well thought out plan helps you to deal with different tasks and to keep track of your activities and time frames.

Make sure you understand:

- how you need to format the information
- how to prepare information according to your organisation's policies and procedures
- how to choose the most appropriate equipment and technology.

Meet deadlines

Managing your time is very important because other people will be relying on you for information. In many instances, people will not be able to complete their work until you provide the information they have requested.

To plan your tasks effectively, you must know when the information is needed. It may be needed immediately and you will have to adjust your work schedule to fit in this priority. It may be part of your everyday work tasks to process information, such as recording messages from the answering machine or processing invoices.

Before you process any information, you should consider your options and work out the best way to get the job done on time. If you have a lot of tasks, you must determine the priority of each task and record any workplace time lines in your work plan.

For example, you may need to:

- prepare meeting minutes within two days of a meeting
- send information to clients within 24 hours of their request
- send invoices within seven days
- catalogue and distribute journals to staff as soon as you receive them.

Practice task 5

Read the case study, then complete the task that follows.

Case study

Gus works in the front office of a car parts shop and warehouse. He is responsible for processing information in the following ways:

• He listens to the answering machine, types the messages into an email and forwards the email to the appropriate person by 9.00 am every morning.

• He collects the mail from the post office box between 9.30 am and 10.00 am, records each item in the electronic mail register database, sorts it and delivers it to the correct person's in-tray by 11.00 am.

• He enters orders received by email, by fax and online into the computer. The orders have to be entered by 4.00 pm to be ready for pick-up by a regular courier service at 5.00 pm.

Create a daily work plan for Gus by completing the table. Make sure you record:

• the information Gus needs to collect

• the processing required for the information

• the time lines for doing this

• contingencies in case a problem occurs.

Assume that Gus is aware of the guidelines for processing information in his workplace.

Time	Information to be collected	Processing required	Due	Contingency

2C Update, modify and file information

Information used by organisations needs to be regularly monitored to ensure it is current, is still necessary and can be easily accessed. It may be your responsibility to do this, so make sure you are familiar with your organisation's procedures for updating, modifying and storing information. Here is more information about these processes.

Update information

Updating means making sure the information is the latest, most current version.

There may be serious consequences if the information an organisation uses is not current. For example, a new customer may be annoyed if they are not sent a catalogue and newsletter because their name has not been added to the customer database. Or, the sales team may be working towards an incorrect target if updated sales figures are not regularly forwarded to them.

If you receive more current information after you have already sent information to someone, make sure you also send the updated information as soon as possible.

Modify information

Modifying means changing or altering information. It may involve reformatting, changing the content, adding information, deleting information or moving information. You may need to modify information when existing information is no longer useful or needs to be used for a new purpose. Modifying may include:

- using an existing flyer as a template and changing the text to advertise a new product
- adding headings, page breaks and pictures to a draft report
- removing all of last year's meeting minutes from the meeting minutes file
- changing a customer's address in the customer database.

File and store information

When you process information, you may be required to catalogue items in the filing system after you have collected, updated or modified them. You'll need to know:

- what information to keep
- the legal requirements of keeping the information
- your organisation's filing procedures
- the security issues surrounding the information.

Decide what information to keep

Filing and storing information is an important task and needs to be done in an organised, systematic way. Before you file anything, you must know what material, documents or files should be stored and what should be removed or deleted. Some information collected needs to be filed and some information can be discarded after serving its initial purpose. You won't need to file everything that comes into the office (think about all the junk mail – both paper and electronic – that organisations receive). You also need to consider if information should be filed electronically or in a paper-based system, or both. Your supervisor will inform you about what information needs to be filed. If you are unsure, remember to ask.

Filing and storing information is a daily task in most organisations.

Items that are regularly filed and stored include:

- correspondence
- financial records
- minutes of meetings
- administration records
- customer details
- sales information
- magazines, books, journals and DVDs
- reports
- promotional material.

Comply with legal requirements

Often the reason for keeping information is determined by requirements outside of the organisation; for example, legal requirements. Make sure you are familiar with the type of information you are required to keep by law. Some information must be kept for a number of years. It includes information relating to tax and other financial data that may need to be referred to in the future. Most organisations also keep records of industrial accidents, health and safety incidents, personnel disputes and environmental issues. These may need to be referred to in court cases or investigations some time after an incident has occurred.

Policies and procedures

Policies and procedures for dealing with workplace information may differ from workplace to workplace. For example, legal offices regularly receive updated legislative information that has to be filed with appropriate records as soon as it is received. A busy wholesale company needs to deal with large volumes of order forms, invoices and receipts on a daily basis.

Other workplaces rely on the filing system to work efficiently as part of their daily activities. For example, medical facilities need to be able to find patient records, update them quickly and file them immediately so the record is always readily accessible. Similarly, a library needs to update its records quickly to keep track of items that are borrowed, late, lost, on hold, on order, damaged and so on. This means that the filing systems in all these organisations need to be well-organised and well-maintained.

You should refer to the organisation's workplace policies and procedures or workplace user manual to explain the specific procedures for filing and storing information. If you are not certain of your organisation's filing procedures, make sure you ask your supervisor or manager to show you clearly. Remember to take notes as you go to refer to later.

Example: policies and procedures

Jeddah has just started work as an administrative assistant. She needs to know her responsibilities regarding information management. She talks to her supervisor, who gives her the following guidelines.

- After trade magazines and journals have been circulated to staff and returned to a central box, catalogue them and place them in the library.
- Destroy or recycle all junk mail.
- Store information about current seminars and conferences in a folder in the lunchroom.
- Print out email messages relating to current projects and file in the central paper filing system.
- Forward CVs from job applicants to the Human Resources department to be filed.
- Forward invoices for goods purchased to the Accounts department where they are filed according to the date they are due to be paid.
- File correspondence in the centralised paper filing system according to its subject or project.

v1239

Before filing paper information

You may have collected a number of different pieces of information that need to be filed or stored. For example, you may have collected data that includes a report on new markets, information from prospective customers, brochures, DVDs, information on competitors and their products and survey forms completed by customers. Make sure you know how and where they are to be appropriately stored or filed.

When a document is ready for filing, the staff member responsible may let you know that it can be filed by marking it with a release indication. The release may be a stamp, a tick or someone's initials. Make sure you are familiar with the system used by your organisation and the procedures for creating, updating and modifying the information in files. Some organisations have a file register, where a listing of all files and their whereabouts is kept. Similarly, a listing of the contents of each file is sometimes kept with the file or in the register.

Before filing paper information you should check:

- documents are not damaged
- documents to be filed together are clipped or stapled together, as necessary
- any relevant notes or instructions attached to the documents are secure, or are written on the documents
- documents are filed in their original condition (in case copies of the documents need to be made later).

Before filing electronic information

Information received electronically, such as letters, reports, emails, meeting minutes and information from the internet, can be saved directly to the computer. Make sure you know which electronic file the information is to be saved in. The system is then backed up at regular intervals, to safeguard the information contained in the files against viruses and computer crashes.

Understand the procedure in your organisation before you make any changes to the files or create new files. Although many organisational information systems are now electronic, many workplaces still keep a paper copy of some information as a backup. This ensures that if the information becomes corrupted in the electronic system and is difficult to retrieve from the electronic backup, then the business is still able to use the paper files.

Electronic files may be listed in a register. This is often electronic itself, such as a database, or can be a paper-based listing of all the files and their contents. A paper-based register is often used in situations where the files are closed or archived. A closed file means that information cannot be removed or added to the file, so a paper listing can be made of all the contents. This can make it easier to search through large amounts of information.

Consider the following guidelines for storing electronic information.

Filing a paper copy of electronic information
• Information to be filed together should be collected in a folder.
• Any relevant notes or instructions must be attached to the items, written on the documents or included in the folder.
• Place the correct versions of the documents into the filing system (there may be many versions or drafts on the computer network).
• Include a reference to the location of the electronic file, such as a code number or folder name.

Use your common sense

Not storing and classifying information according to procedures can result in information being lost, time being wasted in looking for files or files not being able to be found. Use your common sense to work out the best way to deal with these situations. For example, if an item is filed in the wrong place (misfiled), search the surrounding area and check files with similar names, codes or numbers. Your workplace user manual or guidelines may give you some clues. If you are unsure where to file an item, check with your supervisor rather than risk filing something in the wrong place.

Problems encountered during filing may include:

- documents that you can't identify or classify
- documents that don't seem to have any classification in the current filing system
- documents and objects that do not physically fit into the system – too large or heavy
- files missing from the filing system.

Understand security issues

Follow your organisation's procedures for filing confidential information. For example, you may need to place it in a manila folder and give it to your supervisor to file. You may need to return the document to a library. Some organisations have a security policy for handling files. This may mean that files must be handled in a special way to make certain the information is not lost or available for people outside the organisation to see. The range of security measures used by an organisation varies according to need. Here are some examples of different types of document security measures.

1 Files should not be taken from the premises.

2 Files may only be viewed in a special 'viewing room'.

3 Files must not be copied.

4 A password is needed to access certain files.

5 Access to files may be restricted by law, such as some government records.

6 Handling procedures must be followed for certain files, such as customer records.

Practice task 6

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

A local health club has around 400 customers on its database. It is essential that these records and the records relating to the day-to-day running of the business are kept up to date. This includes:

- updating customer information
- recording customer visits
- recording appointments for consultations, training or classes
- recording the results of testing, program results or consultations
- altering appointment records, class times and program information available to all customers.

This means that as soon as information is collected, it is used to update existing documents, databases or other information records. Updating information and modifying records are vital to the efficient running of the business.

1. List five situations that may occur if the information systems at the health club are not kept up to date.

2. Explain the difference between updating information and modifying information.

2D Collate and dispatch information

After you have collected and processed the information required for the task, you need to format it appropriately and deliver it to the person who needs it. The way you do this depends on:

- the type of information
- who it is for
- when the information is needed.

Organisations generally have policies and procedures for collating and distributing information, so make sure you know what is required. For example, does the information prepared need to be bound as a formal report? Can the information be emailed to the person? Does the information need to be sent urgently?

Collate information

Collating information means to arrange the contents in an appropriate order. You may have multiple pages that need to be sorted and stapled or placed in a folder. You may have a number of documents that have to be bound together using a binding machine.

Before you collate information, you need to ensure that it is presented in an appropriate way, according to requirements. Find out these details when you first receive the request for information. Ask questions and observe the people you work with to find out what standards are expected in your workplace.

Examples of presentation details
• What order do the documents go in?
• How many copies are needed?
• Do you need a cover page?
• Should coloured paper be used?
• Should the material be placed in a manila folder?
• Does the document need to be stamped 'confidential' on the cover?

Dispatch information

Dispatching information means sending or delivering it. Much of the information you gather will be used inside the workplace and delivered to various departments, areas or people. However, you could also be asked to collect and process information to deliver to people outside your organisation.

Make sure you are clear about the method of delivery required when the information is requested. For example, if the information is confidential you may need to send it by registered mail. If it is urgent, you may need to use a courier service.

Methods of mail delivery include:

- internal mail
- hand-delivery
- postal service
- courier service
- placing document in an in-tray
- fax transmission
- telephone
- email.

Example: method of delivery

Karl is an administrative assistant for a building contractor. An inner-city client urgently needs a copy of their contract. The company's legal officers have just finalised it, so Karl's supervisor asks him to make a copy, label it and file it in the appropriate folder. Then he needs to organise a courier to deliver it to the client.

Karl knows there are different levels of courier service, so he asks for the urgent service, which guarantees delivery in the central business district within 20 minutes.

v1240

Follow requirements

You should keep notes on the procedures for handling different types of information in your workplace. Keep the notes together in a place that you can easily refer to when you need to remind yourself about particular requirements. Become familiar with how to handle each type of information, how to file it, who to advise and where

to record it. Be aware of any security procedures, such as keeping files locked away or otherwise restricting access to information. Remember, if there are any legal requirements for the handling of information, such as in a government department or legal organisation, you should ensure you know what is expected and how to process such information.

Practice task 7

1. What does collating information mean?

2. What does dispatching information mean?

3. What should you do if you are asked to collate information within the workplace?

Summary

1. Business equipment and technology can be used to process information efficiently and appropriately. You must try to select the most appropriate equipment for the task.

2. Be aware of and follow your organisation's policies and procedures relating to processing information.

3. Confidential information must be handled according to organisational guidelines. This might mean that files should not be taken out of the office, must not be copied, must not be made public or require a special password for access.

4. Keeping to time lines is crucial. Use planning tools to organise your workload and keep on track.

5. Make sure the information you receive and deliver is the latest, most current version.

6. You may need to modify information on a regular basis to ensure it is accurate. This may involve reformatting, changing, adding, deleting or moving information.

7. You need to know the legal requirements for retaining certain information.

8. Information must be filed according to organisational requirements. This means using the organisation's electronic or paper-based filing systems correctly.

9. Information may need to be prepared before distribution. This might mean collating and binding a document.

10. Dispatch information according to requirements. You might use mail, telephone, email, hand-delivery, fax or a courier.

11. Keep notes on the procedures for handling different types of information in your workplace. You need to know how to handle each type of information, how to file it, who to advise and where to record it.

Learning checkpoint 2
# Process workplace information

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in processing workplace information.

Part A

1. Explain why it is essential that you understand an organisation's requirements for processing, updating, modifying, filing, collating and dispatching information. Give examples for each of these activities and what might happen if you do not follow procedures.
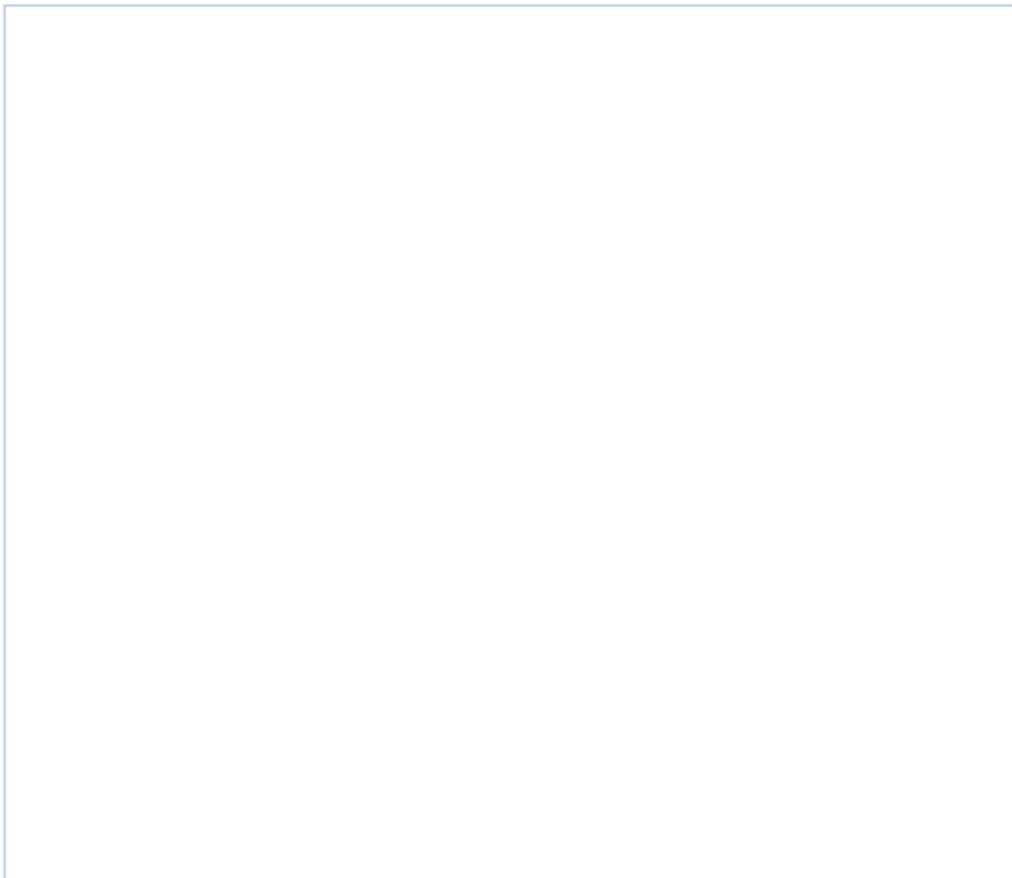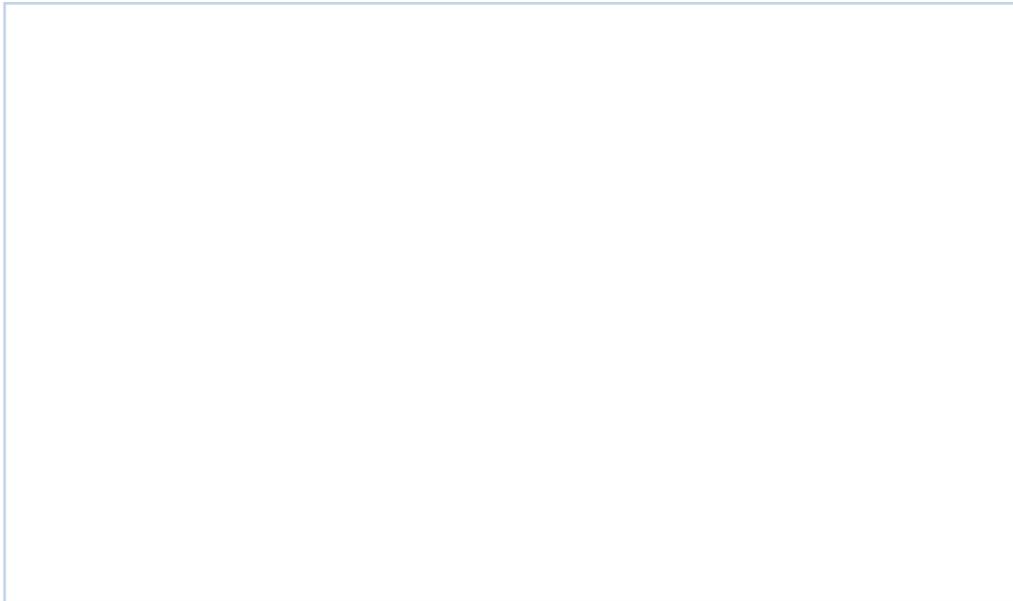
2. Describe what you would do if you were unsure of your responsibilities.
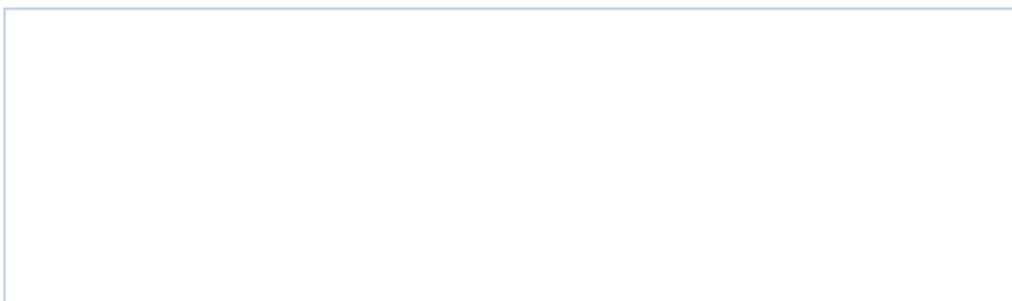
3. Explain why it is important to be aware of expected time frames when collecting and processing information. Describe what might happen if timelines are not met.
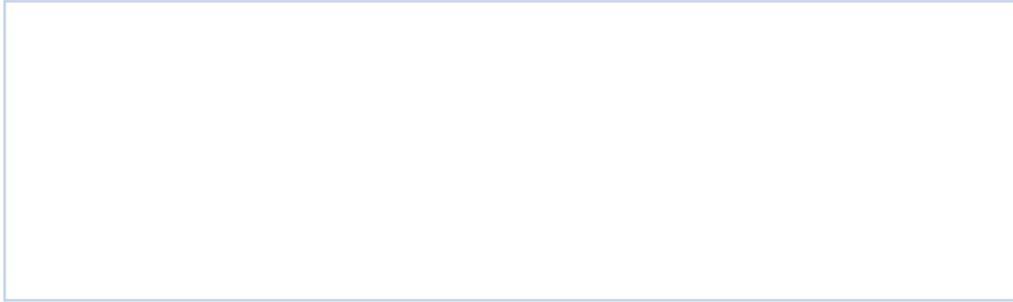
4. Explain what you would do if you knew you were going to be late getting information to someone.

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study
It is Monday. You have the following pieces of information to dispatch: • Meeting minutes from a meeting held this morning • A high-level security document that is not required urgently • Confirmation of the date of a meeting to be held in one month • Sales figures that need to go to the sales manager at the end of each week • Research information for a report your supervisor is working on, which is due at the end of the week • Job applications that have been received for a position that has just been advertised • Journals that are delivered to the organisation each Monday • Customer orders • Information about a conference that managers want to go to next month • A contract that has to be signed immediately by an interstate client

For each situation mentioned:

- decide on the most appropriate method to dispatch the information
- give a reason for your choice
- consider the urgency of the task.

Record your answers in a table like the one below.

Situation	Dispatch method	Reason

... continued

Situation	Dispatch method	Reason

... continued

Topic 3
Maintain information systems

For a business to function smoothly, it must keep its records and other information up to date. Any information that is collected and processed within an organisation must be accessible when it is required. This makes it easier for the organisation to make decisions, and ensures it is projecting a professional image. Customers will be confident that the organisation carries out its activities with confidence and efficiency.

A poorly managed information-handling system hinders an organisation. It leads to inefficiency, mistakes and poor quality work, and can mean loss of business. For example:

- an out-of-date address list means that customers may not be contactable, and the organisation may lose business and waste money sending material to wrong addresses

- a disorganised filing system means time is wasted looking for information that should be easy to find

- a disorganised filing system in which essential information is lost could have disastrous consequences for an organisation.

In this topic you will learn how to:

3A   Maintain information and filing systems

3B   Identify, remove and relocate inactive or dead files

3C   Establish and assemble new files

3D   Update reference and index systems

3A | Maintain information and filing systems

Maintaining an information system means keeping records up to date. All information within the system should be current and easy to access. Updating records is a day-to-day task for any organisation. The specific procedures for doing this may vary from organisation to organisation.

Keeping records up to date might include modifying particular records by changing information or adding information to them.

Maintaining information and filing systems could include:

- updating stock records to make sure they match the actual number of stock items
- updating sales records to make sure they match the number of sales made
- updating customer and supplier details to make sure the details are correct
- updating account details to make sure the amounts owed by customers, and to suppliers, are correct
- updating technical information to ensure it is current
- updating daily, weekly or monthly sales targets to reflect current goals
- updating regular specials lists or offers.

Update records

Some records need to be updated when policies, procedures, legislation or regulations are changed. Part of your job may be to replace old information in the organisation's files with updated information. You need to do this correctly, so your organisation can easily access up-to-date information and carry out procedures in a lawful way.

Inaccurate records cause problems and confusion. If somebody looks at a record and the information is inaccurate or missing, at best they may need to spend time sorting out what the correct information is. At worst, it may affect the organisation's reputation; for example, customers may be upset or accounts may not be paid on time.

When updating a file, always double check:

- file codes
- the index to the filing system
- dates
- cash amounts and figures
- names, titles and addresses
- telephone, fax, mobile phone and pager numbers
- email and website addresses.

Practice task 8

List four things you might do when maintaining information and filing systems.
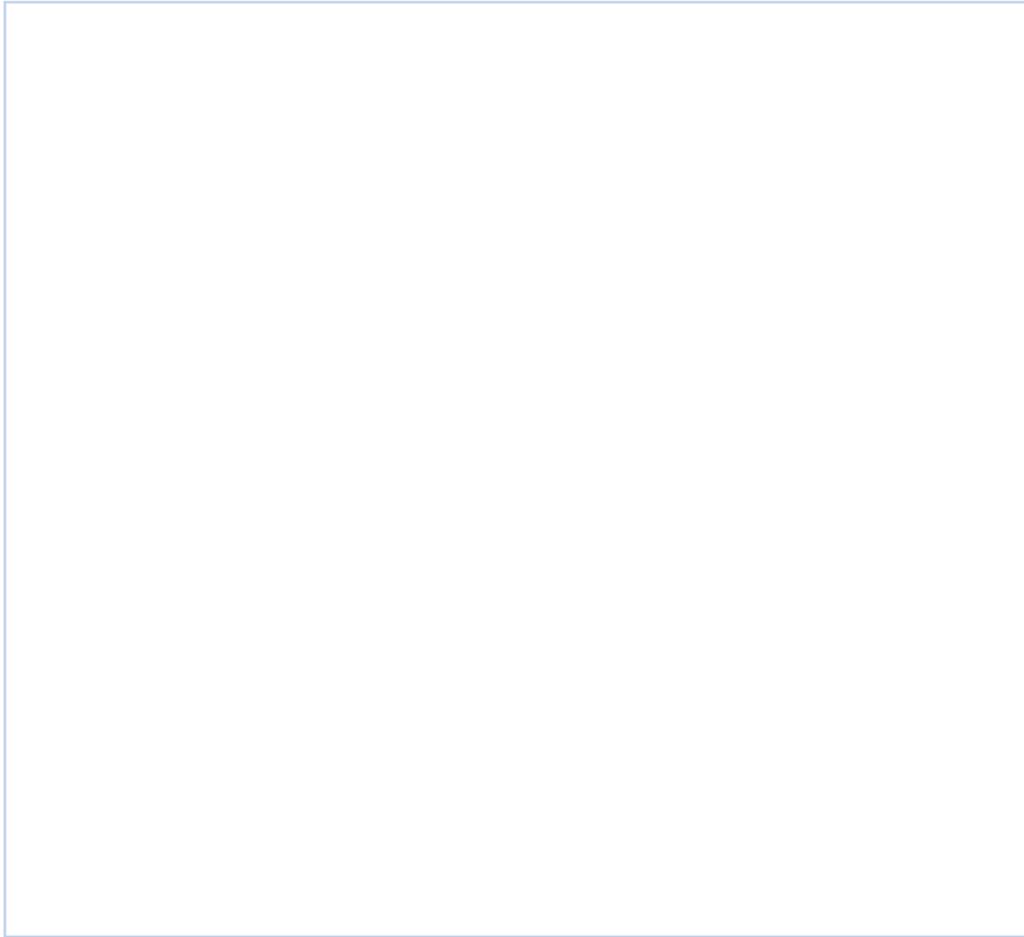
3B Identify, remove or relocate inactive or dead files

In a functioning business, filing systems never stay the same. New files are created for new customers, projects or activities; old files are removed when they are no longer needed; and other files have information added or removed from them as required. If information storage systems are to be useful, they must be carefully maintained so everyone can find the information they need, when they need it. Here are some different aspects of file management.

Remove files

If an organisation kept every file it created, its records management system would soon be overflowing. More and more space would be needed to store the files, and filing and retrieving records would be a serious and time-consuming job.

To keep the system efficient and ensure there is enough storage space in the filing system, records and other documents that are no longer needed must be removed periodically. Some records can be deleted or destroyed completely. Others must be kept for a certain period.

Relocate files

It is important to keep enough room in an electronic filing system, in the same way it is important for paper-based files. This is because the computer hard drives used to store information become full, just as the filing cabinets, shelves and libraries used to store paper-based information become full. Electronic files can be compressed into a much smaller physical space than paper files; for example, on a computer hard drive, CD, DVD or USB stick.

Inactive files

Inactive files contain information that is no longer used but cannot be completely removed because it may be needed in the future. Files such as these are stored in a secondary or separate storage system. For example, the file of a customer who has not been in contact with the organisation for some time would be an inactive file. However, the customer may contact you in the future so you shouldn't throw the file away. Using secondary or separate storage to archive inactive files ensures that information is available if needed, but the files are not occupying valuable space in the system used to store active or regularly accessed information.

Dead files

Dead files are closed files where all the business contained in the file is finished. These files must be kept for a specific period. It is a legal requirement for organisations to keep some information; for example, taxation documents and business documents are kept for a defined period – generally seven years. Some documents may be kept in the archives of the organisation for research or historical reasons.

Transfer files to secondary storage

Individual organisations have their own procedures for systematically removing old records. One example of record removal is the continuous transferring of records from the active filing system to secondary storage as a file is closed. These might be files that exist for a particular case or project, such as a legal case, a student record or a construction project. After the legal case is over, the student has graduated or the construction project is complete and the file is no longer active, it can be transferred into secondary storage.

Files may also be transferred periodically; for example, annually. This method is useful for records with fixed time periods such as end of financial year records. Records are transferred to secondary storage at the end of the period and new files are set up for the current period.

This method may also include a process in which the filing system is periodically inspected for inactive files. Inspecting the entire filing system may take some time and labour.

Remove files

Computer records that have not been accessed for a given period of time, such as three years, may be deleted or archived. The personnel records of an employee who has left the organisation may be deleted or destroyed after the period they are legally required to be kept has elapsed.

You should never remove records from the filing system unless directed to do so. When removing records, you must follow your workplace procedures. If you are not sure how to proceed, check with your supervisor or manager. Your workplace procedures may include keeping a register of files removed or destroyed, or obtaining written permission to remove or destroy information. Sometimes this involves contacting the people whose records are held by your organisation and either sending the information to them or obtaining permission to destroy it.

Manage electronic records

You must make sure that inactive records are regularly removed from the active electronic filing system. As more and more records are stored on a network, the amount of space left for storage decreases and it may become harder to find the information you need. Removing or archiving inactive records frees up space for more current information.

Computer files can be made smaller or compressed using compression software. This means the files are reduced in size and occupy less space in the archive. Compression software is also used for electronic files when the files are made available for download over the internet.

Computer-based records can be removed from the filing system using similar systems and procedures as for paper-based information. This means that removing inactive files is a regular, scheduled cleaning activity of the organisation, or it can be done as required.

A computer can be programmed to periodically archive or delete files that:

- have not been accessed for a given period of time

- are older than a specified date or time

- relate to specific subjects, organisations or individuals.

Store inactive and dead files

Inactive and dead files are generally moved to another storage location after removal from the main filing system. This means they can be stored in a compact form and are generally not as easy to access. By archiving inactive or dead files, the active information becomes more accessible. The archived information must be well-organised so that files can be found easily and retrieved as required. Some archives, such as in large government organisations, are huge and require storage in specially constructed and maintained warehouses. Most archives are smaller and more manageable, and are designed to suit the organisation's requirements.

Your organisation may store inactive and dead files in different ways, as outlined below.

Archive boxes

Archive boxes can be cardboard, wood or steel containers, sometimes specifically designed to store all types of paper-based information, files and documents. The boxes should be labelled to identify the contents. Labelling could be as simple as: 'Customer Records July 2007 to June 2008' or it may list every document and file in the box. This list may also require a reference number that identifies the box and how to find it.

continued ...

... continued

Filing cabinets

Separate filing cabinets may be kept in the centralised filing area or in another location, even off-site. Files stored here are stamped or marked to indicate they are inactive. The central index or system for recording the location of all files is usually changed to indicate the inactive status of the information. If required, the information can be retrieved from the inactive or archived filing cabinets.

Computer-based records

Computer-based records are the most popular method for storing inactive information as more and more information is in electronic form and electronic storage takes up a lot less physical space. Documents that were not created on a computer and are therefore not already in digital format can be scanned into a computer. The main problem with storing digital information is that the format for storage may become obsolete. For example, any information stored on old 3½ inch floppy disks, or the even older 5¼-inch version, is very difficult to retrieve. Computer manufacturers and programmers no longer support these formats. For this reason, the contents of digital archives may need to be re-archived in a newer format to avoid losing historical information.

Electronic storage devices

Electronic storage devices, such as DVDs, removable hard drives and other electronic devices, can store information in the same way as paper-based systems. It is important that the information contained on electronic storage devices is accurately indexed. Indexing describes or identifies the contents of a record or document and ensures easy access to the information.

... continued

Cloud storage

Some records or files are electronically stored on the cloud, which is essentially a number of remote servers that are accessed through an internet connection. This information is password protected to ensure only authorised people have access to it. Other information is publicly available via the internet such as old war service records, which can be viewed in digital form from the National Archives of Australia. Accessibility issues must be considered when storing and making information available via the internet. For example, files should be compressed to ensure they can be easily downloaded.

Email archives

To archive inactive or dead email information, you can save the emails to a computer-based or electronic storage device by moving them from your general inbox to the archive area of your mail program. You can then save the information to a data file that you have created on your server or on the electronic storage device.

When you move emails from your inbox in this way, your email program may automatically mark them as deleted.

Film, sound tapes and similar storage media

Film, video, photographs and audio recordings may need to be stored as inactive files once a project has been completed. Archiving this information may require special skills, although many organisations store photos or film in the same archives as other information. There are often very particular procedures and methods used to both catalogue and preserve these objects. Some organisations specialise in storing this type of media. Make sure you understand any special procedures you have to follow.

Monitor inactive and dead files

Monitoring inactive and dead files means keeping track of where the files go when you move them. When you remove records from the filing system, you need to update the file index to show the new location of the file.

An up-to-date file index helps people access the inactive or dead files in their new location. To facilitate easy access to archived information and files, it is important to catalogue and index them in the same way as the active files and information.

Your organisation should have procedures for indexing archives. You must follow these procedures whenever you are working with archived material. Don't forget the organisation is keeping the records for a reason. Don't ignore procedures because you think the records will never be used again. This could create big problems for the organisation in the future.

v1245

Practice task 9

1. Why is it important to remove or relocate files?

2. What is an inactive file?

3. What is a dead file?

3C | Establish and assemble new files

New files are created when records or documents do not fit logically into the existing filing system or when a new type of recorded information needs to be stored. If it is your job to establish a new file, always follow your organisation's policies and procedures. If there are no guidelines, ask your supervisor or manager for advice.

Procedures for creating new files should cover the following points.

Workplace procedures for creating new files

- How to create the file
- The coding or other identifying system used
- The method for keeping the information together (for example, a manila folder, an electronic folder)
- The system used to catalogue and index the files
- The system for accessing, releasing and returning files to their place

Reasons for creating a new file

There are many reasons for creating a new file.

You may need to create a new file because you are:

- setting up a file for a new customer
- setting up files at the start of a new project
- setting up files at the beginning of a new period (for example, the new financial year)
- re-organising material in an existing filing system
- responding to a request from somebody in your workplace
- responding to a demand (for example, when the organisation has gathered a number of documents relating to the same matter).

Procedures for creating a new file

When creating new files, you need to make sure the system remains logical and easy to use. You also need to make sure all the appropriate information is collected in the new file. Procedures for creating a new file may include:

- creating or assigning a name or number to the file
- creating an index card for the new file
- documenting the new file in a file register or database.

v1242

Name a new file

When you create a new file, you need to decide on the most useful way of referring to (or classifying) the contents of the file. Think about how you would refer to the file if you were looking for the documents.

Many organisations have standardised procedures for naming new files. This means there are particular steps to follow whenever you are creating or naming new paper-based or electronic files. Standardised procedures are particularly important in a decentralised records system. Such procedures ensure that the system remains logical and consistent. A records management department with a centralised filing system also uses set procedures.

For filing systems that are arranged numerically, new files may simply be allocated consecutive numbers. This means that each time a new file is added to the filing system, it is given the next available number.

Sometimes a system that includes a date is used. This can be useful for organisations where the date is important to the information, such as records of births, deaths and marriages. There are many variations of systems that are designed to meet the particular needs of different organisations.

Factors that determine how a new file is named
• The classification system adopted by your organisation
• Organisational procedures for naming new files
• What is easiest for the people using the filing system

Practice task 10

1. List three procedures for creating a new file.

2. What do you need to consider when naming a new file?

3D Update reference and index systems

If you create a new file or update an old one, you may need to classify or index it. An index is a method of classifying and recording the type of information that is in each file, document or archive. This can include the file name, the names of people in the files, dates, subject (such as inactive customers), and any other information you think is required. Always keep the requirements of your organisation in mind.

A file index can be as simple or as complex as you like. It might be left with the file and a paper-based copy placed in a central index or register. The information in the index is often in alphabetical order to make it easier to search. Electronic systems also have indexes.

Each document must be filed logically so it can be quickly and easily accessed.
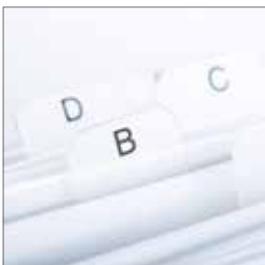
The indexing unit

The information used for indexing (that is, the company name or the subject) is sometimes called the indexing unit or the indexing caption. Here is some information that the indexing unit may include.

Keywords (for example, names, subjects, geographic locations)

Numbers (for example, dates, customer numbers, file numbers)

Information used to put documents in alphabetical order

Index by subject

Generally, when you are indexing a document, the first step is to determine its subject area. This will direct you to the most appropriate area of the filing system. Then you need to further categorise the document; for example, by putting it into alphabetical or numerical order.

When you are indexing a document, try to work out the most logical place for it. Think of where you would look for the file if you were trying to retrieve it from the filing system.

Organisations usually have policies and procedures for creating files. For example, managers may have to authorise the creation of a new file. Familiarise yourself with your departmental or organisational filing system so you can move between files quickly and easily. As you become familiar with the system in your organisation, it will become easier to index, file and locate documents.

Index by alphabetical order

Sometimes files are indexed in alphabetical order. When using alphabetical indexing, the following rules should be observed.

Alphabetical indexing rules

1 Names are indexed by the person's surname, first given name and second given name (for example, Giovanni Mario Domani would be indexed as Domani, Giovanni Mario.

2 An initial comes before a first name and a first name comes before a full name (for example, Ellerson, M comes before Ellerson, Mary, which comes before Ellerson, Mary Louise).

3 Titles are ignored (for example, Sir Charles MacKerras is treated as MacKerras, Charles).

4 Joining words or conjunctions, such as 'the', 'and', 'of', are ignored (for example, The Flower Shop is treated as Flower Shop; The House of Beauty is treated as House Beauty).

5 Hyphenated or prefixed names are indexed as one word (for example, Grieves-Smith is treated as Grievessmith; Van der Vaas is treated as Vandervaas; D'Amore is treated as Damore).

6 Names beginning with Mac and Mc are grouped together but where two names are the same except for Mac or Mc, Mac will come first (for example, MacPhee comes before McPhee, but McPhee comes before MacRobertson).

7 Abbreviations are treated as though they are the full word (for example, St Mary's is the same as Saint Mary's and Co is the same as Company).

8 Company names that include full names are indexed as for personal names (for example, James Hill Publishing is treated as Hill, James Publishing).

9 Company names that do not include full names are filed as they appear, except for joining words (for example, Giramondo Cycles, Wholesale Office Supplies Ltd).

10 Numbers are treated as though they are spelt out (for example, Bistro 21 is treated as Bistro Twenty-one).

Example: recipe index

If you are indexing chocolate cake in the recipe index, the first indexing unit is the subject, 'Cake'; the second indexing unit is 'C' for chocolate; and the third indexing unit is the 'H' in chocolate. The 'H' tells you that chocolate cake goes after carrot cake since 'H' comes after 'A' in the alphabet.

Coding

Coding is a follow-up step to indexing. It involves using a keyword or number that makes it clear where the document should be filed. Coding is also used as a way to quickly locate files. For example, some doctors' surgeries and legal offices use colour-coded files.

Codes make it easy to return a document to the same file each time it is taken out. Ask your supervisor to explain how your organisation codes documents.

Other examples of coding documents include:

- writing the file number onto the document
- underlining or highlighting a name with a coloured pen
- underlining or highlighting a date.

Cross-reference paper-based documents

Sometimes documents are filed in more than one location. If so, it is useful to have a reference to the document in both places. Then if somebody only looks in one place and the document is located in the other place, they will be directed to the correct location.

You might need to cross-reference when the document can be filed under different classifications. You might also need to cross-reference when:

- an organisation is known by more than one name (for example, Australian Government Publishing Service might also be filed under AGPS)

- an organisation or individual has changed their name, and your organisation still uses the service (for example, old records from Telecom might need to be re-filed under Telstra).

Cross-referencing involves filling out one or more cross-reference cards or sheets to be filed in the alternative location. Alternatively, you could photocopy the document and file it in both locations.

When you file copies of the same document in different locations, it is important that the documents are clearly marked 'copy' and 'original'.

Example: cross reference card

Riverside Resort (formerly known as Mighty Murray Motor Inn)

See:

Northern Victoria

See also:

Four-star accommodation

Description:

Brochure and price list as at 1 July 2014

Use systems to find information

Reference and index systems are the keys to finding information in the workplace. Everyone relies on the file index (or other index system) to list all the files in the system. When they find a file listed in the index, they should be confident that they can also find the corresponding file in the filing system. An inaccurate, out-of-date index is of no use to anyone. When files are removed, deleted, added and modified in the filing system, their listing in the index must also be changed.

From time to time you may need to:

- update the file index (for example, when files have changed names or codes to reflect the status of the files currently held in the filing system)

- add new files to the file index

- delete removed files.

There may be specific guidelines for updating the reference and index systems. You might need to update them every week, once a month or every time a file is changed, added or removed. You need to know the procedures you are expected to follow.

Practice task 11

Read the case study, then answer the question that follows.

Case study

Toni is an administrative assistant for a large organisation. She is filing a copy of a fax sent to Rosy's Florist, advising them about the delivery of flowers for a corporate function. She needs to decide the most appropriate place within the indexing system for the document to be stored. She might index the document by company name and file it in the Suppliers file under 'R' for Rosy's Florist. However, it might be more appropriate to index the document by subject (for example, Corporate function) and file it chronologically in the folder used for that particular event.

Toni needs to make a decision about how to classify and index her document. Give her some advice.

Summary

1. A well-maintained information system is vital for a business to function smoothly. A poorly managed information-handling system can lead to inefficiency, mistakes, poor quality work and even loss of business.

2. Keeping records up to date means changing or adding information when required. Records may need to be updated when customer details, policies, procedures, legislation or regulations change. New files may need to be created for new customers, projects or activities. Old files may need to be removed when they are no longer needed.

3. Inactive files contain information that is no longer used but that cannot be removed because it may be needed in the future.

4. A dead file is one that is closed (that is, all business contained in the file is finished), but that must be kept for a specific period. It is a legal requirement for organisations to keep some types of information for a defined period, such as taxation documents and business documents. Some documents are also kept in the archives of the organisation for research or historical reasons.

5. Inactive and dead files are generally moved to another storage location after removal from the main filing system (for example, to archive boxes, separate filing cabinets, CDs or compressed computer-based records).

6. Inactive and dead files should be constantly monitored and maintained.

7. New files should be established according to organisational requirements and procedures.

8. Reference and index systems must be updated on a regular basis so files remain easy to identify and access.

Learning checkpoint 3
Maintain information systems

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in maintaining information systems.

Part A

1. You have to explain the information system at work to a new colleague. Before you can do this, you need to give them some background information. Provide a brief response to each of the following questions.

    • What will happen if the records aren't managed properly?

    • Why is it so important to keep accurate and up-to-date records?

    • Why do we have to keep files that we are no longer using?

    • Why do I need permission to create a new file?

    • Why do I need permission to relocate or delete records from the filing system?

    • How do we keep adequate storage space in the electronic filing system?
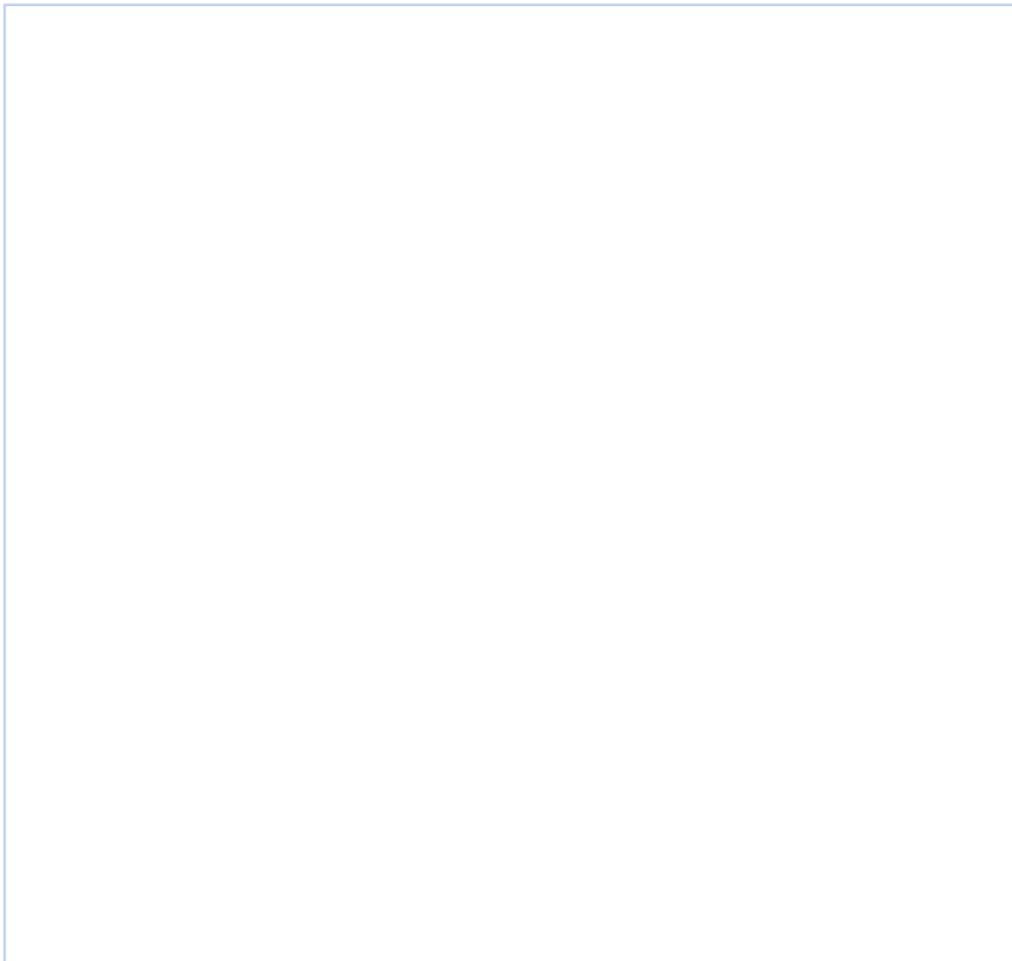
... continued
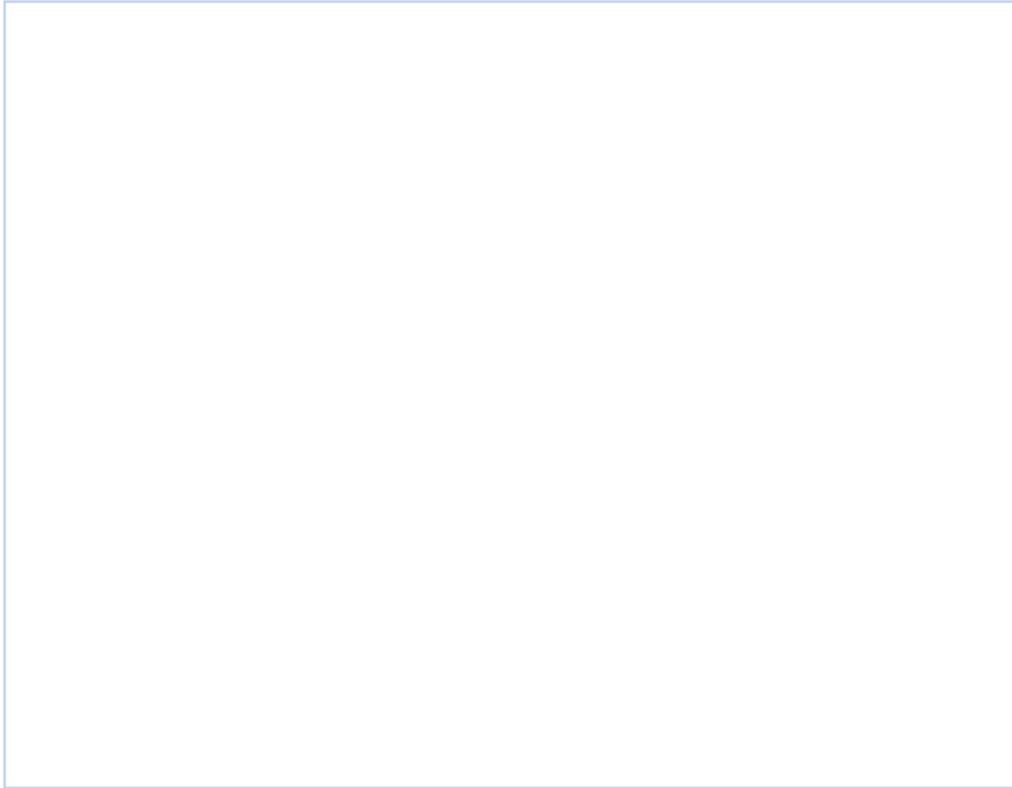
2. Here is a list of paper-based materials:

   • Letter requesting information about products

   • Customer service survey sent to customers

   • Employee's application for leave form

   • Letter to unsuccessful job applicants

   • First aid record sheet

   • Letter from customer complaining about delivery of product

   • Customer invoices

   • Change of address form

   • Report into reasons for falling market

   • Sales trends for the previous five years

   • Current sales figures

   These are the existing files in the filing cabinet:

   • Correspondence

   • Administration

   • Human resources

   • Finance

   • Research

   • Sales

   • Complaints.

It is your task to sort the paper-based material into the correct files. Record your answer in a table like the one below.

Materials	File

3. Read the list of records in the table below. Decide where each one should be stored; for example, active, inactive or dead storage.

Record	Type of record storage
Last year's sales figures	
Material relating to 1990	
Correspondence from last month	
Invoices from this month	
Current research project	
List of consultants the organisation may use	
Tax records from last year	
Employee's accident report form from one year ago	
The organisation's current business plan	
Attendance records of a past employee	
Training records of current trainees in the organisation	
Travel records for the current year	
Unsuccessful tender from three years ago	

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study
Andrew works for a major sporting club and is responsible for maintaining the club records. The club has thousands of members who pay yearly fees. The club survives on the money from the fees and by fundraising through a variety of events where the public can meet players. Auctions of club memorabilia from ex-players are often held and sporting clinics for children are organised each week throughout the season. Sponsorship money from companies and individuals is also a major source of income.

1. Name the file categories that Andrew is responsible for.

2. What types of records do you think Andrew needs to keep up to date, and why?

Part B

3. What are some of the records that Andrew might need to remove from the files regularly?

4. Which records might he archive as inactive or dead?

5. What could happen if some of the records were out of date?

6. When might Andrew establish new files?

7. What would Andrew have to do if one of the sponsors changed their name?