



Email Management : Keeping & Deleting

Who is responsible for managing email messages?

Organizing and managing email is the responsibility of the individual University employee, and can be quite a challenge considering the volume of email sent and received on the campus every day.

At UNC, email messages should be managed according to the NC Public Records Law and appropriate records retention schedules if they exist for your office. For more information about records retention schedules, please contact the University Archives and Records Service at 962-6402.

Why do I need to keep certain emails?

You should keep emails in order to provide documentation of day-to-day office operations and to preserve the history of your department. Keeping certain emails can allow your office to function more smoothly from a business perspective when decisions and discussions are documented. Certain emails should be deleted according to records retention schedules to reduce the risk for the University in case of litigation. The arbitrary destruction of records, however, can increase risk for the University if records cannot be accessed during official actions.

At UNC, many campus units utilize email to transmit reports, meeting minutes, policies, official memorandum and other information without realizing that their email content is a public record, according to the North Carolina Public Records Law (GS 132). Unauthorized destruction of public records is a Class 3 misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment and/or fine. University employees should be aware of their responsibility to keep electronic messages accessible to the public throughout their established retention period.

Why do I need to delete certain emails?

Emails with potentially sensitive or confidential materials should only be maintained in one place to ensure their privacy and security. For example, the chair of a committee may be the primary keeper of the committee documents and each committee member does not need to keep all documents.

Certain emails can also increase the legal risk for the university if they are kept longer than required. For example, email communication concerning the hiring, performance, and/or termination of employees increases liability risk for the University. The appropriate deletion of emails also helps conserve university resources by using up less server space. At UNC, see <http://onyen.unc.edu> for more information about space limitations and quotas. At Duke, see your department IT staff for more information about quotas.

Deletion of emails that are no longer needed allows for easier retrieval of relevant messages from your total stored messages.

What email should I keep?

Does the email message or attachment have continuing or permanent value? (i.e., such as those messages that document administrative decision-making or committee, faculty, and campus activities)? If yes, keep and maintain according to your records retention schedule, if one exists for your office. If no, delete and purge once its value ends (purpose has been concluded).

Messages with continuing value, such as those that document administrative decision-making, and committee, faculty, and campus activities, should be retained in paper or electronic copy until no longer administratively useful, and then deleted or transferred to the University Archives according to your office's records retention schedule if one exists. Electronic copies can be deleted if paper copies are maintained. Examples of messages that may have continuing value are those which

- Approve or authorize actions or expenditures;
- Are formal communications between staff, such as correspondence or memoranda relating to official business;
- Signify a policy change or development;
- Create a precedent, such as messages issuing instructions or advice; guidelines; recommendations; or policies;
- Relate to the substantive business of the work unit or University;
- Involve negotiations on behalf of the University;
- Have value for other people or the work unit as a whole.

Faculty correspondence, research data, and external scholarly communications, which are not of an administrative nature, messages whose loss would pose a significant fiscal, legal, or administrative risk to the university if they could not be accessed or read should be kept.

A variety of questions can help you in making a decision regarding what to keep, such as:

Who else received this message? If there are multiple recipients, are you the primary keeper of this document? The primary keeper is responsible for maintaining the record copy of a document for as long as the retention schedule states, or the length of its continuing value. Other recipients of this document should delete when it is no longer useful to them or the task is completed.

Example: You are the chair of a committee and receive meeting minutes from a committee member; as the chair retention of the document would be your responsibility until transferred to the Archives or the items are deleted. Committee members should not keep minutes or documents beyond the term of the committee.

Is the email or attachment a work in progress (such as a draft)? If yes, do you need all versions? Retention of drafts can depend on whether you are the creator or recipient and on the type of document. As a general rule keep drafts only if they are needed to document the process, such as evidence when negotiating an agreement. In most cases, the final version is sufficient for long-term retention.

What email should I delete?

Personal messages. These should be minimal and retained only as long as necessary. Check your University policy for more information regarding the personal use of email. At Duke, see <http://www.oit.duke.edu/oit/policy/ITACPolicy.html>. At UNC, see <http://help.unc.edu/?id=1677>. Messages with short-term value (only needed for a limited time or purpose) should be deleted and purged once their purpose has concluded. Such messages may include:

- Communications regarding the scheduling of meetings
- Day to day office communications
- Drafts
- Class emails that may be important for the semester, but unneeded when the semester ends
- Messages distributed to a number of staff for information only, such as:
- News bulletins
- Listserv messages
- "Informational" emails

If you manage your routine email correspondence and inter-office memoranda by printing and filing it, you can purge and delete electronic copies.

Should I keep attachments to email? How would you recommend doing this?

If you determine that the attachment and the email have permanent or continuing value, you have several choices for how to save that attachment and email.

The first option is to save the email and the attachment together in its original format within the context of your email software on the email server. This is a good method to preserve the original copy of the attachment that you have received and to maintain a connection between who sent the attachment and the file itself. In most cases where the attachment has continuing value, the email should be kept as it supplies the date, sender, and recipients as well as any cover

message. If the email and attachment have legal or evidential value, storing them together, either as part of your email environment or in an electronic records keeping system that retains email header (transmission) data, is the most authentic storage.

The second option is to save the attachment in another location (not on the email server), such as your hard drive or other network space. This option allows you to manipulate and edit an attachment, but destroys any connection to the original email and does not preserve a record of where the document originated.

The third option is to print the email and attachment and save them in a paper format. This is acceptable as long as transmission data is retained on the print version (date, sender, recipients, subject and message body).

If your office frequently transmits attachments via email, consider placing the documents on a shared drive or making them available across a local area network. This will ease pressure on the users who must manage the attachments, and on the email system's storage capacity.

How long should I keep email?

University employees should be aware of their responsibility to keep electronic messages throughout their established retention period, in accordance with their approved records retention schedule if one exists for their office. Email messages have different values, based on the content of the message, just like other types of records. With the popularity of high-capacity storage systems, users may feel inclined to store all their email indefinitely. It is incumbent on University employees, however, to appraise the value of electronic messages and retain messages with ongoing value throughout their established retention periods.

When should I transfer email to the archives?

At UNC, you may transfer emails that are in a printed format to the University Archives when you send the other materials in that series according to your records retention schedule. If you are keeping your emails in an electronic format, and not in a printed format, then you should keep those emails in a structure that will allow the potential transfer to the Archives in the future when appropriate University policies are established for handling electronic records.

Where should I store email?

You have several options for places to store your email. These include the university email server, your local computer, and removable media (such as disks or cds).

Saving messages on the server has several advantages. Emails on the server can be accessed from multiple locations through web mail, are more secure, and are backed up regularly by the University. The disadvantage to saving all of your messages on the server is that you may run out

of your allotted space and use up University resources.

If you save messages on your local machine, you can avoid filling up your allotted University server space. However, you should check with your department's information technology staff to determine if and when safety backup copies of your local machine are made. Emails saved on your local machine are also not available from multiple locations.

The third option is to save emails on disks or cds. This may be appropriate for inactive messages or topics that you would not need to access frequently. Emails stored on disk may be more difficult to locate than those on your local machine or server. Also, over time the media may degrade or become obsolete, making the retrieval of those messages difficult or impossible.

In what format should I keep email?

You may keep emails in either a printed or electronic format. If you keep them in a print format, you may send them to the Archives according to your office's records retention schedules. It would be good practice to print out the most important emails and keep them along with the other records in a specific records series. If you keep them in an electronic format, you must maintain those records in your office in a format in which you can potentially transfer them to the Archives when appropriate University policies have been established. If you save messages in their native file formats, they will be accessible only as long as the email application is supported. If you save messages in an open format, such as ASCII text, you increase your chances of accessing the messages into the future; however, you lose formatting that exists in the native format.

If I print an email, can I then delete the electronic version of it?

If you choose this management technique for maintaining physical and intellectual control over your email, it is not necessary to retain the original electronic mail message. It is advisable, however, to document this practice of printing and purging as a regular business practice.

If you manage your routine email correspondence and inter-office memoranda by printing and filing it, you can purge and delete electronic copies. For messages of particular importance you should consider retaining it in both electronic and print formats.

What data should a printed version of an email include and why?

Email messages that are printed must include certain components of contextual information of the original electronic version. Those components include:

- Addresses - not names of distribution lists - of specific recipients (the "To:"),
- Including addresses in "cc:" and "bcc:" fields.
- Addresses of the sender (the "From")

- The subject line
- The body of the email message
- All attachments
- The date and time the message was sent and/or received

Some organizations may require the sender to include a signature block or a disclaimer on each sent message. Those components also should be included on printed messages. Similarly, a vCard file that a sender attaches to the message in lieu of a signature block should be printed.

Depending upon your email software, this information can usually be accessed and added to a printed version of an email by including full Internet headers. It is important to include this information with the print out of an email for the evidentiary value of the message.

When should I print an email?

Until there is a University repository and associated policies for the electronic transfer of records, we recommend printing your most important emails and storing them with their appropriate records series if applicable..