



## **File Management : Keeping & Deleting**

### ***What electronic files should I keep?***

The records retention schedule for your office should assist you in determining which files are important to keep and for how long. Remember that content, not format, determines record retention. Contact your university records officer for more information on your schedule. At Duke, visit the Records Management Program's website or call 919-684-6181. At UNC, visit the University Archives and Records Service website or call 919-962-6402.

There may be electronic files that are not listed on your schedule that you may want to keep. Some electronic files, such as personal correspondence or scholarly publications, while potentially not official university records may have long term value and should be maintained appropriately as indicated in the FAQ "What do I do with electronic files that are not considered records, but have long-term value?"

### ***How long should I keep them?***

University employees should be aware of their responsibility to keep documents throughout their established retention period, in accordance with their approved records retention schedule if one exists for their office.

Files have different values based on the content of the document. With the popularity of high-capacity storage systems, users may feel inclined to store all their documents indefinitely. It is incumbent on University employees, however, to evaluate the value of their files on an on-going basis and retain files only for their established retention periods.

### ***Are there electronic files that I can/should delete?***

In general, your records retention schedule for your office can help you determine which files can be deleted and when. You should periodically remove materials scheduled for deletion. Contact your university records officer for more information on your schedule. At Duke, visit the Records Management Program's website or call 919-684-6181. At UNC, visit the University Archives and Records Service website or call 919-962-6402.

You should be particularly careful about maintaining sensitive materials, such as personnel

records and student files on your computer. See the Access & Security FAQs for more information.

### ***Where should I store my files?***

If you would like to learn more about specific storage options available to you, contact your department's IT staff. Duke employees may visit <http://www.oit.duke.edu/oit/> to learn more about computing options. UNC employee may visit <http://www.its.unc.edu> to learn more.

In general, you have several options for places to store your electronic files that you may want to discuss with your IT staff. These include the shared local area network drives, your local computer hard drive, and removable media (such as disks or cds). Your decision on where to save may depend on how often you need to access the files.

Saving files on the local area network drive has several advantages. Files on a network may be accessed from multiple locations, are generally more secure, and are usually backed up regularly by the University (see your IT department for details). The disadvantage to saving all of your messages on a network drive is that you may run out of your allotted space and use up University resources.

If you save files 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. Files saved on your local machine are also not available from multiple locations. If you use a laptop and create and store all of your documents on this laptop, it is essential that you backup these documents in a more secure location.

The third option is to save files on disks or cds. This may be appropriate for inactive files or topics that you would not need to access frequently. If you choose to store files on disc it is a good idea to have multiple copies because of the instability of removable media. Files 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 files difficult or impossible.

### ***How should electronic records of continuing or long-term value be cared for in electronic formats?***

Electronic files are particularly fragile due to hardware and software obsolescence, unstable media formats, and the ease with which files can be erased either knowingly or unknowingly. A consistent backup plan is essential to the preservation of digital materials. Long term preservation requires migration across software versions and media formats.

## ***What's the best way to preserve my department's website?***

At UNC, the North Carolina state approved guidelines for website preservation are used. Please see the Guidelines (pdf) for taking snapshots of websites and the Forms and Instructions (pdf) for more information.

At Duke, guidelines are currently under construction. For general information, please refer to the North Carolina State Guidelines. You may also wish to contact the Records Management Program at 919-684-6181.

## ***If I scan paper records into a digital format, do I have to keep the original paper copy?***

There is no simple "yes" or "no" answer to this question, however, some of the issues to consider include:

- Value of the paper records: Records identified in a retention and disposition schedule as permanently valuable or archival should not be destroyed after scanning because the media on which the images reside are not preservation media. In other words, they do not meet the criteria of permanence, stability, or durability that paper or microfilm possess. Records with short term value typically can be destroyed after scanning as long as appropriate systems are in place to establish the trustworthiness of the images. One component of those systems is the listing of the records in an approved retention and disposition schedule.
- Planning: Scanning paper records will not improve a poor record keeping system. A careful analysis of system needs, retention requirements, indexing needs, user demands, and costs/benefits should occur before investing in the hardware and software required to digitize a large volume of paper records. This needs assessment also should examine workflow and areas where image sharing can take place.
- The entire scanning "system": Often the entire "system" employed to scan records will fall under more scrutiny than the images or paper documents. The "system" includes up-to-date procedures, user training, indexing, the type of media used to store the images, quality assurance, equipment specifications, access rights information, audits of hardware and software performance, and full documentation of hardware and software modifications or upgrades.
- Laws and regulations and admissibility: In most cases an accurate reproduction of an original record is admissible as evidence in an official proceeding even if the original does not exist. The exception is when the original is held in a custodial or fiduciary capacity or when its preservation is required by law. In recent years the North Carolina evidence act was amended to include records stored on nonerasable media. Consult qualified legal counsel if you have questions about legal issues surrounding your scanning system.

## ***When should I print a copy of a file?***

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

## ***If I print a file, can I delete it?***

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

If you manage your routine electronic files by printing and filing them, you can purge and delete electronic copies.

For files of particular importance you should consider retaining them in both electronic and print formats. Some files, such as websites and databases, are intrinsically electronic objects. While you can capture a snapshot of them by printing, you can not preserve them as a complete evidential record in this fashion; therefore you must manage them electronically.

## ***Should I keep multiple versions of a file?***

Retention of multiple versions or drafts can depend on whether you are the creator or recipient and on the type of document. When you are the creator of a document, keeping drafts throughout the creation period allows you to maintain a backup of the most recent version. It also allows you to refer back to original or previous content.

In most cases, the final version is sufficient for long-term retention. Earlier drafts can often contain erroneous, sensitive or conflicting information. Once the final version is created, the primary author of that document should only keep the final version of that document, unless they are needed to document the process, such as evidence when negotiating an agreement or the creative process of writing.

If you keep multiple versions, it is a good idea to add the date of change or your initials to the file name when modifying that file. Some people find it helpful to add words like “final draft” to help identify the differences between files.

If you are working with multiple versions on a shared network server, you should agree upon a policy for naming files in consultation with your coworkers and other accessing the network.

### ***When can I transfer files to the archives?***

At UNC, you may transfer electronic files 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 files in an electronic format, and not in a printed format, then you should keep those files in a structure that will allow them to be easily accessed in a version of the software in which they were created.

The files should be kept so that they will be identifiable in the future within a filing structure that reflects your retention schedules and will allow potential transfer to the Archives when appropriate University policies are established for handling electronic records.