


Best Practices for Records Management on File Systems. A Guide for Departments at ETH Zurich

Educational Material

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Best Practices for Records Management on File Systems

A Guide for Departments at ETH Zurich

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Purpose and Scope

This document provides best practice procedures to support those working with digital documents on a file system. It outlines the most important principles of managing records in order to spread and share our know-how across ETH Zurich, and especially among staff working at department level. This document focuses on managing documents and data created for administrative processes rather than research processes.

Target readers

These best practice procedures are particularly relevant for technical and administrative staff at ETH Zurich at department level. Job titles and functions at ETH Zurich departments are heterogeneous, but as a general rule, the target readers include:

- Department Coordinators and Department Controllers
- Department administration
- Study administration (including Study Programme Coordinators)
- Doctoral administration
- IT support groups
- Administrative staff in departmental marketing and communication
- Administrative staff in departmental libraries and laboratories

Responsibility of all ETH members

All members of ETH Zurich are required to properly manage their business transactions and the documents they receive and produce over the course of their work. At ETH Zurich, the departments are responsible for the management and the storage of their own documents and data. A list of the most relevant laws and other legal regulations in the area of records management can be found in the appendix to this document.

Directive on Archiving of Documents at ETH Zurich (RSETHZ 210)
Weisung über die Archivierung von Dokumenten der ETH Zürich
<https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/210.pdf> →

People responsible for records management at department level

Each department designates one person who is responsible for records management. As a general rule, the department coordinator takes on this responsibility. This person also maintains contact with the ETH Zurich University Archives.

The departments are required to submit the documents and data they no longer use to the ETH Zurich University Archives at regular intervals. Additional information on this process is provided below.

1 Records Management

What is records management?

Records management is the systematic management of business records (documents and data). The terms document management or file management are also in use. Records management takes place both in analogue form (paper files, filing cabinets) and in digital form (electronic file systems, records management systems).

Basic principles

The two fundamental building blocks of records management are **the dossier** (*Akte, Dossier*) and **the filing plan** (*Ordnungssystem*).

Records management aims to

- find the right records in the file system quickly and reliably
- provide support to new staff members and deputy personnel
- make business processes more transparent
- identify relevant documents and mark them for permanent archiving
- promote cooperation within and across ETH departments
- comply with legal requirements

2 The Dossier

What is a dossier?

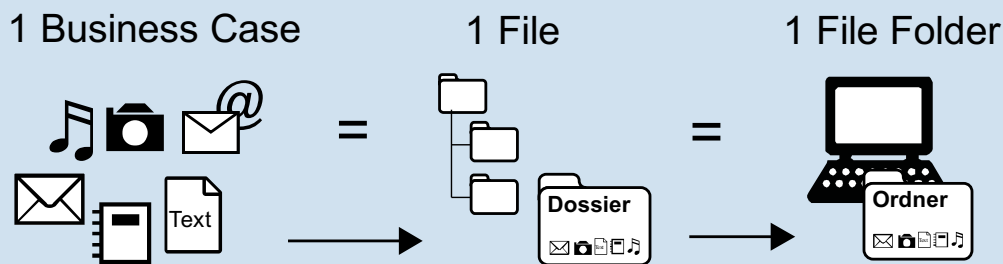
A dossier is a container holding all documents which form a logical entity. In the analogue world, a typical dossier is a

- document wallet, paper folder, envelope
- ring binder
- magazine rack
- suspension file

In the digital world, a dossier corresponds to a folder (on a file system or directory).

The dossier is the building block of records management.

All documents which belong to a business transaction are collected in a folder.



What are relevant documents?

All documents which are relevant for a work assignment or a business transaction belong to a specific folder, irrespective of the type of document.

For example, a folder might contain work-related e-mails, meeting minutes, notes, spreadsheets, official ordinances etc. These documents and data are stored in various formats, e.g. PDFs, word documents, excel documents, power-point documents.

All records that department staff members need to do their work are relevant for business transactions. A business transaction is a work assignment, a business case or a business process.

General rule: If a member of staff who is in a deputy role needs access to specific documents in order to continue with the task during the absence of his/her colleague, then those documents are considered relevant to business transactions (*geschäftsrelevant*). Members of staff who take over duties temporarily in a deputy role must be able to understand the context in which the documents were created.

Documents which are not relevant to business transactions typically include

- collections of legal texts
- newsletters
- publications, literature
- e-mails to arrange appointments
- private e-mails
- advertising brochures
- user manuals

Documents which are not relevant to business transactions are not records and do not belong in a regular folder.

E-mails relevant to business transactions

E-mails which are relevant to business transactions must be filed systematically. At ETH Zurich, e-mail accounts are normally personal accounts. As a result, new staff members or deputy personnel only have access to relevant e-mails if they have been copied from a personal account to a folder on the shared file system.

We recommend that you convert e-mails into PDF format (file extension .pdf) or into text format (file extension .txt) in order to save them appropriately. E-mail attachments relevant to the business transaction should also be stored in the folder. For best practices on file naming see chapter 4.

Sub-dossiers

To avoid overburdening, do not store more than 20 documents in a folder. If a business transaction creates a large number of documents, we recommend using sub-folders to document the individual sub-tasks.

Who is responsible for a dossier?

Every member of staff is authorized to create a new dossier. Normally, a dossier is created by the person responsible for the task at hand. This staff member creates and names a new folder and is responsible for ensuring that the content of the folder is complete and reliable.

How to “close a case”

Whenever a business transaction is completed, the person in charge is responsible for filing the relevant documents in the folder and thereby “closing the case”. A business transaction is considered closed when it can be reasonably expected that no new documents will be added (e.g. end of project, end of fiscal year).

The person responsible for the business transaction then cleans up the folder by deleting the documents which are not relevant to the task. Earlier versions of documents are deleted if they are no longer needed. In case these earlier versions are crucial for understanding the final version of a document, the earlier versions should not be deleted.

For a better overview, closed folders may be moved to designated branches of the file system but please keep in mind that existing links to these documents might be lost.

Examples

_Archive
_closed
9_archive

Upon closing a business case, all office documents should be converted into PDF. This prolongs the life span of the documents and prevents any unintended changes.

Tip: In Windows, you can click on office documents and convert them to PDF by using a right click provided that Adobe Acrobat Pro is installed.

We recommend designating a specific time to regularly clean up your folders, for example every Friday or at the end of every month. You might also organize an annual Records Day for your team. The archivists of the ETH Zurich University Archives are happy to give a short input-presentation and to support your team during the clean-up process.

Paper dossiers

A number of important documents must be kept in their original paper form. At ETH Zurich, such documents include

- contracts
- ordinances (*Verfügungen*)
- bylaws of foundations (*Stiftungsstatuten*)
- certificates of authority (*Vollmachten*)
- letters of intent
- memoranda of understanding



We suggest labelling paper documents the same way as digital documents and folders. A ring binder, for example, is labelled with the respective number and name of the digital folder. In this way, you will be able to recognize which business transaction the paper documents were created for.

Specialised applications

At ETH Zurich, specialised applications are in use for various types of business transactions. These documents and data are best stored in the respective specialised application (e.g. ETHIS, LISETHpro).

Illustration 1: Labels on ring binders indicating their position in the filing plan

3 The Filing Plan

What is a filing plan?

The filing plan is the structure which organizes the dossiers in a specific order. The filing plan orders all business transactions and tasks in a hierarchical structure. In large organisations, the business transactions are grouped into **management functions**, **core functions** and **support functions**. The filing

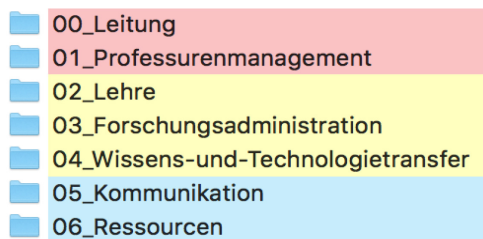


Illustration 2: Management functions in red, core functions in yellow, support functions in blue

plans for ETH departments should be structured in a similar way.

The logical structure of the filing plan enables topics and documents to be searched for systematically. You can use the logic structure of the filing plan to search systematically for a topic or a document. This systematic plan allows one to understand the context in which a document was created. Compared to a simple full-text search functionality, this is a significant benefit.

The terms filing plan or business classification scheme are used synonymously.

Stability in the filing plan

The filing plan is similar to a tree with branches. The levels of the filing plan are supposed to stay stable over time. They should be changed as rarely as possible.

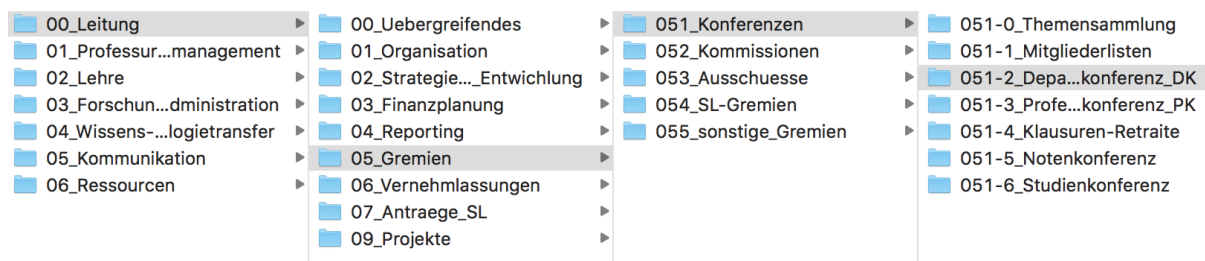


Illustration 2: Detail from the model filing plan, stable levels (tree branches)

Changes to the filing plan should only be made by the person responsible for records management at the department (typically the Department Coordinator). The management of individual sub-branches can be delegated to specialists in the department. The ETH Zurich University Archives is happy to support you in these matters.

We recommend that you do **not change** the top levels (at least levels 1 and 2) of the filing plan.

In contrast, the dossiers are similar to leaves hanging on a tree. The folders and sub-folders are attached below the filing plan. Dossiers are flexible, i.e. they are opened, closed, archived or deleted.

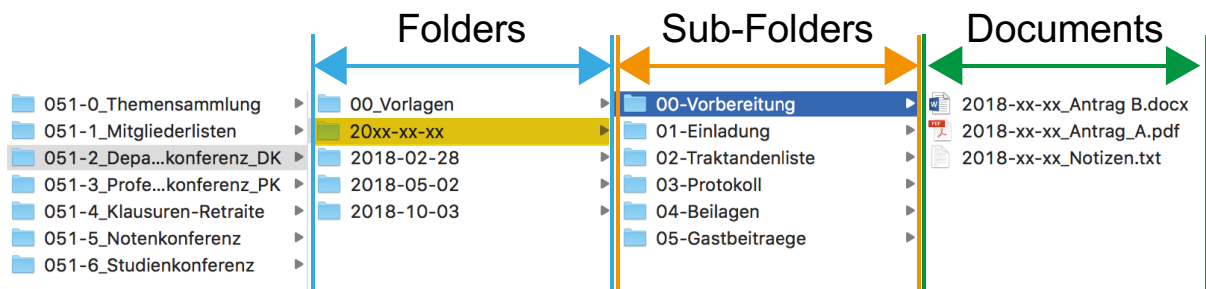


Illustration 3: Folders (leaves) incl. sub-folders and individual documents

Model filing plan for ETH departments

To support the work of ETH departments, we have created a model filing plan for ETH departments. There are a number of benefits of all ETH departments using the same filing plan down to a certain level. Those levels which are further down in the hierarchy can then be adapted to the needs of individual departments.

4 Templates and Resources

File naming conventions

In the following chapter, we provide a few tips for naming directories, folders and documents. The names of folders and individual files should be

- consistent so that it is easier for staff members to understand the logic
- meaningful so that staff members get an idea of the content without having to open the file
- as short as possible
- without blank spaces, special characters (é, &) or umlauts (ä, ö, ü)

The operating system Windows does not support file paths longer than 255 characters. Other operating systems have similar limits. In order to facilitate cooperation across platforms, we recommend using short file names. Even if your operating system tolerates blank spaces, special characters or umlauts, they should be avoided. This makes it easier to exchange and archive files.

In many cases, it is best to start the folder name with a date.

Examples

Type of business transaction	Folder name
Task occurs once a year	YYYY_Christmasparty_D-MATH
Periodic meetings of a committee	YYYY-MM-DD-meeting_PK
Projects with project numbers	XX-XXX_projecttitle

On the level of individual documents, starting the file name with a date creates a chronological order which in turn facilitates file management.

Example

2019-04-27_invitation_teachingcommission.docx

If the file refers to a meeting or if the file is a report, we recommend using the date of the event (day of the meeting, day when the report was submitted) and not the date when the document was written.

If a document has changed a number of times, the individual versions can be marked in the file name.

Examples

2019-06-12_invitation_teachingcommission_v1.docx

2019-07-01_invitation_teachingcommission_v2.docx

It is equally possible to name earlier versions as 'drafts' and the definitive version as 'final'.

Examples

2019-06-12_minutes_PK_draft.docx

2019-06-12_minutes_PK_final.docx

The type of document should be recognizable from the file name, either in full text or abbreviated. Here are a few suggestions:

- agenda
- contract
- CV (Curriculum Vitae)
- email
- enquiry
- invitation
- invoice
- letter
- minutes
- notes
- ordinance
- positionpaper
- presentation

Ideally, the file name is composed of the following components:

Date	Type	Subject	Status	Format
2019-09-26	_minutes	_departmentconference	_final	.docx
2019-08-15	_MINUT	_professorsconference	_draft	.docx
2017-07-03	_letter	_referenceletter		.pdf
2017-03-22	_NOTES	_dialoguemeeting		.txt
2019-01-15	_invitation	_teachingcommission	_v1-2	.indd

Planning documents and templates

We recommend collecting the most fundamental documents for general business transactions in a separate folder of the filing plan, for example the templates for a repetitive task.

For large, complex transactions, it is best to create a planning document, e.g. a spreadsheet or a text file named 'ReadMe'. This provides a good overview of the tasks at hand and facilitates business control.

Templates and letterheads

Using templates for business transactions which occur regularly makes work easier. For minutes or meeting notes, we recommend preparing templates as Word documents containing the letterhead of your department.

We encourage you to use letterheads in every template. Whenever you copy a template to create a new document, the letterhead prompts you to fill in the basic information.

Letterhead: Example of a minimum version

Title	Title of the document
Date	DD.MM.YYYY
Author(s)	Name
Version	0.0

Letterhead: Example of an extended version

Title	Title of the document
Date	DD.MM.YYYY
Author(s)	Name

Folder in filing plan	Subject of folder	Title of folder
Number in filing plan		

Version	Comment	Date	Person responsible	Status
0.0	First draft	DD.MM.YYYY	Name	In process
				Completed

ETH Zurich Corporate Communications provides templates for office documents on its website, using the official ETH corporate design.

<https://ethz.ch/services/en/service/communication/corporate-design/templates-for-office-materials.html> →

We recommend using the functionalities available in office documents. It is easier to manage large documents if the page number, author(s), date and document title are written into the footer.

Quick access

Under Windows and MacOS, you can easily create bookmarks for folders which you use regularly. To do this, just click on the folder, drag it to 'favourites' and drop it where it makes most sense.

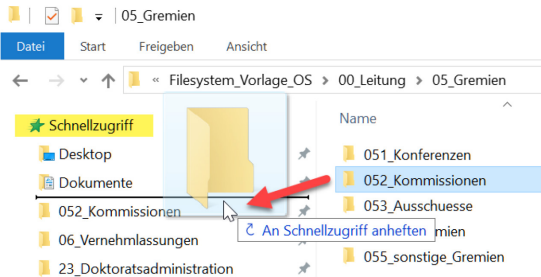


Illustration 4: Windows Explorer

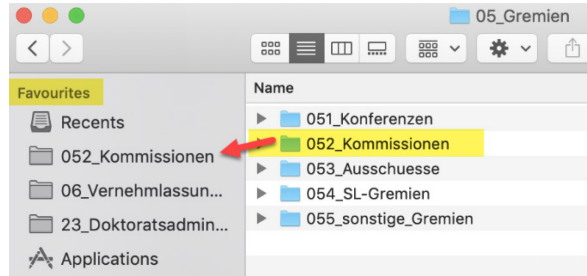


Illustration 5: MacOS Finder

Alternatively, you can create desktop links to folders which you use frequently. These links can be re-named.

5 Data Protection

Information security

Every member of ETH Zurich is required to handle information and data responsibly. Data should only be used if required for work assignments. Documents and data must be protected from unauthorized access or modification.

See: Compliance Guide ETH Zurich
RSETHZ 133

<https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/133en.pdf> →

Protection of personal data

Ideally, documents which contain personal data should not be stored on department file systems. For reasons of data protection, we recommend using ETHIS for managing records about ETH members (staff, professors etc.).

See: *Richtlinien über den Schutz und den Umgang mit Personaldaten an der ETH Zürich*
RSETHZ 612

<https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/612.pdf> →

Student dossiers

The regulations on data protection also encompass dossiers on students including doctoral students. Such documents should not be stored on the department file system, but in the specialised applications provided by ETH Zurich (e.g. LISETHpro).

6 The ETH Zurich University Archives

Contact

The ETH Zurich University Archives is the public archive of ETH Zurich. Since its foundation in 1999, it has been collecting documents and data of long-term value. Our archivists regularly attend training courses in records management and are happy to offer you their services.

For more information on the ETH Zurich University Archives go to:

<https://www.library.ethz.ch/en/Ressourcen/Archivalien-Dokumentationen/Hochschularchiv-der-ETH-Zuerich> →

If you are looking for support in the area of research data management, our colleagues from the Research Data Management and Digital Curation unit provide useful resources on their website:

<https://www.library.ethz.ch/digital-curation> →

Obligation to submit documents to the ETH Zurich University Archives

All ETH departments are legally required to submit those records which they no longer need for their daily business to the ETH Zurich Archives. As a general rule, the period during which documents and data are managed by the department (the retention period) is 10 years.

The archivists of the ETH Zurich University Archives work closely with the departments to determine which records are of long-term value. Those records which are not of long-term value (e.g. Bachelor or Master Theses) can be deleted in a controlled way once their retention period has ended.

Archiving

In the ETH Zurich University Archives, records are processed according to international standards. They are catalogued and archived for the long term. The ETH Zurich University Archives collects documents in paper form and digital form. For the long-term preservation of digital documents we use the services of the ETH Data Archive:

<https://www.library.ethz.ch/en/ms/Research-Data-Management-and-Digital-Curation/ETH-Data-Archive> →

Access to documents for department staff

The ETH Zurich University Archives make sure that access to archived records is managed according to the laws and regulations in force at ETH Zurich. If staff members have the appropriate authorization, they continue to have access to the archived records.

Appendix

Legal foundations at ETH Zurich

Records in general

Weisung über die Archivierung von Dokumenten der ETH Zürich

RSETHZ 210

<https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/210.pdf>

All ETH departments are responsible for managing their own records. Departments take care of their documents and data for at least 10 years (retention period). They are required to submit their records to the ETH Zurich University Archives for long-term archiving.

Federal Act on Archiving (*Bundesgesetz über die Archivierung*)

AS 1999 2243

<https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/19994756/index.html>

Reglement für das Archiv der ETH Zürich

RSETHZ 420.1

<https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/420.1.pdf>

Employee personnel dossiers

Richtlinien über den Schutz und den Umgang mit Personaldaten an der ETH Zürich

RSETHZ 612

<https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/612.pdf>

At ETH Zurich, only Human Resources and the Office of Faculty Affairs are allowed to manage personnel dossiers of ETH employees.

Exams, Bachelor and Master theses

Verordnung der ETH Zürich über Lerneinheiten und Leistungskontrollen an der ETH Zürich

AS 2012 3821

<https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20121393/index.html>

Finance and controlling

Weisung über die Aufbewahrung und Vernichtung von Geschäftsunterlagen

RSETHZ 245.5

<https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/245.5.pdf>

This directive applies only to records in the ETH departments Controlling, Accounting and Financial Services and their specialised applications.

Contracts, bylaws and memoranda of understanding

Finanzreglement der ETH Zürich

RSETHZ 245

<https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/245.pdf>

Standards in records management

ISO standard

Records Management

ISO 15489-1:2001

ISO 15489-1:2016

<https://www.iso.org/standard/62542.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_15489

Access for ETH members:

<http://www.library.ethz.ch/en/Ressourcen/Datenbanken/eresearchcenter>

E-Government standards in Switzerland

Records Management

Verein eCH, Standard eCH-0002

<https://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0002&documentVersion=1.00>

Records Management Framework

Verein eCH, Standard eCH-0038

<https://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0038&documentVersion=1.00>

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