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RECORDS MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

Managing Current Files

SUBJECT FILING

1966

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
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FOREWORD

Over 2 million cubic feet of Federal office records are now organized and filed by subject. Although these subject files constitute less than 10 percent of all office records, their management is one of the most critical and pervasive tasks facing the records manager. The organization, policies, programs, and functions of complex modern Government are documented by subject files. Within the structure of these files are countless papers adjudged to be of enduring value. It is the records manager's task to plan a file structure from which information can be readily retrieved for the divergent needs of the researcher of tomorrow as well as the decision maker of today.

This handbook deals with developing subject files that all keepers and users of records can master and follow. It is one of a series of handbooks issued by the National Archives and Records Service as an aid to Federal agencies in planning and maintaining efficient recordkeeping systems.

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I. THE NEED FOR SYSTEMATIC FILING

"System" should be the first word to come to mind after the word "filing." Without system, purposeful filing of more than a hundred documents becomes difficult. As the documents multiply, it becomes impossible. For this handbook on subject filing, there is then but one theme: *system*.

The Files Spectrum

The goal of every filing system is the organization of information in such a way that the user with a question knows where to find the answer. When the user's questions are predictable, the information can be organized by the search criteria. In other words, the user can find documents already arranged to fit his questions.

Many of our filing systems evolve easily from a single-search criterion—the name of a person or place or thing, or the number of the document itself. "Case files" like personnel folders in alphabetic order of names, and "transaction files" like canceled checks in numeric order, are common examples of simple file structures employing a single-search criterion.

But efficient file structures do not always evolve so painlessly. The complexity of the structure increases in direct proportion to the diversity of the information and the user's needs. At the opposite end of the files spectrum are those massive and diverse collections of technical and scientific papers for which the user's needs are often unpredictable. One modern method of retrieving information from these enormous pools is an unstructured file, queried by machine or manually manipulated keyterm indexes. Not limited to predetermined categories, these coordinate indexing systems are geared to an unpredictable use.

Between the simple case file and the sophisticated information retrieval system are countless structured files of varying degrees of complexity. These are the files commonly used by all Government agencies for functional records that do not lend themselves to arrangement by name or number. They are the *subject files* with which this handbook is concerned. See figure 1.

Requisites of Subject Filing

Every subject file—even the simplest one—is a challenge to the systems analyst. He must predict the user's needs for information and develop a plan for organizing the files by subject categories representative of these needs. Complicating his problem are the varying retention values of documents in the same subject categories. To insure preservation of historical papers, he must organize his files so records of lasting value can be readily segregated.

Systematic subject filing also demands that basic rules be followed uniformly in operating file stations and that conformity to these rules be perpetuated by a manual variously described as a "Handbook of Records Classification and Filing Standards," a "Files Management Guide," or simply a "Subject Filing Manual."

Until these requirements are met, the need for systematic filing is never satisfied.

Evidence of Need

This need is nowhere so acute as in subject filing. It is, first of all, the quest for a better means of information retrieval. It is the recordkeeper's need for guidance on how to file and find his office records; it is management's need for efficiency in office practices; and it is the archivist's need for reassurance that documents of lasting value will not become lost in masses of short-lived papers.

The evidence of need will be seen in illogical and obsolete subject categories, excessive misfilings, the scattering of papers on closely related subjects, the high costs of files operations, and the poor communication between

THE FILES SPECTRUM

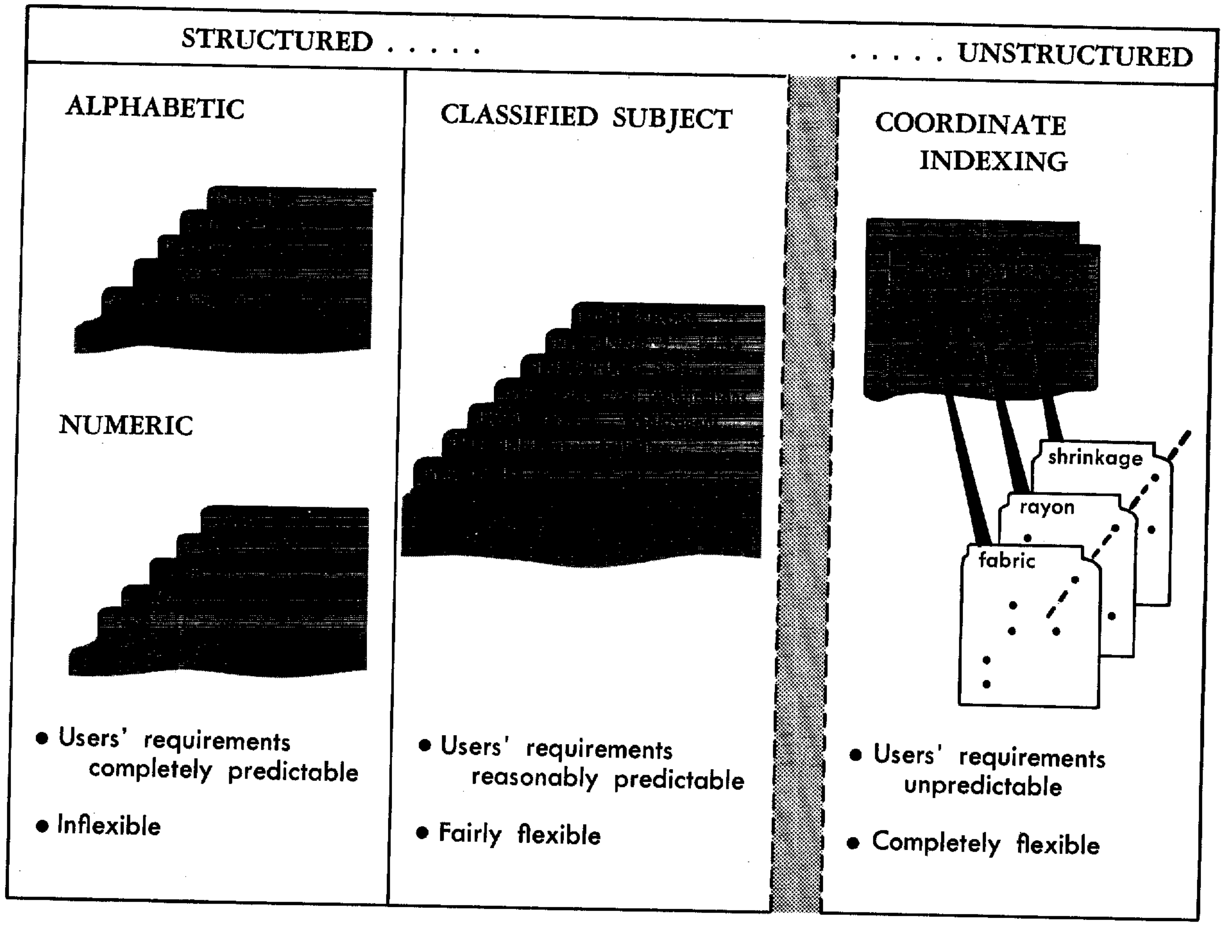

Figure 1

those who file and those who use the records. In recent years the evidence of need has also been seen in efforts to apply costly nonconventional filing methods, such as coordinate indexing and machine searching, when the practical solution to the problem is simply a better conventional file.

Pluses for Standardization

Maximum benefits from systematic filing accrue to those agencies that standardize all of their files, whether at high or low levels of organization. When all file stations follow a carefully planned filing pattern, the agency benefits by:

- *Integrity and continuity of records.* Perpetuation of high recordkeeping standards is assured despite reorganizations and personnel changes.
- *Efficiency of personnel.* File clerks and secretaries master recordkeeping in their own offices and easily acquire a working knowledge of the files in all offices of their agency.
- *Better communication.* A common language representative of the search criteria enables users and keepers of records to cooperate more purposefully in retrieving information. File references cited in written communications have the same meaning to both the sending and receiving office, thus speeding the location of reference materials.
- *Aid to audit and research.* Uniformity of document arrangement facilitates the use of records in management audits and surveys. For those records of lasting value, this same ease of reference promises

to be an invaluable aid in the task of archival research.

- *Compliance with retention schedules.* Symmetry in subject arrangement combined with manual instructions on records disposition helps insure the preservation of valuable papers and the disposal of useless ones.
- *Savings on supplies.* Standardization of filing supplies, such as folders, labels, and guides, permits the purchase of these essential supply items in large quantities at considerable dollar savings.

Meeting the Need

This is a book of practical suggestions on how to meet the needs for systematic subject filing. It does not give the systems analyst detailed guidance on how to inventory his agency's records or counsel him on how to solve special information retrieval problems with mechanical devices. Instead, it provides guidance on methods and practices that help the systems analyst reach the right decisions in developing a subject classification structure best suited to the needs of his own agency.

There is no quick and easy way to bring system to the complex files of modern Government. The remedy for the common shortcomings of functional files comes only from the application of principles and techniques like those set forth on the following pages. The task is a painstaking one, but it is not insuperable. Its accomplishment is well within the reach of every Federal agency.

II. MEETING AGENCY REQUIREMENTS

The first important decision in planning systematic filing comes in answer to the question: *How many filing manuals should an agency have?* Can one comprehensive manual be made to serve the needs of the entire agency, both at headquarters and in the field? Should a manual for agencywide use cover only those subjects of common interest to all major organizational elements, or is standardization at the agency level altogether impractical?

Four Ways to Approach Standardization

Each agency manual prescribing a carefully conceived, uniform method of filing represents a standard system. It may be used by only one file station or it may be used by many. The question, then, is not whether agency files should be standardized but rather the extent to which uniform filing plans can be used for this purpose. There are four approaches to be considered:

1. *A single agency manual with comprehensive coverage of all subject categories.* Each file station, wherever it is located, selects and uses the subject categories representing its own records, setting aside the remainder of the manual as a reference work.

2. *An agency manual on general administrative (facilitative) subjects only.* Every office uses the same manual for general administrative subjects, like "Personnel" and "Budget," but each activity develops its own manuals for records on program (operational) subjects like "Medicare" and "Highway Beautification." This approach, it should be noted, is rarely used.

3. *An agency manual that includes basic rules for coordinating all files, as well as subject classifications for general administrative records.* Like the second approach, this one leads to a single classification scheme for administrative records only. But it has the additional advantage of coordinating all of the agency's filing systems by prescribing uniform procedures for coding, labeling, cross-referencing, and other common filing activities. Sometimes it is also possible to prescribe primary categories for subjects representing program records.

4. *A separate manual for each office or each group of offices engaged in the same activities.* This may mean only one manual for each bureau or division, which constituent offices at headquarters and in the field adapt to their own needs. Or it could mean a different manual for large file stations and for each office or group of offices with unique functions. There are many ways to take this approach, but each is alike in that it bypasses any attempt to standardize subject categories or filing procedures at the agency level.

Choosing the Best Approach

The challenge lies in choosing the approach that will best satisfy agency requirements for information and legal requirements for adequate and efficient documentation. Size of the agency, complexity of subject matter, autonomy of bureaus or divisions or services, and diversity of programs, must be considered in deciding whether an agency should have one comprehensive filing manual or separate ones for distinct organizational segments.

Single classification schemes for general administrative subjects are common, in both large and small agencies. Subject categories for these records are fairly uniform in all offices; and the influence of bureau autonomy lessens with each move to standardize Government procedures on housekeeping matters.

On the other hand, the common interest in subjects relating to program activities is not so widespread. Although a few large agencies subscribe to a one-manual plan, this plan is more likely to be practical in small agencies where offices are closely bound in their program endeavors—as, for example, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

Complexity of subject matter and diversity of programs influence the number of subject categories which, in turn, may influence the decision on the practicality of one comprehensive classification scheme. When subjects are limited to a few hundred, comprehensive coverage in one manual is often advantageous, but the advantages diminish as the number of subject categories increase. A comprehensive manual in a large agency may carry several thousand primary and subordinate subjects, fewer than 100 of which would be useful to a field office and less than a dozen to some of the small file stations. Besides, a subordinate subject that fits in a small file might better be a primary subject in a large file. To be useful, then, the comprehensive system must be flexible enough to permit adaptation to the needs of individual file stations.

Against the possible disadvantages of a one-manual plan, the systems analyst must weigh the high cost of developing and publishing a number of manuals and the inevitability of overlapping subject categories. If mutual interest in the same subjects is sufficient, he may conclude that one manual is the answer even for a diversity of subject matter. The aim is standardization at the highest level of organization consistent with a useful classification scheme.

The Coordinated System

The third approach described at the beginning of this chapter is usually favored when a single classification scheme is hard to apply. Many large agencies have found that this approach has many of the advantages and none of the disadvantages of the one-manual plan. It can provide:

1. One classification plan for records on general administrative subjects, flexible enough for adaptation to the needs of any office.
2. A separate plan for the program records of each division, service, or bureau, flexible enough for adaptation to the needs of constituent offices.
3. Individual plans authorized for special requirements of large file stations or for any file station serving an office that has a unique mission.
4. A uniform method for coding subject categories, applicable throughout the agency.
5. Agencywide use of standard supply items, such as folders and labels; and standard procedures for cross-referencing, charging-out records, retiring records, and other common file station chores.
6. A standard makeup and format for manuals, regardless of the number of manuals issued.

When agency filing systems are standardized and coordinated in this manner, each filing manual is, in effect, a chapter in a comprehensive volume. See figure 2.

Of course, it may turn out that the mutual interest in subject categories is slight, supporting the theory that a separate manual is practical for each office or group of offices engaged in the same activities. The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, subscribes to this theory, issuing a separate manual for each State in which it operates.

Records Coverage

The second major decision in planning systematic filing relates to the types of records that will be covered. Should a plan be developed to systematize the organization of all records or just certain types? Should standards be included for organizing files by name or number, bringing within the system vast quantities of such types of records as engineering drawings, X-rays, projects, financial reports, and medical histories?

While this handbook is concerned solely with subject files, it must be recognized that the best plan covers all types of records although not necessarily as part of the subject classification structure. The initial cost of complete coverage is high. In the long run, however, a comprehensive coverage is the least expensive because it helps to bring order and continuity to every file structure.

Coding

In seeking the best approach to standardization of his agency's files, the systems analyst cannot avoid the question of file codes; that is, the symbols used in identifying and arranging subject categories.

There is a surprisingly common belief that use of a certain type of code practically guarantees sound filing systems. This is no more true than the notion that a coat of paint will insure sound construction of a building. No file code can, in itself, correct or improve an inadequate list of subject categories.

Overemphasis on coding may be due in part to the fascination with readymade systems and the tendency to seize upon them as solutions to filing problems. Codes only facilitate filing, and they do this best when they are created to meet the special requirements of the

COORDINATED FILING SYSTEMS, ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS OF STANDARDIZATION

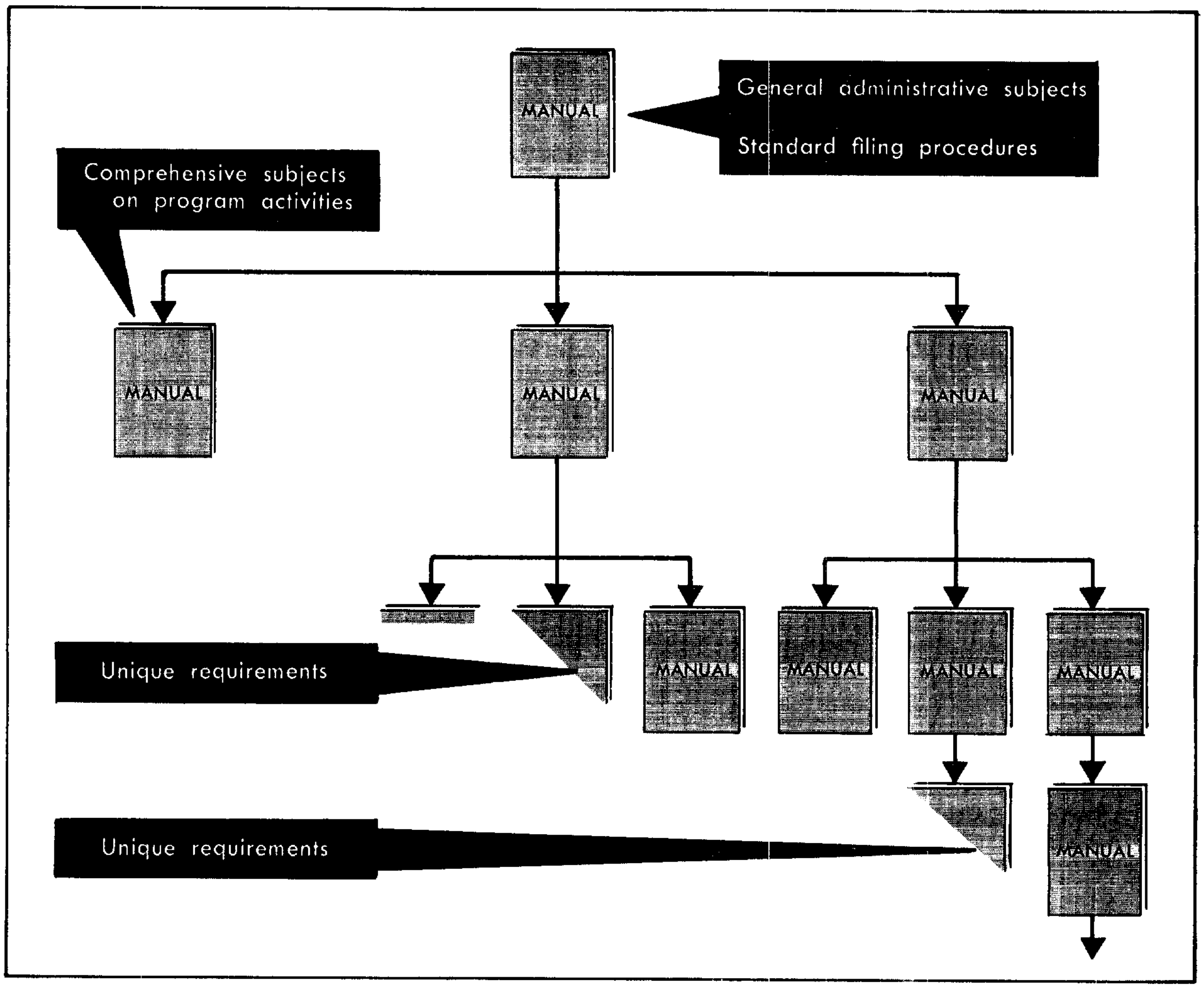

Figure 2

agency. The many considerations in creating and standardizing file codes are discussed in chapter 4.

The Key Factor

The key factor in developing a filing plan is not the selection of a file code, important though this may be. It is the selection of subject categories that are truly representative of an agency's information needs. The individual file stations cannot be left with sole responsibility for this task, if the benefits of systematic filing are to be realized. System demands coordination by management and technical know-how in subject classification. The next chapter is written especially for those to whom this task is assigned.

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III. SELECTING AND CLASSIFYING SUBJECT CATEGORIES

After the plan best suited to an agency's filing needs has been determined, subject categories are selected and arrayed methodically in a subject classification outline. This undertaking, with which we are now concerned, is the development of the plan. It is not to be confused with "subject classification" as that term is used to describe a recordkeeper's task of applying the various subject categories to current records so that they may be placed into the file.

What is Meant by "Classification"?

By noting similarities between numerous distinct and discrete items, it is possible to represent all of them by the same term. The term chosen for the purpose is the *subject category,* sometimes called a *topic,* a *heading,* a *caption,* or a *title.* For example, "Inventory Control" might be chosen to represent a number of papers that are alike only in that each of them relates in some way to the management of inventories. This grouping of different items in one subject category is the first step toward introducing simplicity and order into a multiplicity of subject matter.

Classification goes a step further. Through classification, a group of items with characteristics that can be more precisely defined are subordinated to more general categories until the most inclusive subject is reached. Thus, "Taking Stock" might be subordinated to "Inventory Control" which, in turn, might be subordinated to the even more inclusive subject "Management Methods." By establishing this relationship between subject categories, another advantage is gained in creating order and facilitating information retrieval.

Hierarchical Classification

Subject categories organized in a tree-like structure which shows their relationship are said to be hierarchically arranged. The most highly developed hierarchical systems have been devised by scientists to bring order into their mass of knowledge. Zoologists and botanists, for example, may divide and subdivide their scientific subjects scores of times in descending order of *kingdom, phylum, superclass, class, subclass, infraclass, cohort, order, suborder, family, subfamily, tribe, genus, species,* etc.

The great standard library classification systems, such as Dewey, Bliss, Cutter, Library of Congress, and Universal Decimal, are all hierarchical. The subjects are arranged so that they proceed from the most general to the most specific. For example, the Dewey system is arranged in this way:

Notation	*Subject*
700	Fine arts
720	Architecture
721	Architectural construction
721.8	Openings and their fittings
721.81	Doors

This handbook presumes throughout that agency subject files will be constructed along simplified hierarchical lines. Subject classification of a hundred thousand documents in a correspondence file demands the same thought processes that are required of the taxonomist who classifies a hundred thousand plants or bugs. This means that a body of records is first divided into broad groups of interrelated subjects called *primary* categories. The primaries are then subdivided by successive levels of subordinate topics as illustrated in figure 3.

Essentials of Good Classification

To work well in functional files, a hierarchical order must be:

- *Representative of information needs.* The classification should conform to the

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SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION LEVELS

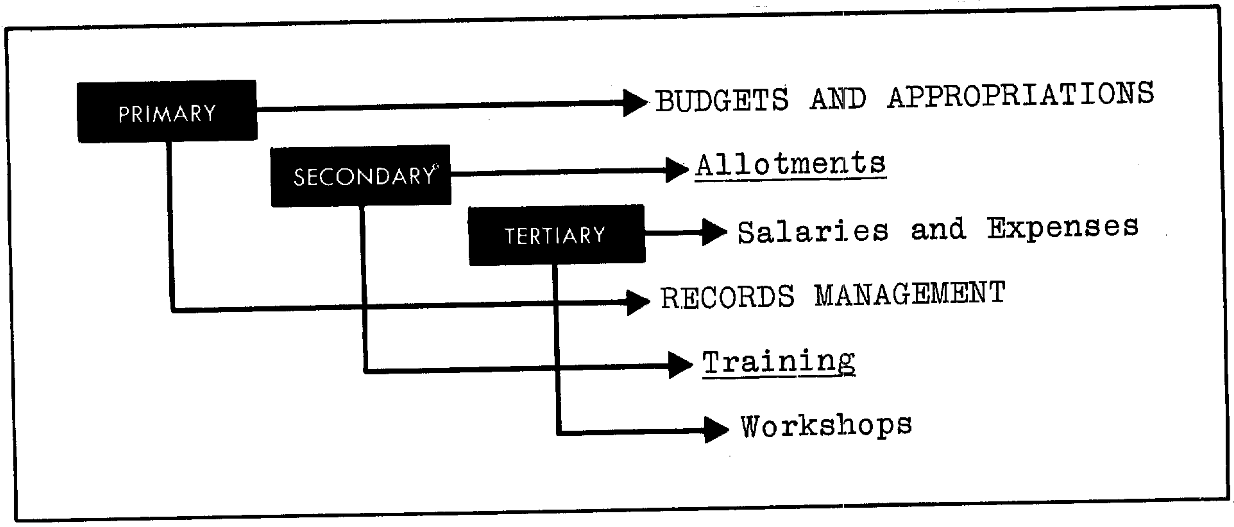


Figure 3

user's requirements. The kinds of records he needs, the way he asks for them, and the terms he uses in his requests should shape the pattern.

- *Complete.* There should be a suitable category for all existing records.
- *Flexible.* There should be the means of contracting or expanding the classification outline, so subjects can be dropped or added as necessary.
- *Logical.* Subjects should be grouped in such logical order that the reasons for the arrangement will be obvious.
- *Restrictive.* Each subject title should be phrased to be as exclusive as possible, so it will stand alone. There should be only one term to denote a subject, no matter how many synonyms may express the same idea.
- *Precise.* Each subject title should be precise in describing the category, thereby encouraging filing at the lowest possible rung of the hierarchical ladder.

Advantages of Classification

Hierarchical arrangements that meet the above requirements facilitate document retrieval by limiting the area of search.

When subjects are arranged in straight alphabetical order, without regard to their generic relationship, searching may involve the scanning of every file caption from "A" to "Z." Classification limits the area of search by keeping related subjects together. If a document is not found in the most specific division of the subject group, it is likely to be found nearby in a more general division of the same group—oftentimes without the necessity of even opening another file drawer.

Functional Grouping

The simple fact that records are the result of functions and are used in relation to them, establishes the principle that they should be grouped and maintained according to the functions to which they relate. The subject categories chosen as filing guides then reflect an agency's purpose, missions, programs, projects, or activities—commonly expressed as its *functions*. The scope of the functions for which a file is organized determines the breadth of the subject categories.

When the systems analyst identifies the separate functions of his agency, he has the first clue to selecting the file categories.

Reasons for Functional Grouping. As the common language of an agency, the vocabulary of functions is ideally suited to communicating the content of a group of documents. Moreover, when files are arranged in functional groupings, additions or deletions or modifications can easily be made without changing the rest of the subject outline. Functions can be transferred from one office to another with only slight modifications—or possibly no modifications—in the file structure. Finally, but by no means the least advantage, is the convenience of using functional charts in planning subject categories.

The readiness with which a functional chart can be converted to a subject outline is illustrated by programs of the World Health Organization of the United Nations, an agency engaged in research and technical assistance to improve the health of mankind. This organization accomplishes its purposes through a series of major programs. Each of these major programs is subdivided into subprograms of more limited scope, and each subprogram is further subdivided into subsidiary programs or projects of even lesser range. Figure 4 illustrates this program subdivision.

In effect, every entry of figure 4 is a function that produces records, and, as such, is a key to reliable file subjects. This relationship between functions and filing subjects is further amplified in figure 5. Figure 5 shows a statement descriptive of the functions of the Department of Veterans Benefits, Veterans Administration, and certain of the subjects from the Veterans Administration filing manual reflecting those functions.

Precautions. The emphasis on functional grouping is not intended to imply that the titles of functions should, in every instance, be used in subject filing outlines exactly as they appear in an organizational chart or in a statement of functions. Volume of records and the organizational level of use may require modification of the terminology; and, besides, it is to be anticipated that there will be subdivisions in a records group for which titles are not supplied by the functional vocabulary.

The idea is to take advantage of the opportunity to use subject categories that identify records-generating functions to the fullest extent practical in organizing the file. Ideally, the beginning of a sound subject outline is found in key words in an agency's organization chart. This advantage is not guaranteed, however. On some organizational charts, functions may not be divided precisely enough to show distinct separations or organizational titles may be too broad or insufficiently descriptive of the functions. For these reasons, organizational

PROGRAM SUBDIVISIONS OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

MAJOR PROGRAMS		*SUBPROGRAMS*		*SUBSIDIARY PROGRAMS OR PROJECTS*
Epidemiology				
Food and nutrition				
Maternal and child care				
Therapeutic substances				
Sanitation and hygiene	↔	Advisory and demonstration services		
		Aeronautical hygiene		
		Dental hygiene and stomatology		
		Housing, town and country planning		
		Maritime and nautical hygiene		
		Occupational hygiene	↔	Dust hazards and control
				Toxic hazards and control

Figure 4

RELATIONSHIP OF FUNCTIONS TO SUBJECT CATEGORIES, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS BENEFITS, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

FUNCTIONS	*SUBJECT CATEGORIES*	
Administers program of veterans benefits consisting of compensation and pension, vocational rehabilitation and education, loan guaranty, guardianship, and contact activities of the Veterans Administration.	BENEFITS	
	1	Adjusted Compensation
	2	Burial
	3	Compensation and Pension
	3–1	Apportionment
	3–2	Awards
		* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
	4	Loan Guaranty
	4–1	Discrimination-Practices
	4–2	Eligibility
		* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
	5	Special Disability Benefits
	5–1	Housing
	5–2	Special Monthly Compensation
	5–3	Vehicles
	6	Vocational Rehabilitation and Education
	6–1	Allowance and Assistance
	6–2	Counseling
		* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
	7	Forfeiture
	8	Waiver—Overpayments

Figure 5

charts must be used discriminately as guides in classifying records.

Number and Breadth of Categories

There is always a direct relationship between the number of subject categories and their breadth—the broader the categories the fewer their number, and vice versa. The systems analyst must pinpoint his agency's functions, then seek to get the right balance between primary subject categories and their subdivisions.

An excessive number of subject subdivisions complicates the files structure and slows down the tasks of searching and readying records for filing. Three levels of classification—primary, secondary, and tertiary—should usually suffice. Should a fourth level of classification (quaternary) be needed, it may be better to upgrade secondary subjects to primaries, although sometimes quaternary subjects cannot be avoided. See figure 6.

Similarly, too many subject categories at a given hierarchical level create a serious filing problem. Excessive categories lead to overlapping files, making it difficult to classify documents that are only slightly different. Besides, when subjects are too highly specialized, there are always too many documents for which there is no appropriate filing place.

One indication of excessive categories will be seen in titles using the same keyword or phrase but prefaced by different adjectives and adverbs. Extensive cross-referencing may be another indication. Large file stations, commonly called "central files," are often plagued by this problem of excess. It is less likely to be encountered in the small stations.

On the other hand, when the subject categories are too broad, they may require too many subdivisions, becoming meaningless catchalls. The remedy here, just as in avoiding quaternary classification levels, is to upgrade secondary topics to primaries.

The Army subject filing manual contains 15 broad functional groupings, the Air Force 25, the Navy 13; while the Federal Reserve System has only 6. As these figures suggest, there is no fixed answer to the question of the number of categories, even in the broadest functional groupings. The three big factors that must be considered in seeking the best answer are:

1. Volume of records covered.
2. Organizational level served.
3. Precision of terms selected as subject captions.

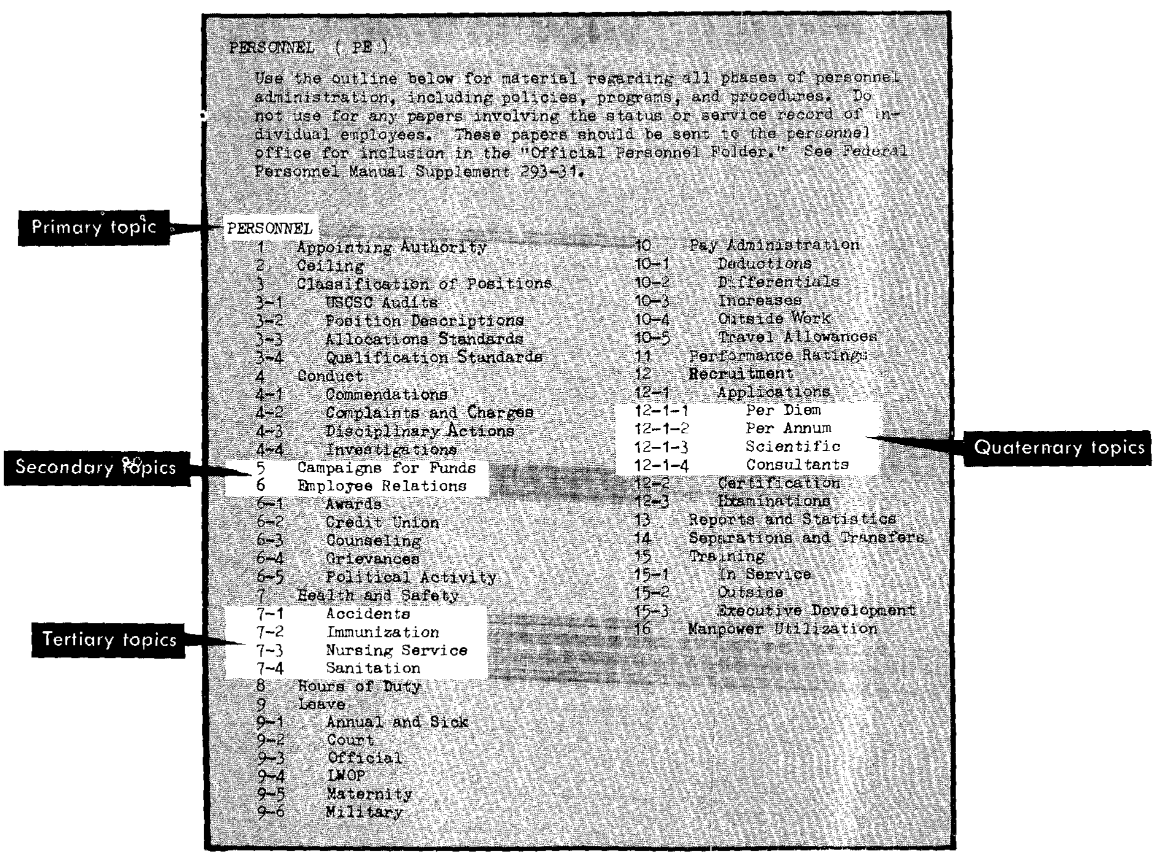
Each of these factors will now be reviewed.

Gauging Categories by Records Volume

Subject categories presuppose a certain volume of records for each primary subject. If the quantity of records is comparatively small, the subject categories should be broad and few. As the quantity of records increases, so does the need for more numerous and precise categories.

A letter-sized file cabinet drawer holds up to 1½ cubic feet of records, equal to about 2,000 documents (about 4,000 sheets) including folders. Thus, one full 5-drawer cabinet contains approximately 10,000 documents. Although a file folder is built to hold about 75 documents (¾ inch of material), 25 docu-

SAMPLE PAGE FROM A SUBJECT OUTLINE


PERSONNEL (PE)

Use the outline below for material regarding all phases of personnel administration, including policies, programs, and procedures. Do not use for any papers involving the status or service record of individual employees. These papers should be sent to the personnel office for inclusion in the "Official Personnel Folder." See Federal Personnel Manual Supplement 293-31.

PERSONNEL

1	Appointing Authority	10	Pay Administration
2	Ceiling	10-1	Deductions
3	Classification of Positions	10-2	Differentials
3-1	USCSC Audits	10-3	Increases
3-2	Position Descriptions	10-4	Outside Work
3-3	Allocations Standards	10-5	Travel Allowances
3-4	Qualification Standards	11	Performance Ratings
4	Conduct	12	Recruitment
4-1	Commendations	12-1	Applications
4-2	Complaints and Charges	12-1-1	Per Diem
4-3	Disciplinary Actions	12-1-2	Per Annum
4-4	Investigations	12-1-3	Scientific
5	Campaigns for Funds	12-1-4	Consultants
6	Employee Relations	12-2	Certification
6-1	Awards	12-3	Examinations
6-2	Credit Union	13	Reports and Statistics
6-3	Counseling	14	Separations and Transfers
6-4	Grievances	15	Training
6-5	Political Activity	15-1	In Service
7	Health and Safety	15-2	Outside
7-1	Accidents	15-3	Executive Development
7-2	Immunization	16	Manpower Utilization
7-3	Nursing Service		
7-4	Sanitation		
8	Hours of Duty		
9	Leave		
9-1	Annual and Sick		
9-2	Court		
9-3	Official		
9-4	LWOP		
9-5	Maternity		
9-6	Military		

Figure 6

ments (approximately ¼ inch) is a better average for searching and referencing the file. This average figure is simply a guide in determining whether the total number of individual filing categories is within reason. It is, of course, impossible to plan a file structure in which each folder would receive 25 documents during a year or any other given period.

The average of 25 documents is especially useful in forecasting probabilities. The primary category "PROPERTY" illustrates the point. This broad primary subject with a few broad secondaries and a few tertiaries should suffice in an office where property files occupy less than one file drawer. Chances are, there will be not more than 40 folders or 1,000 documents in the search area.

In another office, the property files may fill a full cabinet. The primary "PROPERTY" probably will still serve, but many precise secondaries and tertiaries and possibly even some quaternaries are needed, including categories such as:

PROPERTY

Accountability

- Identification
- Inventory
- Receiving Documents
- Relief from Accountability
- Removal
- Reports of Survey

Acquisition

- Loan
- Purchase
- Rental
- Specifications and Bids
- Inspection and Testing

Disposition

- Transfer
- Sale
- Excess Declarations
- Salvage

In yet another office, property files may fill several file cabinets. In all likelihood, the primary subject "PROPERTY" is then too broad to be practical. The secondaries must be elevated to primaries; the tertiaries must be moved up to secondaries; and new and more precise tertiaries must be provided. Thus, the secondary subject "Accountability" might become the primary subject "PROPERTY ACCOUNTABILITY," with secondaries and tertiaries such as these:

PROPERTY ACCOUNTABILITY

Inventory

- Adjustment
- Evaluations

Receiving Documents

- Receiving Reports
- Memorandum Receipts

There is one important exception to this general rule that the volume of records determines the number and breadth of categories. Regardless of the volume, a separate primary, with subdivisions as needed, must be established for unique papers that cannot be subordinated to any other subject. When a unique records accumulation warrants separation, it is essential to provide appropriate subject categories, regardless of the volume of records involved.

Adjusting Categories for Organizational Levels

The criticism frequently leveled at a single (one-manual) filing system in a complex agency or bureau is that the categories do not fit: Either they are too broad for use at lower levels of organization or they are too detailed for use by the top staff offices. The long and cumbersome classification list, comprehensive enough to serve all needs, may carry only a handful of subjects pertinent to the needs of most file stations.

In standardizing a filing system for use throughout an organization, it is not necessary to provide precise subordinate categories. Indeed, to insure the usefulness that comes from flexibility, it may be better to let each file station subdivide subjects to meet its own volume requirements. An agency personnel office, for example, would develop a detailed classification outline to cover its thousands of papers relating to personnel administration, perhaps employing several dozen primary categories. Other offices, with only a few papers on this subject, might find "PERSONNEL" the only primary subject required. Hence, the number of subject categories in any manual depends in part on the organizational levels served.

The Department of Agriculture recognizes this problem by classifying records at the top level using broad subjects like these:

FARM PROGRAM

1 Acreage Allotments—Marketing Quotas
1–1 Payments
2 Comments and Suggestions by Individuals
3 Crop Insurance
4 Foreign Trade
5 Marketing Agreements and Orders—Self Help Program
5–1 Formal Dockets and Agreements
6 Price Support—Surplus Removal Programs—Commodity Loans
6–1 Storage
7 School Lunch Program
8 Surplus Distribution Program
8–1 Domestic
8–2 Foreign

These broad subjects, suitable for the Office of the Secretary, do not meet the reference requirements of lower organizational levels. Take, for example, the category "Crop Insurance." Although this is a secondary subject at the top level, it reflects the total program of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation. Therefore, the subject "Crop Insurance" is not included in the Corporation's subject classification outline. It is replaced by more specific primary categories such as "LOSS ADJUSTMENTS," "MARKETS," and "UNDERWRITING."

In summary, the organizational level of use must be considered in deciding on the number and breadth of subject categories. It can be expected that the full range of functions expressed in the fewest and broadest subjects will represent the files at the top of the agency, and the most precise functions will be represented by numerous subjects at the lowest levels. If this spread is too great to be covered in one subject classification system, a separate outline should be developed wherever it is needed for a more useful filing manual.

Restricting and Expanding Categories by Choice of Terms

The third and perhaps biggest factor influencing the number of subject categories is the systems analyst's discrimination in the choice of terms

PROCESSES, CLASSES, AND ITEMS

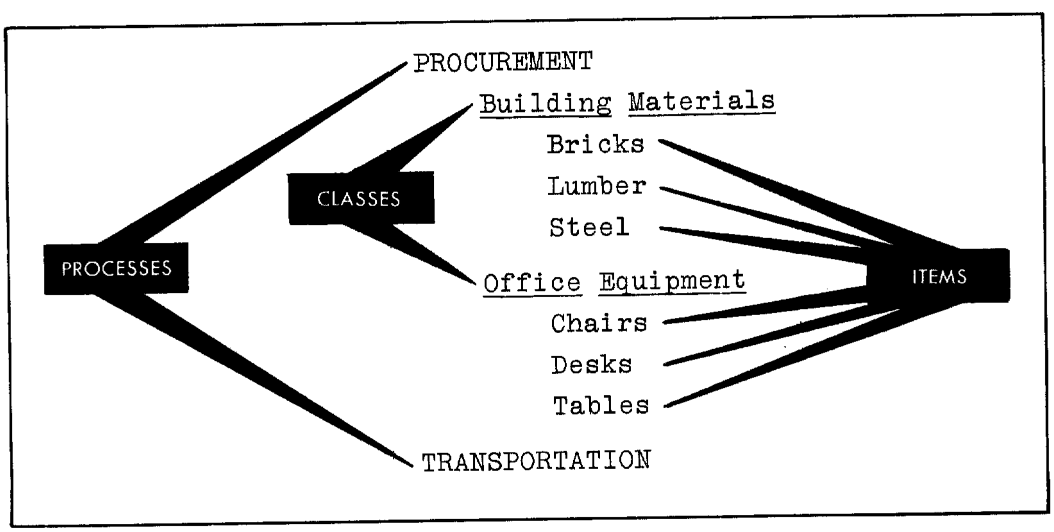


Figure 7

to caption the subjects. Should the analyst restrict the meaning of his categories by using adjectives and adverbs as modifiers? Adjectives and adverbs can be used freely in conversation, public speaking, and even in nontechnical writing. The listener or reader is not likely to examine each word critically or to evaluate the degree to which it affects another word in the sentence. No such casual handling of the English language will get by in choosing terms for classifying records. Ill-considered use of a modifier can narrow the scope of a term so drastically as to restrict its application to only a fraction of the records it should cover. On the other hand, the absence of a modifier may result in an omnibus term which overlaps and engulfs subjects that should be covered by other terms. The omnibus term is especially hazardous in captioning primary subjects, since they govern the breadth of secondaries and tertiaries.

Study of the subject content of record material will narrow the selection to the best qualifier—the one that insures the proper balance between generality and exactness. For instance, "TIMBER SALVAGE" may be a good primary for a group of records consistently about the salvage of timber. But if the records sometimes concern other matters relating to timber, the word "salvage" is too restrictive. The broader term "TIMBER" with more restrictive secondaries as required is, a better primary caption.

Similar sharp differences can be seen by comparing the following terms:

Community affairs	Community management
Mines and mining	Mining operations
Forest resources	Forest products
Marketing	Marketing services
Aircraft	Aircraft facilities
Trade	Trade agreements
Epidemics and disasters	Epidemic and disaster aid
Postal services	Postal services (domestic)

Deciding whether a modifier is needed or which one to use is hardest when a program is just getting underway. The scanty record material on hand does not give much indication of the eventual volume and subject coverage. At this stage, qualifying words should be used sparingly.

Choosing the Best Terms

In choosing a term as a subject caption—whether primary, secondary, or tertiary—it should now be clear that the analyst should be guided by: (1) the ways in which records are requested (terms used); (2) the breadth of the file contents; and (3) the need for detail as governed by the volume of records. The biggest question in meeting these requirements is whether to choose terms that denote *processes, classes,* or *items*. These choices are defined below and illustrated in Figure 7.

PROCESSES—Actions taken, such as *procurement, transportation,* and *use*.

CLASSES —Groups of items, such as *building materials* and *office equipment*.

ITEMS —Specific things making up the broader class, such as *bricks* and *lumber,* or *chairs* and *desks*.

Parallel Construction. The mixing of processes, classes, and items at the same classification level (primary, secondary, or tertiary) should be avoided if at all possible. Ideally, the subjects selected for a classification outline should be parallel in construction, but mixing, especially at the primary level, is often unavoidable.

Figure 8 illustrates how parallel construction can avoid overlapping subject topics.

If documents pertain primarily to a class and only occasionally to items within a class, then a class term should be selected to provide expandibility. Items, if needed as subdivisions, can usually be arranged alphabetically below a a class.

Technical Terms. Another thorny problem in compiling subject categories is knowing how far to go in using technical terms. Use of technical language varies from agency to agency, reaching a peak in those agencies engaged in scientific research.

There is a decided filing advantage in converting scientific terms to lay terms. Intensive

PARALLEL AND NONPARALLEL CONSTRUCTION

Parallel Primary by PROCESSES Secondary by CLASSES	*Parallel* Primary by CLASSES Secondary by PROCESSES	*Nonparallel* PROCESSES, CLASSES, AND ITEMS intermixed
PROCUREMENT	BUILDING MATERIALS	BUILDING MATERIALS
Building Materials	Procurement	CHAIRS
Fuels and Lubricants	Transportation	FUELS AND LUBRICANTS
TRANSPORTATION	FUELS AND LUBRICANTS	LUMBER
Building Materials	Procurement	PROCUREMENT
Fuels and Lubricants	Transportation	TRANSPORTATION

Figure 8

training is usually required before recordkeepers can be expected to understand technical terms and properly classify documents within the meaning of these terms. Recordkeepers in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, for example, have to know that "elastomers" are types of nonmetallic materials; that "spectroscopy" is a field of physics having to do with light; and that "plasma" usually means, in that agency, a form of gaseous substance occupying outer space between planets and other heavenly bodies.

Again, the question is: How is information requested? Will the specialist seeking information about food preservation, diets, and vitamins, ask for the file on "bromatology" or will he use the lay term "food and nutrition"? Common requests for documents by scientific or technical terms plainly indicate the need to organize the files by these terms. But when documents are frequently requested by lay terms, these terms should be favored. A cross-index of technical terms can be used to serve as a files key when information requested needs translating.

Trade Language. Every organization gradually envolves a vocabulary peculiarly its own. This local lingo appears in oral and written instructions, in correspondence, and in reports. At times, it may take the form of jargon, a kind of trade talk, understood only by the personnel of the agency and those with whom the agency has frequent dealings. Sometimes the peculiarities of language come from special meanings applied to ordinary words. The following examples of specialized languages are taken from agency filing manuals:

Title VII—NDEA	Crisis management
Joint set—asides	Portfolio function
Equity skinners	Marginal returns
M.T.P.P.	Leasebacks
Cannibalization	Customer etiquette
Underwater evasion	Prebargaining
PERT	Jigs
Subroutines	Elliott Fischer tickets

Trade language should not be overlooked in searching for classification terms. The persons who use records think and speak in this language, and, to them, it most clearly expresses what they mean. It is not always desirable to use trade language for subject captions within a classification outline, but such language should not be overlooked in preparing a detailed index to the outline.

Substructures

Up to this point, only the standard methods for arranging material under a subject file system have been discussed. There are, however, many techniques for meeting peculiar filing needs. Within the framework of a subject file, it is always possible to design subdivisions or subarrangements which sharply depart from standard subjective arrangement methods.

Special file arrangements are often needed for large volumes of repetitive material representing the "case files" attached to a subject category. The terms "case" and "subject" are not precise. It might be argued that the name on a case file is the subject of that file. Regardless of the fuzziness of these definitions, "case-filed" substructures are frequently found in classification outlines. Take, for example, a large file of material relating to agencywide instructions on processing awards. The material can first be divided by type of award, such as "Honor," "Performance," and "Suggestion" awards—a standard subjective arrangement. However, each of these subject categories can then be subdivided into "case files" arranged alphabetically by the names of States, if volume warrants.

In effect, if the volume of case folders warrants, any of the typical alphabetic or numeric arrangements of case or project files can be used as subarrangements within the overall subject file structure. Sometimes to meet user needs, papers for just one "unique" case file folder could be assembled and filed within a subject file structure by a name assigned to a particular matter. For example, a special folder for all papers relating to a managers' conference on consolidating two field offices, could be filed under the appropriate subject by the name assigned to that conference.

IV. SELECTING FILE CODES

No matter how sound the subject categories, a subject file may be hard to use without the help of a "chart." It may look to the user as the night sky looks to a new observer without a star map. A well-devised code charts subject classifications just as a star map charts constellations.

Noncoded File Arrangements

The simplest subject file is arranged in straight alphabetical sequence of subject titles without any file codes:

ACCOUNTING
ANNUAL LEAVE
BUDGETING
COMMUNICATIONS
MAIL
PERSONNEL
RECRUITMENT AND PLACEMENT
SICK LEAVE
SUPPLIES
TRAINING
WORKSHOPS

Arrangements like this are often called "Subject-Alphabetic" or "Subject-Title" files. Sometimes the topics are classified as shown below, with the alphabetical order of topics retained at each classification level:

PERSONNEL
- Leave
  - Annual
  - Sick
- Recruitment and Placement
- Training
  - Workshops

SUPPLIES

As long as the file is small—a file drawer or so, these arrangements may be satisfactory. But, as the files grow, it becomes harder to keep related subjects together, and maintain an alphabetical order.

Evolution of Codes

To avoid the need to write out lengthy subject titles as the file designations of papers, some offices assigned a consecutive number to each subject category used. The next consecutive number would be assigned when a new topic was created. This practice of filing subject categories numerically as they come up is similar to the registry system widely used in other countries for numbering documents as they are received. Such a rudimentary coded system might look like this:

1 PERSONNEL
2 FINANCE
3 SUPPLIES
4 REPORTS
5 LOANS
6 ADVERTISING

From simple arrangements like this consecutively numbered listing have evolved some elaborate coding schemes. This one, known as "Duplex-Numeric," is an example:

3	SUPPLIES
3–1	Factory
3–1–1	Oil
3–1–2	Wire
3–2	Office
3–2–1	Furniture
3–2–2	Pencils

In a variation of the above scheme, letters instead of numbers may be assigned to the primary subjects for an arrangement known as "Alpha-Numeric":

A	SUPPLIES
A–1	Factory
A–1–1	Oil
A–1–2	Wire
A–2	Office
A–2–1	Furniture
A–2–2	Pencils

An even more elaborate file code is the "Decimal," generally based on Melvin Dewey's library classification of the world's knowledge. Here is an example:

400	MINING
410	MINING ENGINEERING
411	Working of Mines
411.1	metal mining
411.11	gold mining
411.111	placer mining
411.111.1	ditches and flumes

Complex coding schemes create problems in functional files. To begin with, the advantage of keeping primary subjects in alphabetic order is hard, if not impossible, to retain when each primary subject is assigned a number. Even more disturbing is the difficulty of memorizing abstruse numbers that do not suggest the identity of the subject categories. The Decimal system further complicates filing by restricting the number of symbols to 10 at each classification level.

The Department of Agriculture devised a coding scheme, known as the "Subject-Numeric," to correct the weaknesses of the simple alphabetic arrangements and the more elaborate codes. Now widely used throughout the Federal Government,[1] the Subject-Numeric code permits arrangement of primary subjects in alphabetic sequence while retaining a simple numeric order for subdivisions of the primaries. For example:

MA —	MARKETING
1	Domestic
1–1	Retail
1–2	Wholesale
2	Foreign
PE —	PERSONNEL

It will be seen that primary titles are given mnemonic abbreviations; that is, alphabetic abbreviation suggesting the subjects. For example, the abbreviation "MA" or "MAR" might be used to suggest the subject "MARKETING," "CO" or "COM" to suggest "COMMUNICATIONS," and "PE" or "PER" to suggest "PERSONNEL." Thus, the Subject-Numeric scheme has the additional advantages of being easy to memorize, and of employing short code symbols.

Usefulness of File Codes

Without a file code, an inordinate amount of time would have to be spent writing subject captions on papers to be consigned to files. With a code, the time is cut drastically by reducing long subjects like "PALEONTOLOGY AND STRATIGRAPHY—Fossile Determinations—Stratigraphic Position" to short symbols like "PS 4–2." See figure 9.

Although codes make their biggest contribution by speeding the classification of records, they are also useful in:

Cross-referencing. At least two subjects are shown on every cross-reference form. Codes can be written in a fraction of the time it takes to write the subject titles.

Sorting. A document must be sorted to each of its classification levels in the process of readying it for filing. This process is speeded when the levels are represented by symbols rather than multiword titles.

Filing. Document classification and file captions must be matched before documents can be filed in the right folders. Codes are easier to match than subjects.

Indicating classification level. The classification level inherent in hierarchical arrangements is not apparent when a subject category stands alone. Codes give visible cohesion and order to the subjects, and plainly indicate the rank (primary, secondary, or tertiary) of each category. Rank is evident in both of the following arrangements, but it would not be evident if one of the uncoded subject categories stood alone:

[1] Agencies and bureaus now using the Subject-Numeric code include Agriculture, Air Force, Veterans Administration, Public Health Service, Geological Survey, General Services Administration, Atomic Energy Commission, Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Small Business Administration, Federal Aviation Agency, and Bureau of Labor Standards.

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PERSONNEL	PE	PERSONNEL
Leave	PE 1	Leave
Annual	PE 1-1	Annual
Sick	PE 1-2	Sick

Design of Codes

By combining numbers and letters of the alphabet, singly and in groups, it is possible to come up with an almost unending variety of file-code symbols. But if the coding scheme is to accomplish its purpose of speeding production, it must be designed so it will lend itself to quick comprehension and use. This requires that the symbols be easy to read, and at the primary level, at least, easy to memorize. These requirements are satisfied by codes that are:

1. *Short.* Each symbol should be restricted to a few characters (letters and/or numbers), preferably not more than five.
2. *Simple.* A complex construction with variations in composition should be avoided. The pattern should be obvious by glancing at the classification outline.
3. *Meaningful.* If otherwise practical, the symbols for the primaries should be meaningful rather than abstract. Use letters to suggest the subject, like "RM" for "RECORDS MANAGEMENT," rather than a number.
4. *Segmented.* Components of symbols should be in segments, instead of in one group of letters and/or numbers; for example, "PE 1-2," instead of "2117.6." Segmented symbols are not only easy to read but also helpful in denoting the level of classification.

HOW FILE CODES SAVE WRITING TIME

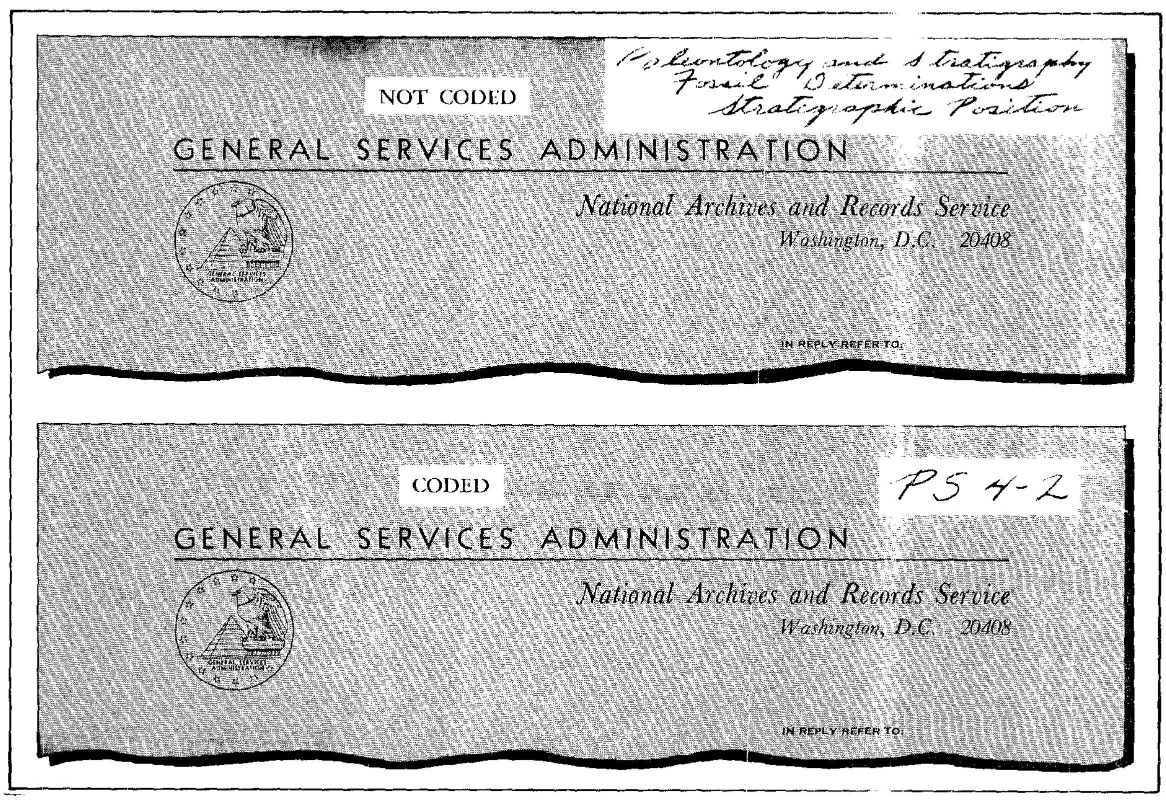

Figure 9

5. *Flexible.* The coding scheme must be flexible enough to permit the addition of new subjects without changing the symbols assigned to other subjects and without breaking the continuity of the pattern.

The helpfulness of easily-remembered symbols is pointed up in this statement by an official of the Motor Vehicles Department of the District of Columbia:

"In auto license plates we have tried many symbols and numeric combinations. Several years ago we adopted a system whereby a license plate has no more than five characters; that is, a two-letter prefix followed by three numerals. This system has been well received. We cannot recall a single incident where an owner has complained that he could not remember his tag number because of the combination. This was a common complaint with the previous systems that we tried." (In previous systems, numbers were written as 841627, 8–41627, 84–1627.)

Multipurpose Codes

An agency can use the same coding scheme for filing that it applies to such activities as routing its mail, or controlling its directives, forms and reports. The Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, is now using such a multipurpose code. Figure 10 illustrates the pattern of the Forest Service multipurpose code and how it is applied to different types of documents.

Under the above arrangement, the same code number that is used in filing a letter is also used as the control number for a directive, report, or form, or for routing mail on the same subject. Code "2430" has come to mean *commercial timber sales* in all Forest Service communications, whether oral, handwritten, typed, or printed.

Intrigued by the possibilites of the multipurpose code, including the possibility of using it in electronic data processing, a number of other Federal agencies have also adopted the principle. The purposes for which such codes are used vary from agency to agency, but most of them follow a similar pattern of construction. Numbers instead of letters are favored, and the digits are used to indicate organizational levels. The thousands usually stand for a major division of organization, as, for example, the use of "2000," to represent the Forest Service grouping of various divisions under the broad area of "National Forest Resource Management." An agency which has clear-cut assignments of functions coinciding with its formal organization structure, is a good candidate for a multipurpose code. In such an agency, there will be a marked parallelism between the subject topics actually fitting the records, and the titles on the organization chart.

FOREST SERVICE MULTIPURPOSE CODE PATTERN

1000 ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT
2000 NATIONAL FOREST RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
  2400 Timber Management
→ 2430 Commercial Timber Sales
3000 STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

Type of Document Applied To	*Coded*
Letter to a timber buyer	2430
Directive on timber sale procedure	2430
Form for timber sales contracts	2430
Report of timber sold	2430

Figure 10

The systems analyst who converts an existing filing system to one employing a multipurpose code, selects file codes representing primary, secondary, or tertiary categories in the master multipurpose coding scheme. He can always expand the master multipurpose code by adding further subdivisions to his subject outline when the volume and variety of records demands it. Figure 11 illustrates a page from the Forest Service filing manual. Note how the lowest classification level of the master code scheme (for example, "2430—Commercial Timber Sales") has been further subdivided for file classification purposes.

Whatever code is selected—numeric, alphabetic, subject-numeric, or a more elaborate scheme—and for whatever other purposes it may be used, the fact remains that the code in itself is simply a production aid, a shortcut in readying papers for file. The order of the file, good or bad, is reflected not by the code, but by the precision of the subject topics selected, and of the classification structure reflecting the relationship of the topics.

SAMPLE PAGE FROM FOREST SERVICE HANDBOOK ON FILE SYSTEM

Use the outline below for material regarding management of the timber resource, its protection and utilization, including plans, appraisals, sales, reforestation, and stand improvement work. Case folder as needed. See 4100, Forest Management Research, for research cooperation; 5150, Prescribed Burning, for hazard reduction, 5300, Trespass, for timber trespass cases, and 1380, Reports, for recurring reports which are not properly a part of a case folder.

	Disposition (Years)			
	WO	R & ES	All Other	To FRC
2400 Timber	P	P	5	2
1 Inquiries	½	½	½	-
2 Studies, Administrative	5	5	5	2
2410 Plans (Folder by plan.)	P	P	5	2
1 Inventory (Including surveys.)				
2 Sustained-Yield Units				
2420 Appraisal (Including policies, rate redetermination, and millscale studies.)	P	P	6	2
2430 Commercial *-Timber-* Sales	P	P	6	2
1 Miscellaneous Products				
2 Presale Preparation (Folder by "Chance" or area.)				
3 Timber Sales (Including appraisal, prospectus, advertising, bids, award, reports, payments. Folder by name, date, and/or number.)				
2440 Sale Cruises, Marking, and Volume	P	P	6	2
1 Designating (Including marking.)				
2 Sale Cruises				
3 Scaling and Measuring				
*-2450 Commercial Timber Sale Contracts (Under new contract forms).				
2460 Other Than Commercial Timber Sales	P	P	6	2
1 Administrative Use				
2 Diseased Materials				
3 Free Use				
4 Settlement-*				

Forest Service Handbook -31- *-June 1965 Amendment No. 9-*

Figure 11

V. PREPARING THE MANUAL—THE PRELIMINARIES

A manual provides the guidance needed to maintain a filing system. This guidance is helpful in every file station, and it is essential in the larger stations. To be sure, a file custodian soon memorizes most of the subject categories and knows exactly where to look for documents repeatedly requested. Many papers, though, are not repetitive. Even the most proficient recordkeeper will have occasion to consult a manual.

Sizing Up the Project

It is extremely difficult to gauge the time required to meet an agency's needs for filing manuals. Much depends on the decision with respect to how many manuals are needed and on the extent of records coverage planned. (See chapter II.) The volume of records and the effectiveness of existing manuals will help in measuring the extent of the project in the older, well-established agencies. But in the newer agencies where functions are not always clearly defined and subject classifications have not yet evolved, the time needed for the manual project is disproportionate to the volume of records. Similarly, more time is always needed in those agencies engaged in highly technical activities.

In every agency enough time must be allowed to analyze program records and select terms representative of program activities. General administrative (housekeeping) records, common throughout Government, are so standard in their subject content that they should no longer be a problem. In fact, standard subject outlines for general administrative records are available from the National Archives and Records Service.

The systems analyst must consider all of these factors when scheduling his project. He must remember, too, that the end result to which his efforts are directed may be a manual or several manuals which could include all, or any combination of the following:

1. A statement by a top-side executive, endorsing the manual as an official guide in classifying and filing records.
2. Procedures on how to classify, index, and file records.
3. Standards for approved records equipment and supplies.
4. Exhibits illustrating approved physical housing of records and recordkeeping procedures.
5. Needed subject classification outlines with corresponding code symbols.
6. Alphabetic (relative) index listings to the subject outlines.
7. A glossary of procedural terms.
8. A conversion table comparing the file-code designations of a previously used system with those to be prescribed by the manual.
9. Records disposition instructions based on schedules approved by Congress.
10. Instructions on the structure of related case or project files, or of other special types of records common to many file stations.
11. A file station directory providing a detailed listing of the different types of records authorized to be kept at each of the many file stations of a large organizational segment of the agency, such as its headquarters offices.

Undertaking a Comprehensive Files Improvement Project

From this above listing, particularly items 9, 10, and 11, it can be seen that the filing manual project may well be a part of a comprehensive agency files improvement project. A comprehensive project could embrace far more than merely controlling the subject-filed general correspondence type of records at each file station. The subject files probably would comprise no more than 10 percent of the total agency records. As indicated in chapter II, the project goal could very well be to improve the maintenance of all types of agency records at all file locations.

The project might, among other things, be concerned with the proper placement of records among the many separate file stations within a large organizational segment of an agency, for example, its headquarters offices. The resulting file station directory could provide a detailed listing of each basic type of record authorized to be kept at each file station of the headquarters offices. This directory would furnish guidance on who is authorized to keep what records where within an integrated network of file stations. The Records Management Handbook, *File Stations*, describes in detail how to prepare file station directories.

The project might also be concerned with updating and improving the agency records disposition authorizations. Many agencies consider it desirable to coordinate their records control schedules with their uniform filing systems. Sometimes they include disposition instructions as part of the classification outline of a manual. Figure 11, illustrated such a system adopted by the Forest Service.

How much of a comprehensive files improvement project can be undertaken at one time will vary from agency to agency. The larger and more complex an agency, the more difficult if not impossible it is to accomplish simultaneously all the worthwhile goals listed previously in this chapter. Similarly, the systems analyst must beware of trying to do too much with his agency filing manual. Too many different types of records guides improperly lumped together into one overlarge publication are confusing.

Inclusion of approved subject filing systems, systems for related case or project records, file station directories, and file disposition guides all in one manual could make it so unwieldly as to defeat its purpose at each file station. If a comprehensive files improvement project is warranted at a particular agency, special care must be exercised to issue the resulting records guides as a usable series of publications. Further, the series of coordinated publications should be a part of the agency directives system.

The systems analyst should, however, remember that the primary purpose of a filing manual is to control the structure of the subject-filed general correspondence type of records at each file station. Therefore, of the 11 items listed previously as possibly being included in his manual, he should concentrate on item 5 covering subject classification outlines. Classification outlines were discussed in chapter III. They are the heart of the manual system, and their preparation is the most time-consuming operation in the manual project.

Taking Inventory

The classification outlines of all successful filing manuals have one basic attribute. They fit closely the actual records whose arrangement they are controlling. The outlines fit the records regardless of whether they are in small office files or in larger centralized files, or are in field or headquarters offices. To achieve this needed tailoring of manual subjects to records, the systems analyst, using the inventory process, must obtain as precise information as possible about the records his manual is to be applied to.

Before starting the inventory, the analyst should have decided exactly which of his agency records the manual is going to control. He should know the answers to such questions as: Will the classification outlines apply only to the general correspondence type of records at each file station? Or, in addition, are references to related case, project, or other special types of files to be included in the outlines? Will disposition instructions be included as part of the outlines? If so, will coverage of all agency records be required? The answers decided upon will profoundly affect the inventory planning.

Inventory Methods. In the planning stage, two basic choices concerning inventory methods should be made. One involves who will collect the data. Will trained records analysts personally collect the data by visiting all the many records locations within the agency? Or, should a questionnaire type of inventory be undertaken? Agency size, project deadlines, geographic factors, and availability of trained analysts will point to the proper answer.

The other choice involves how the collected data will be analyzed. Should the data be hand-transcribed to slips or cards for manual manipulation? Or, should machine processing using punched cards be considered? Machine processing has been most effectively used in agencies where comprehensive files improvement projects have been undertaken. Machine processing can save time in preparing drafts of classification outlines. In addition to processing the subjects of the outlines, the punched cards can also be used in preparing the alphabetic (relative) index listings, needed file station directories, and revised records control schedules.

The machine method should not be relied on as always appropriate in preparing the subject outlines and other related records guides. Experience with the technique is still limited to a relatively few organizations, including the Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance, the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Civil Service Commission, the General Services Administration, and the Bureau of the Census. Before adopting the method, the systems analyst must study its feasibility against the background of his own agency.

Needed Inventory Information. Regardless of the scope of the proposed project, the analyst needs precise information on agency functions and organizational patterns. If he is not familiar with the agency, he should consult agency organization charts, functional statements, procedure manuals, periodic reports, budget presentations, and the like to obtain this basic knowledge.

To prepare classification outlines, the analyst needs two basic kinds of information about the records maintained at each file station. He should have: (1) general information about each separate collection of similar-type records (file series) presently being maintained; and (2) detailed, precise information covering the key file series at each location—the general correspondence type of records whose structure is to be controlled by the topics of the subject outlines.

The better classification outlines include more than just a listing of subject topics controlling the structure of the subject-filed general correspondence records at each location. They include references to related case, project, or other special types of records commonly kept at a majority of the records locations. To prepare such subject outlines, the analyst needs the first kind of data—general information about all of the separate records collections at each location. In addition, he can be helped by the descriptive title of each case, project, or other special records collection included in the inventory. Such titles will suggest subjects to be incorporated into the classification outlines.

The systems analyst uses an inventory form to record this general type of information concerning the separate records collections at each file location. A good prototype is the "Records Inventory and Files Data" form, figure 12, used by the U.S. Civil Service Commission in connection with a comprehensive files improvement project. From data mainly obtained on this form were prepared file classification outlines (including references to related case, project, or other special-type files); a relative index; a file station directory covering all records of headquarters offices; and revised records control schedules. The machine-processing method was used. Note particularly in the upper right corner of the form the listing of the internal and external functions of the Commission. They represent the analyst's pre-inventory judgment of preliminary broad categories under which to group suggested subject topics.

Special Data on Subject Files. The second kind of records information the analyst should have, special data on the subject files at each file station, is used specifically in selecting needed subject topics for the outlines. The key data he wants from each file location is a

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SAMPLE OF A RECORDS INVENTORY FORM

THIS FILE IS: 1. ☐ A SERIES 2. ☐ AN ITEM

SERIES NUMBER

FUNCTION NUMBER

TITLE *(Attempt to place Functional word first and shorten lengthy titles)*

OFFICE OF PRIMARY INTEREST? 1. ☐ YES 2. ☐ NO

SCHEDULED FOR RECORDS CONTROL? 1. ☐ YES 2. ☐ NO

IF SCHEDULED, GIVE SCHEDULE NUMBER(S)

RETENTION OR DISPOSITION INFORMATION

1. ☐ DESTROY
2. ☐ TRANSFER

PERIOD OF TIME | AFTER WHAT EVENT?

3. ☐ RETAIN

DATE OF OLDEST RECORD | DATE OF MOST RECENT RECORD

FREQUENCY OF USE

1. ☐ OFTEN *(More than once a month)* 2. ☐ SELDOM *(Less than once a month)* 3. ☐ NEVER

FUNCTIONS

INTERNAL *(Housekeeping)*

1. Administrative Management
2. Administrative Services
3. Budget and Fiscal
4. Information Services
5. Personnel
6. Committee Management

EXTERNAL *(Substantive or Program)* FUNCTIONS

7. Appeals
8. Classification and Compensation
9. Employee Management Relations
10. Employee Development and Utilization
11. Examining and Recruitment
12. Inspection
13. Insurance, Health and Safety
14. Legislation and Litigation
15. Personnel Program Development
16. Employee Security, Loyalty and Suitability
17. Placement
18. Retirement
19. Veteran Preference
20. Other *(Specify)*

SUB FUNCTION

IF A SERIES

TYPE: 1. ☐ SUBJECT 2. ☐ PROJECT 3. ☐ CASE 4. ☐ CONTROLS, INDEXES, READING AND CHRONOLOGICAL FILE, ETC.

CONTENT: 1. ☐ OFFICIAL RECORD 2. ☐ REFERENCE OR EXTRA COPY 3. ☐ MIXTURE

VOLUME → NUMBER AND SIZE OF DRAWERS | NO. OF CU. FT.

IF AN ITEM

1. ☐ RECORD MATERIAL
2. ☐ REFERENCE OR EXTRA COPY
3. ☐ REPRODUCED MATERIAL
4. ☐ PROJ. OR SPECIAL ASSGM'T.
5. ☐ MIXTURE
6. ☐ OTHER *(Specify)*

VOLUME → NUMBER OF FOLDERS OR NUMBER OF INCHES

TEST FORM 61 - 1 (6-61) RECORDS INVENTORY AND FILES DATA NARS - CSC RECORDS SURVEY

Figure 12

listing of suggested subject topics descriptive of the records whose structure is to be controlled by the classification outlines. Regardless of whether this listing represents the existing subject folder labels being used, or includes subject changes proposed by the station, it should cover completely the active subject-filed folders at the station. In addition, the analyst needs data on the estimated volume of subject-filed records which will be accumulated at each file station before file cutoff. The volume data aids in gauging the number and breadth of needed topics.

A general purpose inventory form of the type illustrated in figure 12 does not have the space needed for recording these special subject listings and volume estimates covering just the subject-filed records. Normally, each file station enters this special information on blank sheets of paper. The sheets can be attached to the appropriate inventory form describing the subject-filed general correspondence records of the station.

The Preview

Assuming the systems analyst is involved in a questionnaire type of inventory, several weeks will be needed—perhaps longer—to obtain the completed inventory forms and the special sheets containing the subject lists and volume estimates. During this waiting period, the analyst can spend his time profitably on:

1. *Reviewing the inventory job being done at selected file stations.* The quality of the classification outlines, file station directories, or other end-product records guides of a questionnaire-type inventory is dependent upon the accuracy of the data submitted.
2. *Unravelling knotty problems of organization and functions through conferences with knowledgeable officials.* These preliminary conferences should resolve any doubts about broad administrative (budget, personnel, fiscal, etc.) and program (old-age insurance, medi-

VI. PREPARING THE MANUAL—THE STEPS

Once the needed inventory information is at hand, the systems analyst is ready to begin a series of steps to convert the raw inventory data into one or more published filing manuals ready to be distributed to agency recordkeepers.

Developing Subject Classification Outlines With Index Cards

Although punched cards are becoming increasingly useful in the machine processing of subject outlines, the manual method employing plain index cards or slips of paper is still more commonly used.

Sorting Subjects. When the inventory is completed, the first step is the grouping of suggested subjects by categories. If one comprehensive manual is planned, all of the lists of suggested subjects and related inventory forms provide raw material for subject classification outlines. If several manuals are planned, the subject lists and related inventory forms must be separated into groups representing the subject matter of each manual.

ROUGH SORT OF SUGGESTED SUBJECTS

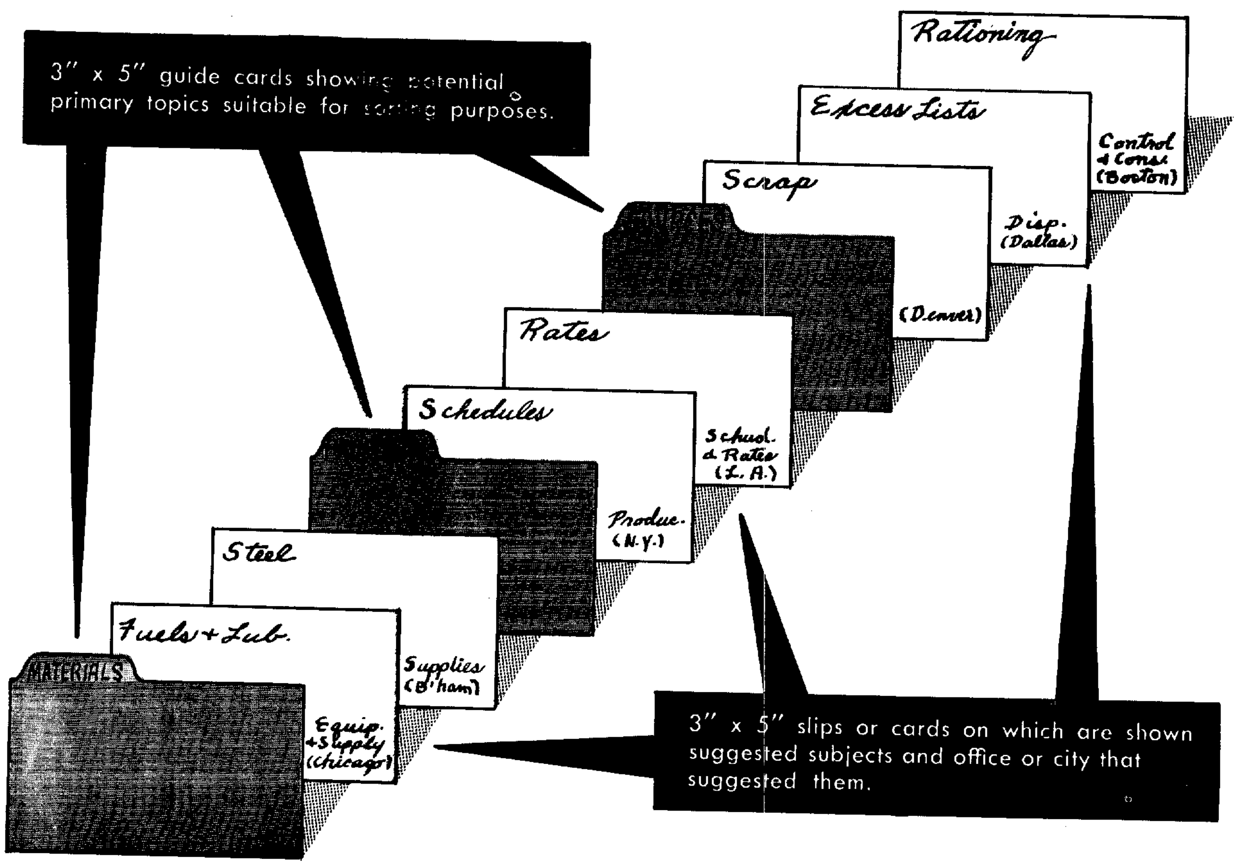

Figure 13

care, etc.) functions and responsibilities for carrying them out.

3. *Listing subjects recognized through this preview as representative of program activities.* Such a preliminary listing will be helpful in bringing order to the many subjects which will be suggested as a result of the inventory. In some surveys, the analyst may feel he has enough knowledge to determine the preliminary broad categories (potential primaries) prior to beginning the inventory. In any event, if the preview uncovers potential subordinate as well as primary topics, this preliminary listing should be organized in hierarchical order; that is, with related subordinate headings grouped under their primary topic.

4. *Studying the terminology and structure of classification manuals used in comparable organizations.* A manual that has proved its worthiness may suggest many helpful techniques and potential subjects.

The sheer volume of subjects suggested, the diversity of terms, and the lack of consistency among lists—all indicate the need for arraying the miscellany into manageable units. Here is a simple method employing 3- by 5-inch cards or slips of paper:

1. For each subject suggested, prepare a card showing (a) the subject, (b) the broader subject, if any, under which it may have been listed, and (c) the name of the office suggesting the subject. A card should be made on every subject submitted, regardless of whether the subject seems good or bad. (Additional subjects not included on a file station subject list may be uncovered by checking through the file title entries of the inventory forms submitted by the station.) Most analysts find that by using abbreviations, it is easier to write the cards in longhand than to insert them in a machine for typing.
2. Sort the cards into groups representing the primary subject categories that seem most suitable. (The data obtained in the preview may point to these preliminary primaries.) A separate card is made each time a subject is suggested, even though it may be a duplicate. Duplicate cards serve to verify the need for a subject.
3. Arrange the cards in a file box or drawer designed for 3- by 5-inch cards. Use first (left) position guide cards for each of the preliminary primary topics under which the subject cards are being grouped. See figure 13.

As the subject lists and related inventory forms are examined during this sorting process, special attention should be given to significant similarities in records, types and characteristics of records, volume ranges, and unique filing requirements in individual file stations. Conditions pointed up by information like this may suggest the need for such actions as consolidating file stations, developing nonconventional filing systems, or providing supplemental filing manuals for unique situations.

Analyzing Subjects. A large number of cards collected under a preliminary primary category may be the sign that the category is too broad. The cards should be resorted into several groups, each of which is represented by a somewhat more specific primary subject than the original one. New first position guide cards are then put in place for these new primary subjects and appropriate subject cards are placed behind them. For example, if a large number of cards are batched under the primary subject "RESEARCH," the cards for this subject can be subdivided into groups represented by such primary topics as "MEDICAL RESEARCH" and "INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH."

On the other hand, a few cards under a primary subject may be the tipoff to combine this primary with another. "PERSONNEL," for example, would be an appropriate primary for combining a few cards found under the original primaries "CIVILIAN PERSONNEL,' "MILITARY PERSONNEL," and "TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES." Of course, a broad subject in no way related to another one should be retained, even though it attracts only a few cards.

When the number of primary subjects seems reasonably well balanced, and the analyst has an understanding of the kinds of records expected to be filed under each primary, he is ready to subdivide the cards into secondary and tertiary breakdowns. Inevitably, the subjects suggested at these levels by the file stations will contradict one another on the hierarchical relationship. The agency's Chicago office may suggest "Withholding Taxes" as a subdivision of "Payroll and Salaries," while the New York office may relate "Withholding Taxes" to "Taxation." Yet another office may have no real convictions on the subject relationships, merely suggesting the possibility of subordinating "Withholding Taxes" to "Deductions." Resolution of differences like these requires logic and judgment in predicting information needs.

The analyst should avoid using terms for secondary or tertiary topics which result either in too broad or too narrow topic coverage, or in overlapping subjects within the same classification level. If two or more slips contain subjects which are almost but not quite identical, *he either selects a term that embraces them all,* such as:

Innoculation Vaccination Segregation Quarantine Hygiene Sanitation	Preventive Medicine

or he provides combination titles, such as:

Training Indoctrination Instruction Education Orientation	Education and Training

These techniques prevent the establishment of subjects which are not sufficiently exclusive of one another to be useful as secondary topics; yet they provide a place where more specific topics can be added as tertiary breakdowns if records volume requires further division.

As secondary subjects are determined, needed second-position guide cards can be added to the file box and the appropriate subject cards can be placed behind them. Similarly, third position guides can be added to make a place for tertiary subject cards.

Resolving Special Problems. At this phase of the project, decisions should be made regarding certain types of records which traditionally create subject filing problems. Such records include those relating to: *reports, organization* and *management* matters, *committees* and *boards* or *meetings* and *conferences, policy* and *planning* matters, and *public information* activities.

Several methods are available to the systems analyst in arraying subject categories so as to reduce the built-in cross-referencing potential of these types of materials. The agency's records volume and reference requirements should guide the analyst in selecting the method best suited.

"General only" primary topics may be established using such terms as "REPORTS," "ORGANIZATION—MANAGEMENT," or "COMMITTEES—MEETINGS." In this case, the manual should specify that only those general reports embracing several of the manual's other primary topics are to be filed under the general primary "REPORTS"; likewise, only pertinent documents of similar broad coverage are to be filed under the primaries "ORGANIZATION—MANAGEMENT" or "COMMITTEES—MEETINGS." It should be made clear that any document of this class relating to only one of the regular primary topics of the manual should be filed under that specific primary topic.

Sometimes systems analysts try to segregate *within each primary topic of the manual* the records concerning reports, or organization and management, or committees and meetings, or policy and planning. They do this by establishing separate subordinate topics for these types of materials within as many primary topics of the manual as required. Attempts to segregate important policy and planning papers by establishing under each primary a secondary topic such as "Policies—Plans" are particularly difficult to accomplish. The ridicule of the policy and procedure file, as a catchall for everything from advertisements to Presidential proclamations, is bound to make a systems analyst wary of this classification.

Records concerning supplying *public information* pose another sort of problem. Many times such materials can concern public-relations matters; development, review and clearance of external publications; printing and distribution of all agency publications; and other information services. Some agencies are so organized that all these functions are intertwined. Other agencies may have assigned certain of these functions to entirely separate organizational units. Agency organizational patterns will guide in determining whether to combine all records of this type under a broad primary such as "INFORMATION SERVICES," or to establish several separate primaries for them.

Preparing the First Draft. The first draft of a subject classification outline can be typed from the 3- by 5-cards, which are now arranged

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as primary, secondary, and tertiary subjects. Here are six tips:

1. *Sequence of primary topics.* Consider separating into two subject outlines the subjects for *administrative* (facilitative, housekeeping) and *program* (mission, substantive) functions. Some manuals intermix both administrative and program subjects to provide one classification outline with all primary subjects listed in straight alphabetic sequence. Administrative records, however, usually have shorter retention periods than program records. To facilitate disposal, the better manuals divide the listing of primary topics into two outlines, one for administrative and one for program subjects. The primary topics within each of the two outlines are then alphabetized. (Closely related primaries may be kept in sequence without regard to the alphabet.)

2. *Indentation.* Indent secondary and tertiary subjects to indicate clearly their relative positions.

3. *Names and titles.* Unless there is some unusual reason for including them, omit names or titles of specific persons, places, or organizations.

4. *Codes.* Do not try to code the subjects at this stage of the project. Codes are not introduced until the final draft is prepared.

5. *Index.* Similarly, withhold preparation of the alphabetic (relative) index until all subject categories are firmly established. It is a good idea, though, to note the cards with terms or synonyms that seem likely candidates for the index.

6. *Review.* Finally, review the classification outlines with knowledgeable agency personnel who can offer comments and suggestions. Use personal visits and discussions wherever possible. The proprietary interest of these persons is essential to the eventual success of the system.

Developing Subject Classification Outlines With Punched Cards

Inventory information gathered for machine processing is used not only for subject classification outlines, but also for relative index listings, and for needed file station directories. It can also be useful in updating records disposition schedules.

Normally, a questionnaire-type inventory is undertaken. Inventory forms similar to figure 12 are prepared by recordkeepers. They are then reviewed and coordinated by records management representatives in the major organizational units. See the Records Management Handbook, *File Stations,* for additional information on the establishment of records liaison representatives and other actions involving a questionnaire type of inventory.

Of special interest in the development of classification outlines is the proper punching into cards of the suggested subject topics and of the file title entries of the inventory forms. Emphasis is placed on determining the keyword or words of the file titles shown. The keywords are underscored to insure correct punching in the data processing facility available to the systems analyst.

Machine runs of correctly encoded and sorted decks of punched cards can produce needed printed listings. Such machine listings are then used in preparing whatever end-product record guides are to result from the project. A key machine listing necessary to prepare classification outlines is one which closely parallels the manually sorted 3- by 5-inch slips illustrated in figure 13. This listing groups suggested terms under the predetermined broad categories (functions). Each entry of the listing shows an organization code symbol indicating the office from which the term was derived.

The systems analyst should then refine this rough machine listing of terms grouped under broad potential primary topics (functions). As in the case of the manual method, he should first decide on the correctness of his predetermined broad categories. Once he has the proper primaries and can roughly define their scope, he is ready to work on the subordinate topics (subfunctions). He should choose proper captions to reflect the subfunctions represented. He should also insure that the subordinate subjects are properly arrayed in hierarchical fashion, with related tertiaries being grouped under secondary topics, and the like.

This refinement of the rough machine listing is normally a manual operation. One or more sheets of paper can be used to record the subordinate topics of each broad potential primary. The finished draft of the classification outlines should then be reviewed with knowledgeable agency personnel who can offer comments and suggestions.

Reconstructing the Outlines

After the informal review by selected agency personnel, the draft of the classification outlines, whether produced manually or by machine, requires some basic changes in construction and terminology before it is ready for testing. Additional subjects will have to be fitted in place; other subjects will have to be deleted or rearranged. It is also advisable to take this opportunity to provide for subjects which, though not immediately needed, soon will be essential to file operations. Perhaps the agency has well-laid plans for a new program for which file subjects can now be stockpiled, ready for use when the program gets underway.

This editing is the opportunity to reduce technical terms to layman's language, wherever practical, and to make sure that the language conforms to agency lingo and is truly representative of the subject matter.

Preparing Supporting Materials

This stage of the project is also timely for preparing certain of the supporting materials needed to complete the manual, such as:

1. *An introduction.* The manual gets off to a good start with an introduction that states its purposes and fixes responsibility for its use and maintenance. Emphasis should be placed on the responsibilities of program directors and staff members, as well as of recordkeepers, with a word of recognition for those who have contributed to the project. Later, when the manual is published, an appropriate signature should be obtained for the introduction—preferably from a top-side official.
2. *Instructions on procedures.* One section of the manual should be set aside for a statement of the policy on additions and modifications. In this section, an appeal is made for everyone's cooperation in helping the filing system to retain its character and serve its purpose. Here, too, is the appropriate place for instructions on adapting the manual to fit the records at each file station, and for standard procedures on classifying, indexing, cross-referencing, charge-outs, folderizing, using standard supply items, and the like.
3. *Illustrations.* Illustrations help in getting across to recordkeepers how they should install the standard systems and filing procedures enunciated by the manual. When preparing the standard recordkeeping procedures, the analyst should note appropriate places to insert drawings, photographs, or other illustrative materials to serve as figures within the manual. Later, when the manual is being readied for printing, arrangements should be made to obtain needed graphics in final form.
4. *Explanatory notations (definitions of subject coverage).* A listing of subject categories is not in itself sufficient; subject captions can mean different things to different people. Definitions of subject coverage are, therefore, incorporated into outlines to reduce the chances of misinterpretation. Some definitions may have already been included prior to the informal review of the outlines. Definitions are placed to the right of secondary and tertiary topics, and at the top of a page on which a primary subject is introduced. Needed special filing instructions, such as those for case-filed subarrangements, should also be inserted at appropriate locations within the outline.

   As a minimum, a definition of coverage should be included for each primary topic. Basically, the definition indicates the kinds of records intended to be filed under the primary category and its subordinate subjects. Definitions also normally contain "SEE" references to subjects that might be sought under the primary but for various reasons are located elsewhere in the manual. For example, the subject "Procurement" is commonly sought under the primary "SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT." The procurement activities of some organizations are so many and diverse that the "Procurement" category must be elevated to a primary topic. The notation preceding the primary "SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT" then calls attention to the fact that "PROCUREMENT" is a primary elsewhere in the manual.

See figure 14 for an example of the

EXAMPLE OF EXPLANATORY NOTATIONS WITHIN A CLASSIFICATION OUTLINE

AUTOMATIC DATA PROCESSING (ADP)

INCLUDE records on applying automatic data processing equipment and techniques to facilitate *internal* GSA operations. Specifically, include records on: planning for use of ADP in obtaining specific program or administrative reports and required information; special studies or projects covering specific proposed applications including the feasibility of systems, designing systems requirements, and formation of committees, study groups or teams for such projects; special training needed in automating operations; equipment capabilities and selection; services provided by central GSA data processing facilities; and on periodic accuracy checks, input controls, and analysis of data obtained through presently automated information systems, and the like.

EXCLUSIONS

SEE:

1. SUPPLIES—EQUIPMENT for records on the requisitioning of ADP equipment either by rental contracts or purchase, or on maintenance of such equipment.
2. SPECIAL FACILITIES—SERVICES for records on contracting for services of outside ADP consultants or experts.
3. APPROPRIATE PROGRAM SUBJECTS for records on GSA Government-wide responsibilities for improving automation techniques or computer usage within other government agencies.

(ADP) AUTOMATIC DATA PROCESSING

1 Equipment Selection—Capabilities (INCLUDE manufacturers' catalogs and literature; and material on outside computer installations and equipment shows.)

2 GSA Data Processing Facilities (INCLUDE requests for and services provided by the central GSA data processing facilities, Washington and regions.)

2–1 Requisitions for Data Processing Services (ESTABLISH case files as required.)

3 Information Systems (Automated) (INCLUDE specific applications, proposed or operating, concerning input information, accuracy checks, analysis of data obtained, etc.)

3–1 Proposed Systems (ESTABLISH individual case files, as required.)

3–2 Automated Systems (ESTABLISH individual case files, as required, for automated information systems.)

Figure 14

definitions and other special filing instructions included as notations within the General Services Administration filing manual.

Testing and Gaining Approval

A copy of the finished draft is presented for testing to each office in which it will be used, both in the field and in headquarters. If the manual is a comprehensive one, an office need be given only those segments of classification outlines in which it is interested.

In requesting an office to test the manual, it should be made clear that the test is to be

EXCERPTS FROM AN ALPHABETIC (RELATIVE) INDEX TO A SUBJECT OUTLINE

Note: The symbol (G) denotes a "General Only" primary category which should not be used for material that may be classified under a more specific category. The word "See" indicates that the subject category is further subdivided. In such cases, consult the subject outline to obtain the precise file code designation.

SUBJECT		*FILED UNDER*
Accidents:		
Employee		PERSONNEL 1
Vehicle		VEHICLES 2
Accounting	See	ACCOUNTING
Allotments		APPROPRIATIONS—BUDGET 3
Annual leave		PERSONNEL 4–1
Appointments:		
Committee members	(G)	COMMITTEES—MEETINGS
Personnel		PERSONNEL 3–2
Cable facilities		COMMUNICATIONS 2
Conferences	(G)	COMMITTEES—MEETINGS
Leave	See	PERSONNEL 4
Longevity pay increases		PERSONNEL 6–3
Property	See	PROPERTY
Accountable (real and personal)		PROPERTY 1
Damage (vehicles)		VEHICLES 2
Procurement of		PROCUREMENT 4
Receipts		ACCOUNTING 7
Records	See	RECORDS MANAGEMENT
Personnel		PERSONNEL 6
Property		PROPERTY 4
Visitors		INFORMATION SERVICES 3
Safety		SPACE—UTILITIES 4

Figure 15

completed and evaluated before existing systems are converted. The main requirement at this time is to determine whether the classification outlines adequately cover the subject field. As a convenience the offices testing the manual can make their suggestions on the draft by:

- Inserting missing subjects.
- Crossing out subjects that are not needed.
- Rearranging subjects that seem to be in the wrong place.
- Noting any other improvements.

A questionnaire accompanying the draft is helpful in getting the exact information wanted.

The Final Draft of the Classification Outlines

Preparation of the next, and hopefully the last, draft of the classification outlines should progress speedily. It primarily involves incorporating the suggestions accepted as a result of the test. Other improvements are also made at this time. Overlapping terms are sought out, standardized, and placed in proper hierarchical arrangement. Wording of unclear subject definitions is sharpened. The subordinate topics of each primary category are arrayed in some logical sequence, often, but not necessarily, alphabetical.

Finally, the file-code symbols of the prescribed code (see chapter IV) are prefixed to the properly sequenced topics. The symbols are arranged vertically—not zigzagged down the page. Alinement is at the left of the page, sufficiently close to the subjects to permit ease of reference. See figure 14.

The Alphabetical (Relative) Index

After the classification outlines have been completed, preparation of the relative index can get underway. For any except the simplest system, a relative index is essential. It is arranged in two columns. The first column (the "Subject" column) lists in alphabetic order, each of the topics contained in the subject outline and synonyms and other terms under which information might be sought. The second column opposite these terms (the "Filed Under" column) lists for each subject entry the file code symbol under which papers on that subject will be filed, and any other pertinent notations. See figure 15.

The relative index may be developed by writing or typing the basic information on 3- by 5-inch cards, which are then alphabetized and used for copy in typing the index. See figure 16. It may also be developed from the punched cards that are employed in putting together a subject classification outline.

The systems analyst can choose between two basic formats when preparing his relative index. Format 1 is a simple listing of headings in straight alphabetic sequence. Format 2 is also an alphabetic listing of headings, but related terms are indented under a keyword or phrase. If needed, more than one level of indention can be used. Format 2 is shown in figure 15.

Under format 1, the simple alphabetic listing, headings are inverted when necessary to bring keywords to the fore. Example:

Forms, design of
Forms, printing of
Forms, stocking of
Insurance, accident
Insurance, health
Insurance, life

Under format 2, the indented listing, if there is a similar clustering of headings under one keyword or phrase, the keyword is listed in alphabetic sequence, and the related subheadings are indented and listed under the keyword.

Under format 1, words of the same spelling but of different meaning, or other terms requiring explanation, are followed by identifying words or phrases in parenthesis. Example:

Lime (fruit)
Lime (limestone)
Order (arrangement)
Order (regulation)

Under format 2, the need for these parenthetical explanations is greatly reduced by using the keyword headings.

PREPARING A RELATIVE INDEX

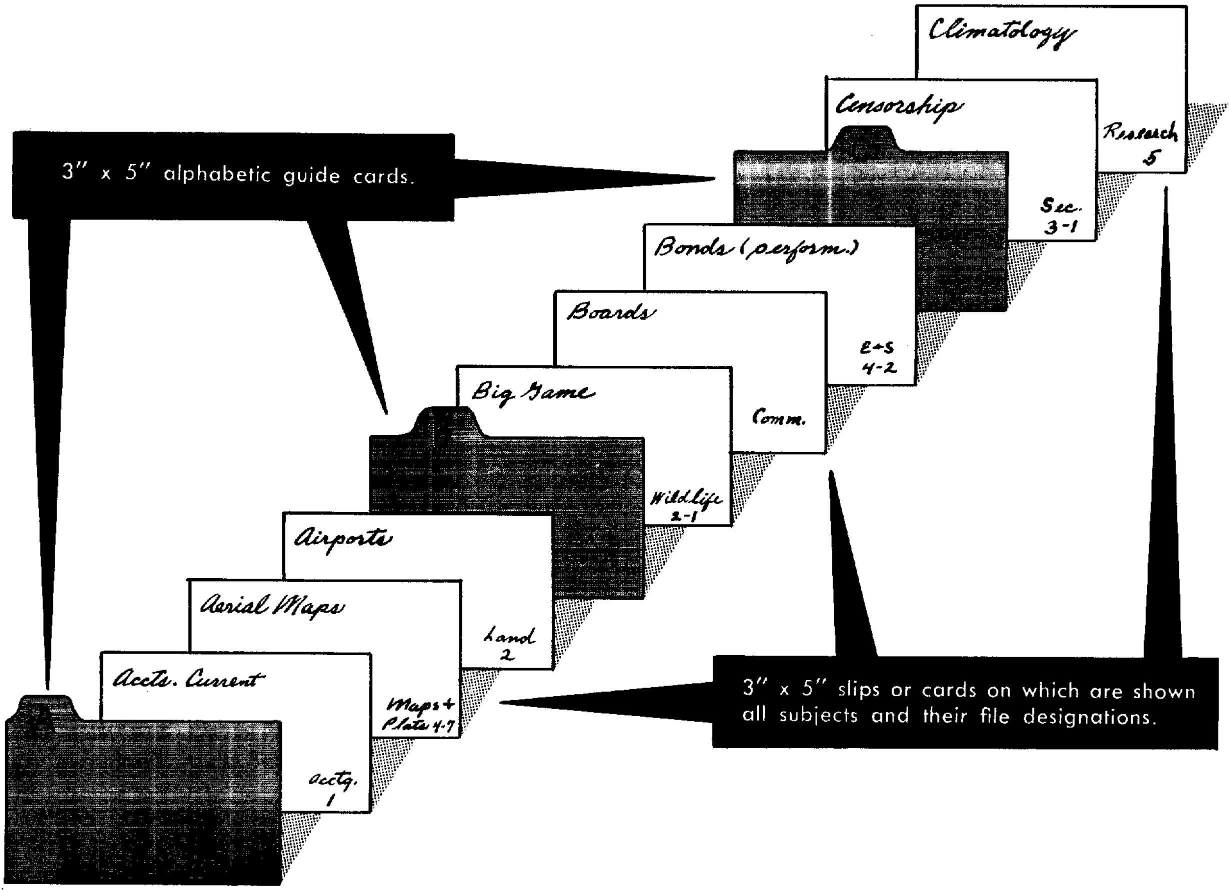

Figure 16

Under either format, if more than one word is in a caption, such as "Health insurance," entries normally are necessary under the first letter of each word (both under "H" for "health," and "I" for "insurance").

Records Disposition Instructions

Records managers will not dispute the desirability of coordinating records disposition plans (control schedules) with uniform systems for records arrangement (file manuals). They will not agree, however, that coordinating requires combining the two documents. The Department of the Army and the Forest Service are two of the agencies which favor combining classification outlines and records control schedules to reduce to one the guides recordkeepers must use.

Other agencies have found the records coverage of their classification outlines too restrictive to serve properly as both a file structure guide and a records control schedule. They have found that a bulky and hard-to-use document begins to emerge when they attempt to build the required total records coverage into their classification outlines.

These agencies, therefore, have used other records guides than their classification outlines as the media for combining records maintenance and disposition instructions. Some use their file station directories, while others require each file station to prepare its own "File Maintenance and Disposition Plan" for this purpose.

If disposition instructions are either to be built into the classification outlines or to be included as a separate segment of the manual, they should be readied in final form at this stage of the project.

The Conversion Table

One last guide to consider is a conversion table. If the filing system replaces an existing one, a conversion table will aid in assuring continuity of reference service and in orienting employees in the new filing scheme. It may also prove useful in future reference and research.

A conversion table need be nothing more than a simple listing of the old file designations, with corresponding new ones shown alongside. See figure 17. If it is not feasible for the systems analyst to provide the table, as it may not be when a number of files are converted, instructions can be issued to the file stations on how to prepare their own. Sometimes the new file designations can be written alongside the old ones in a manual being replaced.

EXCERPTS FROM CONVERSION TABLE FOR FILING SYSTEM CHANGEOVER

(OLD) *DECIMAL*		(NEW) *SUBJECT-NUMERIC*
230.54	Annual Leave	PE 4–2
230.55	Sick Leave	PE 4–3
230.56	Leave Without Pay	PE 4–4

Figure 17

Format of the Manual

The final packaging of the completed manual is the last step of this lengthy process. The cover of the manual should be distinctively designed, and produced on durable papers that will withstand many handlings. The date and the name of the office of origin appear on the cover or on the flyleaf, along with the directive number if there is one.

Revision Facility. Bound manuals do not lend themselves to the changes that are inherent in every filing system. A filing manual should always be printed on looseleaf, replaceable, prepunched pages, which are printed at least 1½ inches from the punched edge.

Divider Sheets. Tab dividers, with the tabs laminated if desired, are inserted to separate the major divisions of the manual. These tools of convenience increase the cost of the manual, but add much to its durability, facility, and appearance.

Typography. Preferably, different type sizes are used for primary, secondary, and tertiary subjects: The secondary subjects in smaller type than the primaries; the tertiaries in smaller type than the secondaries.

No detail contributing to the pleasing appearance of the manual is trivial. An eye-appealing manual attracts the attention that encourages its use.

VII. MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK

It is one thing to have a theoretically good filing system; it is another to have the system work efficiently. Here and there, throughout this manual, brief suggestions have been made about workability. Now, in this chapter, those suggestions will be elaborated and highlighted.

Placing the Responsibility

Whether an agency has one comprehensive filing manual or a coordinated system employing dozens of manuals, there should be one organizational unit responsible for overseeing further developments, maintenance, and change. Personnel should know where to go for interpretation of principles, whom to talk to about coding difficulties, who has authority to audit compliance and make changes, and from whom training is available.

Ideally a filing manual is part of the agency's directive system. When it acquires this status, the clearance procedures inherent in the directives system are abided by, both in development of the manual and in subsequent changes.

Training Recordkeepers

Deficiency in training is one of the main reasons for Federal filing problems. Training sessions are too few and too infrequent to meet the needs of the vast number of employees engaged in filing and finding.

Those who file and search the records of Government—usually the agency's file clerks, secretaries, and administrative aides—are bound to have many questions about the new manual. And because of the big turnover in this occupational group, the questions will be repeated by new employees as long as there is an office file.

Training sessions should be conducted in every agency and repeated often enough to insure that no recordkeeper will be on the job very long without adequate training. This need for training is not simply a matter of explaining how to put the "B's" behind the "A's." Fundamentals of the filing system must be presented in such a way that recordkeepers see themselves as important participants in an essential undertaking. To this end, trainees must be given the opportunity to apply techniques learned to the solution of their own filing problems.

Training in subject filing should point up:

1. *The principles and the benefits of the filing system.*
2. *The contents of the filing manual.* Each recordkeeper should know what records guides and standards are included in the manual, where to find them, and how they are organized.
3. *The subject categories covered by the system.* The classification outlines of the manual should be thoroughly reviewed during the sessions. Participants should understand the hierarchical structure of outlines, and the proposed records coverage of needed primary categories.
4. *Techniques of adapting the classification outlines to the records at each file station.* Participants should know how to select only those subjects from the outlines needed to fit the volume of subject-filed records in their offices. They also should understand how to add subjects to take care of gaps in manual coverage, and to prepare their own office subject outline reflecting the actual folder labels of their subject files.
5. *Procedures for installing the system.* The approved format of uniform guide, folder, and drawer labels for subject files should be explained. Participants should understand the prescribed arrangement pattern for standard file folders and guide cards, and the procedures for cutting off

the old files and beginning operations under the new system.

6. *Procedures for classifying papers.* Recordkeepers need to know how to select the correct subject from the manual to serve as the file designation of each paper to be filed under the system. They also should understand the proper use of indexes and cross-references. They should avoid indiscriminate cross-referencing which can produce more index sheets than documents in a subject file.
7. *Daily maintenance procedures.* Procedures involving the accurate placing of papers into the files, and searching for, charging out, and refiling of wanted papers should be explained.
8. *File cutoff and disposal procedures.* The system will gradually break down unless recordkeepers understand the need to apply file cutoff at least every 3 years, and to facilitate disposal by segregating short-lived records from those of more enduring value.

The Records Management Handbook, *Files Operations,* discusses in detail the basic techniques of planning for and operating a subject file at a file station in accordance with an agency file manual.

Auxiliary Indexes

Under certain circumstances, an alphabetic name index or a precedent index may be helpful in operating a subject file.

Alphabetic Name Index. An alphabetic name index is an aid to finding records arranged by subject when the requester specifies only the names of persons or organizations. These may either be the names of correspondents, or names mentioned within a document. In most instances, it is expected that the requester will provide adequate subject identification to find the record in the subject file.

This index is most needed by centralized records facilities as such units often receive many varied types of reference requests. The volume of subject-filed material in individual office subject files is usually small enough that a name index is not needed. Little difficulty should be encountered in finding records by subject.

Extensive use of this index in lieu of searching by subject is often a sign of trouble. The recordkeeper may have done a poor job of adapting the manual classification outlines to fit his records, or he may not be consistent in choosing the file designations of papers.

The index is composed of extra copies of documents or letter-size cross-reference forms arranged by name. When marking the extra index copy, the recordkeeper underlines the name under which it will be filed, and also indicates on the copy the subject file code of the main record in the subject file.

Precedent Index. The precedent index aids in locating documents of unusual importance or interest which might not readily be found when scattered among the regular files. The index consists of cross-references to documents selected by the recordkeeper as reflecting important opinions, orders, policies, organizational changes, administrative determinations, or other precedent-setting actions. The cross-reference sheets or cards are arranged alphabetically by selected subject topics or names. As long as the index proves useful, it is maintained as a continuous unbroken file.

Precedent indexes are most frequently used as auxiliary indexes to subject files maintained at high organizational levels, for example, the files of a department secretary or of a bureau chief. These top officials may find a precedent index a useful research tool in providing background information needed to maintain consistency in administrative actions. For example, an official may wish to have assembled all the documents on policy affecting fair employment practices. If such policy is established in subject-filed documents scattered among several collections in the agency and in a Federal Records Center, a properly maintained precedent index would be well suited to this task.

As a rule, a precedent index is not needed for the records of small file stations where the subject files are small enough to be easily

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searched through. The cost of maintaining the index would outweight potential benefits.

Auditing

Every file station where records are organized by subjects should be inspected periodically. When problems are encountered, the inspector must decide whether the system is at fault or whether the recordkeepers need more training. He especially looks for:

1. *Effectiveness with which the standard manual is used.* If the manual is not being used, he obtains a copy of the classification list by which the documents are being filed. If the standard manual is used ineffectively, he attempts to learn why.
2. *Duplicate files.*
3. *Overloaded file folders.* Overloading is often the sign that documents are kept in active files longer than need be.

Above all, the inspector should seek to learn whether information needs are being satisfied by the station and how long it takes to satisfy them. His total findings will point to the best course of action. A sound classification outline sharply coded, an adequate manual, and trained workers—these in total mean a filing system that supports and speeds office operations.

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