

Tips for Records Management: Handling Business Documents at ETH Zürich

Fundamental building blocks: The single data file

Staff working in ETH-units are encouraged to name their data files consistently. We recommend using the following template: [date] [subject] [author acronym].

Examples: 2016-03-22_invitation_mw.docx
 20160322-invitation-mw.docx

Putting dates first creates a chronological order and thus facilitates managing the files over time. It is best to avoid special characters and whitespaces. Please keep file names short as operating systems might have problems with long file paths.

If you are naming files containing minutes of meetings or reports, it is best to use the date of the meeting or the date when the report was handed in, not the date when you wrote the document.

If documents have different versions, their file name is marked as „draft“, while the very last version is marked as „final“.

Example: 2016-11-19_minutes_mw_final.docx

We recommend converting the final version into PDF (if possible PDF/A-1b). Please make sure to convert multiple spreadsheets into single PDF or CSV-files for each table.

Organize your records: The folders

Every document is part of a business process or project. All documents pertaining to a particular project are stored in one folder. The template for folder names is similar to the file name template above: [time span] [subject] [author acronym]

Examples: 2015-11_2016-02_moving_to_new_office_mw
 201511-201602_moving_to_new_office_mw

If necessary, extensive business processes are sectioned into sub-folders. Numbers or letters are added to the original folder name to link them logically.

Even more structure: The file plan

A file plan is a very useful tool to manage your business records in a systematic fashion. We recommend ETH-units to agree on a file plan to be used by all staff members collaboratively. The structure of the file plan should be based on the unit's main duties, projects, processes and business cases. The file plan is to remain unchanged for several years enabling staff members to browse the unit's files systematically. We recommend numbering the folders from 0 to 9 on each level of the file system.

Excerpt:

- 0 management
 - 00 general
 - 01 legal framework
 - 02 strategy
 - 020 general
 - 021 planning
 - 022 controlling
 - 03 operations
 - 04 communication
 - 040 general
 - 041 internal communication
 - 042 external communication
- 1 support
 - 10 general
 - 11 manage human resources
 - 12 manage finances

Individual project folders are stored below these fixed levels of the file plan. Additional metadata are managed in a separate document (table with columns for e.g. administrative delays, data privacy provisions, archival value).

Hybrid records management: paper and data files

In order to keep track of all your documents, use the same reference number and name for digital files and paper files. Label your boxes, plastic folders, presentation pockets, ring binders and also your postal mail in the same way.

No exceptions: emails are just another type of records

All emails necessary to understand a business process or a project are best stored in the folder where other records pertaining to this process are stored. Please convert your business records emails into PDF or TXT, including attachments. Emails with personal content or mere coffee/lunch dates are best left in your email inbox.

File names derived from the email's topic line often are too long for the file system. In this case, rename them using the name of the appropriate file plan folder.