

Manual
OF
Registry Procedures

MANUAL OF REGISTRY PROCEDURES

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1. RECORDING AND CIRCULATION OF INCOMING MAIL

(i) Registration

In registries where incoming mail is recorded on a date-receipt basis, retrieval problems occur especially in big Ministries.

Registry officers should register incoming mail by Ministry/Department/other organisation so as to ensure quicker retrieval of information.

(ii) Circulation Process

To ensure more efficient decision-taking and to minimise delay both at registry and user levels, the officer in charge of the registry should carry out daily a screening of the incoming mail to sort out urgent letters which should be filed immediately and submitted to the relevant schedule officer. He/she should then place a photocopy of such letters in the mail cover for circulation.

Only those letters dealing with policy issues or of specific interest should be seen by Ministers.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF FILING

(i) Punching of Folios

To ensure that all papers, files and records are kept clean and tidy at all times, every registry officer should make it a point of duty to see that every file or other records leaves their hands neat and tidy. All papers punched for filing *should have the hole in the same position near the upper left hand corner, i.e. one inch from the top of the paper and three-quarters of an inch from the side.*

(ii) Filing, cross-referencing and Transfer of Correspondence

(a) Filing

When an incoming letter has been filed, a folio number should be put on the top right-hand corner with a red pencil, and thereafter an appropriate entry should be made in the minute sheet and the entry underlined.

Registry officers should ensure that the record must not be falsified by the insertion of any folio between entries already made on a minute sheet. Such action is not in order as it may give the false impression that minutes appearing subsequently were written in full knowledge of the paper in question, as well as resulting in unsightly erasures.

It is perfectly right to keep entries in files in correct chronological order as far as possible but not at the expense of common sense or falsification of the record.

All officers concerned should refrain from such practice.

(b) Cross-referencing

- (i) If in the letter there will appear the following introductory words "with reference to your letter of....." the registry officer will have to look into the file to see at what folio has been filed the letter to which reference is made. If the letter is at folio (8), then folio (8) will have to be appropriately inserted in the margin of the incoming letter with a red pencil and the words "with reference to your letter of....." underlined again with a red pencil.

If the cross-referencing is to a correspondence on another file, then the cross-reference should be indicated as follows:

Reference Number of file
Number of folio

- (ii) Similar cross-referencing should be made on the file copy of any outgoing letter.

(c) Transfer of Correspondence

If for any reason a Schedule Officer directs that a folio should be transferred to another file, a 'Transfer Slip' should be inserted in the place left vacant by the transfer of the folio. Please see *Appendix 'A'* which shows the 'Transfer Slip' which would apply, if, for instance, fol. (7) in file 'X' is transferred to file 'Y' as fol. (10).

If any minutes are copied to another file, this should be indicated in the margin in the minute sheet.

- (d) Unnecessary flags and unnecessary odd pieces of paper should be removed.
- (e) If the file is bulky, a new volume should be opened.
- (f) See whether any decision taken lately on the file requires to be included in the appropriate list of precedents.

(iii) Opening of a new file and indexing

The decision whether or not to open a new file should be the responsibility of the officer-in-charge of the Registry. The latter may do so in consultation with the relevant schedule officer, if need be.

(a) Allocation of reference numbers

When a paper is received, it is good to see whether a reference number is quoted on it. If so, the reference number should be checked against the title of the file in the index card on the file register to ensure that the reference quoted is correct. If no file reference is quoted and provided an appropriate file does not already exist, a file title should be selected and a file opened in which the letter should be placed. As soon as a new file is opened, care should be taken to include the file title and number in the file register and to build up a new index card.

(b) File Title

Whenever a new file is opened, care should be taken to ensure that the title conveys a clear indication of the subject matter. Hence, the subject matter as a whole should be taken into account before selecting for a file. Titles such as 'Miscellaneous/General' should be avoided as far as possible.

(c) Connected Files

If after a new file has been opened, it is noticed that another file is related to the new file, the reference number and title of the other file should be recorded in the appropriate place on the new file cover. Such indication often proves helpful to Schedule officers.

(iv) Flagging of Files

The conduct of business at all levels is greatly eased by the correct use of flags which show at a glance the type of action required by the recipient or the urgency of the matter.

Flags should be used without fail whenever appropriate, either singly or in combination — e.g. a file containing an urgent draft should be flagged both "Urgent" and "Draft", so that the flagging reads vertically

Urgent
Draft

The excessive use of the flags "Most Immediate", "Today" and "Urgent" defeats its purposes. These flags should therefore be used sparingly.

The flag "For Signature" should be used on all files containing any form of document for signature or initially either by the officer to whom it is submitted or by the latter's superior.

Flags should always be pinned inside the front cover of the file. The points of pins should *always* be buried.

It is the responsibility of each officer submitting a file to see that it is flagged as appropriate.

A flag should not be removed until action on the matter which gave rise to the use of the flag has been completed.

(v) Opening of new volume of file

The Registry officer should ensure that a new volume is opened if the file becomes bulky and that the volume number (for instance volume II, volume III as the case may be) is properly inserted on the file cover. It is sometimes said that a file should not contain more than 100 folios. This is but a rough indication because if after 50 folios, a file becomes bulky, a new volume should be opened. On the other hand, a file may still not be bulky after 125 folios. An appropriate index card should accordingly be made for the file.

When a new volume of the same file is opened, the numbering of folios and minutes must be consecutive, e.g Volume II should *not* start with fol. (1) but with the number next after the last number in the previous volume.

(vi) Disposal of Files

(a) *Bring Up System*

This is an important aspect of registry work as it helps to ensure that files on which action has to be taken at a later date are not lost sight of. Certain documents/returns have to be submitted by a fixed date according to law, and failure to comply with such date limit may entail embarrassing situations.

A diary should be used concurrently with updated index cards for an effective functioning of the 'Bring Up' System. The reference numbers of files should be clearly and accurately recorded in the diary on the appropriate date whereas the B.U. dates should be simultaneously posted on the respective index cards. B.U. files may be put in specific filing cabinet drawers or in armoires with numbered pigeon holes.

The diary may indicate that ten files have to be B.U. on a date whereas only nine files may be seen in the cabinet drawer or pigeon hole. The diary will thus help the registry officer to identify which file is missing.

(b) *Put Away System*

It is important that the P.A. system be correctly understood. The P.A. sign appearing in a file is operative only in regard to the officer who has written the P.A. sign but not to the officers who may have dealt with the file previously. It is therefore necessary for the officer-in-charge of the Registry to check whether there are previous items on the file on which action is still pending. If such check reveals that every action has been taken, the registry officer will then proceed with the disposal of the file.

(c) *Disposal of file*

Before disposing a file, the officer-in-charge of the registry should take the following action as appropriate:

- (i) If the file cover is damaged, it should be repaired or changed as appropriate. If a file cover is replaced the last two entries on the previous file cover should be transcribed in the ladder of the new file cover.
- (ii) If the file is a temporary one, it should be incorporated in the main file.
- (iii) All drafts on which action has been taken should be removed, provided such drafts have not already been recorded as folios in the file.

3. TEMPORARY FILES

(i) Opening of Temporary Files

There is a tendency for excessive use to be made of temporary files. Occasions on which the opening of a temporary file is justified should be rare.

The opening of a temporary file is justified only when—

- (a) the main file is in urgent action (not just awaiting action) and cannot be released by the officer who has it, *and*
- (b) the papers awaiting filing require action before the main file can be made available, *and*
- (c) the papers in the temporary file can be disposed of without reference to the main file.

The officer in charge of registry should be given the responsibility to open temporary files *but* with prior consultation with respective schedule officers.

(ii) Merging of Temporary Files

The officer in charge of the registry should ensure that a temporary file is merged with the main one at the first opportunity when both files are available.

(iii) Monitoring of temporary files

The officer in charge of the registry should submit a list of temporary files opened and remaining open on a weekly basis to the Principal Assistant Secretary or other senior officer in charge of administration who should monitor the system and advise where necessary.

4. FILE AND INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

(a) File Retrieval

- (i) Movement of files should be posted on the index cards in order to minimise delay in file retrieval and to ensure that files can be located at any time by the registry staff as well as users.
- (ii) Action officers should not by pass the index card system and a *transit slip* should be used by them to record any file which they have handed over to other officers and to submit it to the registry on a daily basis. The registry staff would then make the appropriate entry on the index cards. A layout of the transit slip is attached at *Appendix " B "*.
- (iii) The problem of delays in file retrieval is more acute in Ministries which have dispersed sections/divisions. Such Ministries should improve their existing systems of file transfer and movement. Each Ministry should determine the frequency of transfer required between locations depending upon volume and urgency. The frequency should be reviewed on an annual basis or whenever workloads change considerably.

(b) Information Retrieval

In the context of quick and easy retrieval of precedents and policy decisions, a categorised list of major policy decisions and precedents should be compiled from policy files by the officer in charge of registry in consultation with schedule officers. The system should be based on topic headings rather than file references and should have the scope for several cross-references.

5. Missing Files

It is deplorable that files should ever be allowed to get lost and there are altogether too many alleged to be missing.

To reduce the possibilities of files being lost, the following steps are to be taken:

- (a) careful recording of the movement of every file, either internally or externally;
- (b) regular follow-up to ensure that files circulated are being returned e.g. once a week, the officer in charge should show each schedule officer a list of all the files which are on the latter's schedule which have been out for more than two weeks and seek instructions as to recall etc...;
- (c) once a week a list of files with each schedule officer should be drawn up and checked against a list of files recorded as marked out to those officers. Action should be taken *immediately* thereafter to resolve any discrepancies; and
- (d) a list of all files for which registry cannot account should be drawn up. A central record should be kept of all files reported missing—in other words, a register of "Missing Files" should be opened and kept in the safe custody and responsibility of the officer in charge of registry.

As soon as any file is found to be missing, the registry officer concerned should submit a report which should cover the following points to the officer in charge of registry;

- (a) number and title of file;
- (b) when found to be missing and by whom;
- (c) last recorded movement;
- (d) steps taken to trace.

The Officer-in-Charge of Registry will consider what further action might be taken to trace the file. If and when he is satisfied that no further action is practicable, he should submit the report to the Principal Assistant Secretary or other senior officer in charge of Administration through the Schedule Officer who should in due course consider whether they agree with the conclusions of the Officer-in-Charge of registry. If not, further action should be initiated to look for the file.

6. Weeding Procedures

Weeding of dead files should be considered as a routine operation. Without weeding, storage as well as retrieval problems arise.

To remedy this, regular, e.g. annual weeding of files should be carried out jointly by the officer in charge of the registry and management e.g. an Administrative Officer.

7. SECURITY OF FILES

(i) Opening of Confidential/Secret/Top Secret Files

The authority of an officer not below the substantive rank of Administrative Officer or equivalent grade must be obtained before any document is graded CONFIDENTIAL.

In relation to SECRET documents, the level of authority should be that of Principal Assistant Secretary or equivalent grade.

Only the Supervising officer may grade a document TOP SECRET.

(ii) Down-grading/declassification of files

Departmental Security Officers should ensure that all files containing Cabinet papers are reviewed at least once every three months. In many cases, it will be found that both the original cabinet papers and files containing these can be down-graded or possibly even declassified altogether.

(iii) Custody of Confidential Files

The officer in charge of the registry should, as far as practicable, ensure that confidential files are returned to the Confidential registry at the end of each day.

8. FLIMSY FILE

An extra copy of all the letters typed and signed is normally placed in chronological order in a file cover called 'Flimsy File' which should generally be circulated on a fortnightly basis.

The aims of a 'Flimsy File' are:—

- (a) to enable the Supervising Officer to ensure that instructions have been correctly interpreted by officers signing papers on his behalf;
- (b) to enable senior officers to know what is going on in the Ministry;
- (c) to provide a record of outgoing papers without having to consult the despatch book or individual files.

9. TASKS AND TASK ELEMENTS IN REGISTRY WORK

A detailed list of common registry activities is at *Appendix 'C'*.

APPENDIX 'A'

<p>Transferred to File 'Y' as fol. (10)</p>	(7)
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Note:

This Annex shows a model Transfer Slip.

The folio number (7) appearing at the top right-hand corner of the Transfer Slip should be written in red just as for any folio number.

**MINISTRY/DEPARTMENT
FILE TRANSIT SLIP**

File Reference No. and subject.....

Handed over by.....**Signature**.....**Date**.....

To Mr/Mrs/Miss.....**Grade**.....

For.....

Index Card updated by..... **Signature**..... **Date**.....

TASKS AND TASK ELEMENTS IN REGISTRY WORK

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Task-Elements</i>
1. Receipt of Incoming Mail	<p>... 1. 1 Stamping of documents received.</p> <p>1. 2 Entries in Incoming register.</p> <p>1. 3 Screening of mail to sort out letters requiring urgent action.</p> <p>1. 4 Photocopies of such letters placed in the file for circulation.</p> <p>1. 5 Circulation of incoming mail.</p> <p>1. 6 Ensuring that incoming mail which is being circulated is not unduly delayed.</p> <p>1. 7 Receipt of telegrams, registered and express letters.</p> <p>1. 8 Signing of despatch book or other document for receipt of such documents.</p> <p>1. 9 Opening of letters addressed to Head of Department/Section.</p> <p>1.10 Ensuring that despatch clerk open incoming mail with the aid of a knife and neatly.</p>
2. Despatch of outgoing mail	<p>... 2. 1 Verifying whether letter has been signed, and all enclosures mentioned therein, attached.</p> <p>2. 2 One copy to be kept flimsy for circulation.</p> <p>2. 3 Inserting of date of issue on file copy initialling of document and returning file to Schedule Officer.</p> <p>2. 4 Proper addressing of the envelope and placing relevant documents therein.</p> <p>2. 5 Stamping the envelopes.</p> <p>2. 6 Making entries in outgoing register.</p> <p>2. 7 Despatching of correspondence addressed to P.S.C. through Cabinet Office.</p> <p>2. 8 Issuing of registered letters and express delivery mail — filling of appropriate forms in that connection.</p>
3. Opening of new files	<p>... 3. 1 Effective reading of correspondence to identify the subject matter.</p> <p>3. 2 Ensuring that no file dealing with the topic already exists.</p> <p>3. 3 Devising a good file title.</p> <p>3. 4 Proper indexing of new files.</p> <p>3. 5 Entry in appropriate registers.</p> <p>3. 6 Filling of card for recording the movement of the file.</p> <p>3. 7 Insertion of reference number and title of connected files, if any.</p> <p>3. 8 Deciding on the real need for opening a temporary file (such file should be merged with the main file as early as possible).</p>

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Task-Elements</i>
4. Proper filing of documents	... 4. Ensuring that : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) correspondence is entered in appropriate file; (ii) folios are punched in such a way that all papers are kept neat and tidy; (iii) folio is properly numbered; (iv) all enclosures also numbered; (v) all correspondence referred to body of letter are "cross-referenced"; (vi) correspondence is recorded on minute sheets in simplest way; (vii) entries on minute sheets are underlined (using a ruler); (viii) priority is given to files containing documents requiring immediate action; (ix) appropriate marking of file cover for directing its movement is made; (x) flags are used (when necessary); (xi) blank minute sheets are always available; (xii) entries in files are made in chronological order <i>but</i> improper insertion of any folio between entries already made on a minute sheet should be avoided.
5. Recording of Movement of files	... 5. 1 Ensuring that careful recording on appropriate cards is kept of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) all files leaving the registry; (ii) all files to be re-submitted to schedule officers; (iii) all files to be put aside (B.U and P.A). 5. 2 Regular following up of files sent out of Registry. 5. 3 Taking appropriate action for recalling files which have been out for long. 5. 4 Avoiding sending files to other Ministries/ Departments unless strictly necessary. 5. 5 Making arrangements for prompt and regular exchange of material between Registry and Schedule Officers. 5. 6 Updating cards in the light of transit slips returned to Registry.
6. Providing means of identifying files	... 6. Devising an effective classifying system for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) indexing purposes; (ii) facilitating the retrieval of information within the least delay; (iii) regular weeding of files; (iv) facilitating the tracing of files.

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Task-Elements</i>
7. Care & Maintenance of files	<p>7. Making it a point that all files and records are kept neat and tidy at all times:</p> <p>7. 1 folios should be properly punched;</p> <p>7. 2 bits of papers should <i>not</i> be pasted on minute sheets.</p> <p>7. 3 cuttings should be pasted rather than pinned.</p> <p>7. 4 scrap papers to be removed or if necessary, to be put on as a proper folio.</p> <p>7. 5 folios and covers should not be torn.</p> <p>7. 6 file should not be too bulky.</p> <p>7. 7 when new volume is opened, numbering of folios and minutes should be consecutive (<i>should in no case start with f.(1)</i>)</p>
8. Tracing of files	<p>8. 1 Taking steps to trace missing files.</p> <p>8. 2 Taking measures to reduce possibilities of files being lost — e.g. once a week, to draw up a list of:—</p> <p>(a) all files with each schedule officer and to check it against records;</p> <p>(b) all files which cannot be accounted for and recorded in register of missing files stating steps taken to retrace them.</p>
9. Examining of files before putting them aside	<p>9. Ensuring that:—</p> <p>(i) Schedule Officers have indicated next action to be taken by entering appropriate marking on file covers;</p> <p>(ii) action has been taken on all folios;</p> <p>(iii) all documents have been filed;</p> <p>(iv) merging of temporary file, if any.</p>
10. Ensuring compliance with security rules	<p>10.1 Devising system for safe custody of documents and files.</p> <p>10.2 Not allowing unauthorised persons to have access to Registry/files</p> <p>10.3 Ensuring that files carried from one department to another are placed in envelope.</p> <p>10.4 Ensuring the proper classification of files.</p> <p>10.5 Registry never to be left unattended.</p> <p>10.6 Down grading of confidential files as appropriate.</p>