

**Institute for Advanced Study
Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center**

Managing Email - Recommendations for Institute Staff

Email Management: Guidelines & Policies

How do I know when an email is a record?

Work related electronic mail messages created and received by Institute employees during the course of business are Institute records, and should have the same retention as similar paper-based records with a few exceptions. Messages with continuing value, such as those that document administrative decision-making, committee, faculty, and campus activities should be transferred to the Archives similar to paper-based records. Examples of messages that may have continuing value are those which:

- approve or authorize actions or major expenditures;
- are formal communications between staff, such as correspondence or memoranda relating to official business;
- signify a policy change or development;
- create a precedent, such as messages issuing instructions or advice;
- relate to the substantive business of the work unit or Institute as a whole;
- involve negotiations on behalf of the Institute;
- have value for other people or the work unit as a whole.

Faculty correspondence, research data, and external scholarly communications which are not of an administrative nature may still have significant archival value. These are considered Faculty papers and may be acquired by the Archives separately after discussion with the Faculty member and/or his or her heirs.

Unwanted or unneeded junk mail (spam) and personal messages are not Institute records and should be routinely identified, separated, and removed from the email system.

What are records series and how do they relate to email?

A records series is a group of similar or related records that are normally used and filed as a unit, and that permit evaluation as a unit for retention scheduling purposes. Email is not a records series, but rather a means of transmission of information, therefore its retention and disposition depends on the function and content of the individual message.

What do I do with emails that are considered records?

Messages with continuing value, such as those that document administrative decision-making, and committee, faculty, and campus activities, should be retained in paper or electronic copy until no longer administratively useful, and then either destroyed or transferred to the Institute Archives according to the guidelines discussed with the Institute Archivist.

Electronic messages whose loss would pose a significant fiscal, legal, or administrative risk to the Institute if they could not be accessed or read should not be deleted unless retained in an acceptable paper format. Electronic copies can be deleted if paper copies are maintained.

You may keep emails in either a printed or electronic format. If you keep them in a print format, you may send them to the Archives according to your office's retention guidelines. It would be good practice to print out the most important emails and keep them along with the other records in a specific records series.

If you keep all messages in an electronic format, you must maintain those records in your office in a format in which you can potentially transfer them to the Archives when appropriate Institute policies have been established. If you save messages in their native file formats, they will be accessible only as long as the email application is supported. If you save messages in an open format, such as ASCII text, you increase your chances of accessing the messages into the future; however, you lose formatting that exists in the native format.

What do I do with emails that are not considered records?

Messages with short-term value (only needed for a limited time or purpose) should be deleted and purged once their purpose has concluded. Such messages include:

- Those distributed to a number of staff for information only, such as news bulletins, circulars, meeting notices, copies of documents, and drafts;
- Those created solely as part of preparation for other records;
- Personal messages and announcements that are not work related;
- Junk mail.

How can email be considered an authentic record?

When determining the admissibility of records into evidence, courts will consider the reliability and accuracy of the process or the system used to produce or reproduce and maintain the records, rather than its format.

Records are usually deemed admissible into a court of law when it can be demonstrated that the workflow process used to create and maintain the records is proven trustworthy in producing accurate documents. The output of email to a particular format is acceptable as long as the result accurately reflects the original message and the method used is consistent and reliable. Once these records are accepted into courts, the accuracy of the content may still be challenged.

For more information check with Institute legal counsel.

Are email records handled differently than paper?

Email should be managed by its content, not its format. Whether or not you keep an email message depends on its value, subject, and function.

Email Management: Keeping & Deleting

Who is responsible for managing email messages?

Organizing and managing email is the responsibility of the individual Institute employee, and can be quite a challenge considering the volume of email sent and received on the campus every day.

Why do I need to keep certain emails?

You should keep emails in order to provide documentation of day-to-day office operations and to preserve the history of your department. Keeping certain emails can allow your office to function more smoothly from a business perspective when decisions and discussions are documented. Certain emails should be deleted according to records retention schedules to reduce the risk for the Institute in case of litigation. The arbitrary destruction of records, however, can increase risk for the Institute if records cannot be accessed during official actions.

Why do I need to delete certain emails?

Emails with potentially sensitive or confidential materials should only be maintained in one place to ensure their privacy and security. For example, the chair of a committee may be the primary keeper of the committee documents and each committee member does not need to keep all documents.

Certain emails can also increase the legal risk for the Institute if they are kept longer than required. For example, email communication concerning the hiring, performance, and/or termination of employees increases liability risk for the Institute. The appropriate deletion of emails also helps conserve Institute resources by using up less server space.

Deletion of emails that are no longer needed allows for easier retrieval of relevant messages from your total stored messages.

What email should I keep?

Does the email message or attachment have continuing or permanent value? (i.e., such as those messages that document administrative decision-making or committee, Faculty, and campus activities)? If yes, keep and maintain according to the records retention guidelines your office has discussed with the Institute Archivist. If no, delete and purge once its value ends (purpose has been concluded).

Messages with continuing value, such as those that document administrative decision-making, and committee, Faculty, and campus activities, should be retained in paper or electronic copy until no longer administratively useful, and then deleted or transferred to the Institute Archives. Electronic copies can be deleted if paper copies are maintained.

Examples of messages that may have continuing value are those which:

- Approve or authorize actions or major expenditures;
- Are formal communications between staff, such as correspondence or memoranda relating to official business;
- Signify a policy change or development;
- Create a precedent, such as messages issuing instructions or advice; guidelines; recommendations; or policies;
- Relate to the substantive business of the work unit or Institute as a whole;
- Involve negotiations on behalf of the Institute;
- Have value for other people or the work unit as a whole.
- Messages whose loss would pose a significant fiscal, legal, or administrative risk to the Institute if they could not be accessed or read should be kept.

Faculty correspondence, research data, and external scholarly communications which are not of an administrative nature are considered Faculty papers. These may be acquired by the Archives separately after discussion with the Faculty member and/or his or her heirs.

A variety of questions can help you in making a decision regarding what to keep, such as:

Who else received this message? If there are multiple recipients, are you the primary keeper of this document? The primary keeper is responsible for maintaining the record copy of a document for as long as the retention schedule states, or the length of its continuing value. Other recipients of this document should delete when it is no longer useful to them or the task is completed. Example: You are the chair of a committee and receive meeting minutes from a committee member; as the chair retention of the document would be your responsibility until transferred to the Archives or the items are deleted. Committee members should not keep minutes or documents beyond the term of the committee.

Is the email or attachment a work in progress (such as a draft)? If yes, do you need all versions? Retention of drafts can depend on whether you are the creator or recipient and on the type of document. As a general rule keep drafts only if they are needed to document the process, such as evidence when negotiating an agreement. In most cases, the final version is sufficient for long-term retention.

What email should I delete?

Personal messages. These should be minimal and retained only as long as necessary.

Messages with short-term value (only needed for a limited time or purpose) should be deleted and purged once their purpose has concluded. Such messages may include:

- Communications regarding the scheduling of meetings
- Day to day office communications
- Drafts

Messages distributed to a number of staff for information only, such as:

- News bulletins
- Listserv messages
- "Informational" emails

If you manage your routine email correspondence and inter-office memoranda by printing and filing it, you can purge and delete electronic copies.

Should I keep attachments to email? How would you recommend doing this?

If you determine that the attachment and the email have permanent or continuing value, you have several choices for how to save that attachment and email.

The first option is to save the email and the attachment together in its original format within the context of your email software on the email server. This is a good method to preserve the original copy of the attachment that you have received and to maintain a connection between who sent the attachment and the file itself. In most cases where the attachment has continuing value, the email should be kept as it supplies the date, sender, and recipients as well as any cover message. If the email and attachment have legal or evidential value, storing them together, either as part of your email environment or in an electronic records keeping system that retains email header (transmission) data, is the most authentic storage.

The second option is to save the attachment in another location (not on the email server), such as your hard drive or other network space. This option allows you to manipulate and edit an attachment, but destroys any connection to the original email and does not preserve a record of where the document originated.

The third option is to print the email and attachment and save them in a paper format. This is acceptable as long as transmission data is retained on the print version (date, sender, recipients, subject and message body).

If your office frequently transmits attachments via email, consider placing the documents on a shared drive or making them available across a local area network. This will ease pressure on the users who must manage the attachments, and on the email system's storage capacity.

How long should I keep email?

Email messages have different values, based on the content of the message, just like other types of records. With the popularity of high-capacity storage systems, users may feel inclined to store all their email indefinitely. It is incumbent on Institute employees, however, to appraise the value of electronic messages and retain messages with ongoing value throughout their established retention periods.

When should I transfer email to the Archives?

You may transfer emails that are in a printed format to the Institute Archives when you send the other materials in that series. *If you are keeping your emails in an electronic format, and not in a printed format, then you should keep those emails in a structure that will allow the potential transfer to the Archives in the future when appropriate policies are established for handling electronic records.*

Where should I store email?

You have several options for places to store your email. These include the Institute email server, your local computer, and removable media (such as cds or removable drives).

Saving messages on the server has several advantages. Emails on the server can be accessed from multiple locations through web mail, are more secure, and are backed up regularly. The disadvantage to saving all of your messages on the server is that you may run out of your allotted space.

If you save messages on your local machine, you can avoid filling up your allotted Institute server space. However, you should check with your department's information technology staff to determine if and when safety backup copies of your local machine are made. Emails saved on your local machine are also not available from multiple locations.

The third option is to save emails on CDs or removable drives. This may be appropriate for inactive messages or topics that you would not need to access frequently. Emails stored on removable media may be more difficult to locate than those on your local machine or server. Also, over time the media may degrade or become obsolete, making the retrieval of those messages difficult or impossible.

In what format should I keep email?

You may keep emails in either a printed or electronic format. If you keep them in a print format, you may send them to the Archives with related paper records. It would be good practice to print out the most important emails and keep them along with the other records in a specific records series. *If you keep them in an electronic format, you must maintain those records in your office in a format in which you can potentially transfer them to the Archives when appropriate policies have been established.* If you save messages in their native file formats, they will be accessible only as long as the email application is supported. If you save messages in an open format, such as ASCII text, you increase your chances of accessing the messages into the future; however, you lose formatting that exists in the native format.

If I print an email, can I then delete the electronic version of it?

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

If you manage your routine email correspondence and inter-office memoranda by printing and filing it, you can purge and delete electronic copies. For messages of particular importance you should consider retaining it in both electronic and print formats.

What data should a printed version of an email include and why?

Email messages that are printed must include certain components of contextual information of the original electronic version. Those components include:

- Addresses - not names of distribution lists - of specific recipients (the "To:"),
- Including addresses in "cc:" and "bcc:" fields.
- Addresses of the sender (the "From")
- The subject line
- The body of the email message
- All attachments
- The date and time the message was sent and/or received
- Some organizations may require the sender to include a signature block or a disclaimer on each sent message. Those components also should be included on printed messages. Similarly, a vCard file that a sender attaches to the message in lieu of a signature block should be printed.

Depending upon your email software, this information can usually be accessed and added to a printed version of an email by including full Internet headers. It is important to include this information with the print out of an email for the evidentiary value of the message.

When should I print an email?

Until there is an Institute repository and associated policies for the electronic transfer of records, messages whose loss would pose a significant fiscal, legal, or administrative risk to the Institute if they could not be accessed or read should be printed and stored with the appropriate record series if applicable.

Email Management: Management

How should I organize the email that I need to keep?

People use email in many different ways and for many different purposes, including as a communication tool, as a to-do list, and as a storage mechanism for keeping their messages. There are three main approaches to organizing your email messages that may help you use your email for these multiple purposes:

1) No filing strategy:

This strategy consists of creating no folders within your email software and keeping all emails in your inbox. People who choose this strategy often periodically remove emails from their inbox and save them offline in chronological folders in order to reduce the amount of server space they are using.

The advantage of such a system is that it requires little effort. The owner of the email is able to locate things because they may personally know when specific emails were received or can use a search engine to retrieve specific emails. Using the threaded messages feature, if your software has this, can allow you to see all messages relating to a particular topic.

The disadvantage is that over time, it may be more difficult to recall when you received certain messages, and thus difficult to retrieve them without subject related folders. It may also be difficult for your successor, your colleagues, or an archivist to make sense of your emails in the future. You may end up keeping more emails than you need to because you are not reviewing the emails and assigning them to topical folders.

2) Filing system:

The traditional way to organize records is to establish a simple filing scheme based on topical areas in order to bring together all documents on a particular topic. For some people, (such as those who deal with large amounts of similar documents) establishing a filing scheme is a successful way to manage your electronic records as well as your paper documents. This filing structure can incorporate your office's records retention and disposition schedule, if your office has one.

One advantage of a filing system is that it provides a complete view of all the emails on a particular topic, regardless of subject line or sender. A topical folder provides a context for a set of messages that you would not necessarily see if they were all in your inbox mixed with emails of various topics. A filing system can allow quick retrieval of emails if you know what folder you put something in. It allows those who may access your email later on (a successor, colleague or archivist) to find emails and follow threads on subjects easily. Although you may not file every single email message, a folder system can greatly reduce the feeling of clutter in your inbox.

The major disadvantage of a filing system is that it takes time and discipline to maintain. Over time you may find that you need to review your folders and delete old emails, or modify the names of folders that you have created.

3) Combination of filing system and usage of inbox to store emails:

Research has shown that filing all messages is not necessarily an effective management tool for some people. If you receive a large amount of email (over 100 per day), spend a lot of time away from your computer, or just do not have the time to maintain an extensive filing system, you may want to consider a strategy in which you file some messages and leave others in your inbox.

If you choose this strategy, it is a good idea to first delete the emails that you know that you do not need or should not keep. If you delete these messages on a daily basis, you will be able to easily identify the messages that you do need to keep without having to weed through too many emails in your inbox.

File any emails that you know that you want to keep and that you do not have to follow up on. These may be emails that you want to keep as evidence of your activities or evidence of a business transaction. Depending on the content, these may be emails that you want to keep for a long time, or for a shorter period of time (such as class assignments that you may only want to keep for the semester).

After deleting and filing, the emails left in your inbox should be emails that you need to act upon or that you are waiting for some sort of resolution on. Some people find that creating a folder for messages that they need to follow up on works well. Others keep all of these emails that need resolution in their inbox. In some systems you can "flag" emails for follow up. For some emails, you may want to delete the email after the task has been completed, for others, you may want to file the email into your filing system.

You may find that one of these systems works for you, or you may use a combination of strategies to find a method of organizing your email that you are most comfortable with. These simple guidelines are suggested for the individual email user. If email messages are intended to be stored on a network server, organization schemes and folder titles should be set up in consultation with system administrators and others accessing the network.

What should I do with copies of messages that I have sent?

Most email software packages automatically save a copy of sent messages into a "Sent file". While you may not have the time to go through your sent folder and file each message, if you have storage limits you may want to store messages from this folder offline. It is a good idea to remove messages with sensitive material in them (personnel, etc.), by deleting them, moving them to a specific subject folder, or saving elsewhere offline.

A few email clients prompt you to decide if you want to save a copy of a sent message at the time that you are sending the message. If you use such a system, although you may not save every message, you may want to at least choose to save important emails. Some people choose to

file sent messages in a specific subject related folder, but many people find that filing them in a centralized sent folder is the most useful record of what they have produced. This follows traditional archival and filing practice.

How should I file emails?

A good email folder structure is not just a way to keep the number of emails in your inbox low, but it is a structure that helps you keep, find and contextualize materials.

When choosing a folder title, it is important to use a name that accurately describes the messages you will file there (example: "travel requests and reimbursements FY 2003/2004"). Try to use consistent spelling and vocabulary that others can interpret if they need to. Avoid using obscure acronyms and abbreviations when possible. Check that your categories do not overlap.

There are a number of different types of names that you can give your file folders:

Type	Example	Reasons to Use
Numbers or symbols	NF-001	Can be brief, specific, indexable. May not immediately be apparent what they represent.
Dates	March 2004	Allows quick deletion of documents that can be deleted after a certain period of time. Can quickly sort messages by date and move into a folder.
Subject Topics (names, organizations, companies, projects, publications, etc.)	Budgets, Seminars	Brings together all documents on a particular topic, regardless of subject line. Allows you flexibility in overcoming erroneous subject lines.
Combo - Subject/Date	Evaluations Spring 2002	Can take a large subject file and break it down into smaller time-based files.
Sender	John Smith	Can use to view all communications with a particular person, regardless of their email address.
Geographic area or location	Travel Reports > England	Good for subfolders
Records Series	Annual Reports	Makes retention and deletion of documents identified in records schedules easy.

If your email software allows you to create subfolders, you might find this to be an easy way to organize emails on a particular subject that occur on a periodical basis. For example: your main folder may be Evaluations, with subfolders of Evaluations Fall 2002, Evaluations Spring 2003, etc.

If email messages are intended to be stored on a network server, organization schemes and folder titles should be set up in consultation with system administrators and others accessing the network.

What should I include in the subject line of an email message?

You should include enough information to help the receiver(s) assess the message's value and importance and be able to find the message at a later time. In some cases, the receiver does not need to read beyond the subject line. It can be useful, particularly when working on group projects, to add within the subject line a designated word or abbreviation, which signifies that the message is pertaining to that project. For example: Website Committee: latest redesign. Here are some other examples:

Instead of:	Use:
Question	Question about project deadline
Please review	Strategic plan for your review
Meeting	July 1 budget meeting confirmed

I've exceeded my space quota, what should I do?

You may be assigned a limit as to how much server space you are allowed to use for your emails. When you exceed your quota, you should consider either deleting some emails or moving emails off of the server to other storage. Here are some tips for reducing the amount of emails that you are storing on the server:

- Delete any emails in your "trash" folder.
- Look through your inbox and delete any emails that you don't need. Check with the Institute Archivist for guidelines on what you may be allowed to delete.
- If your email software automatically saves a copy of all of your sent messages, you may want to look at the "sent folder" and determine if there are emails that you can delete or save offline elsewhere.
- Review other folders and check for emails that you may no longer need to keep. If the emails are no longer necessary, it is frequently easy to delete folders that are organized by date or by sorting your emails by date. While you might be tempted to sort your emails by size and delete the largest ones, you should be careful not to delete important attachments.
- Consider storing folders of old emails that you do not use on a regular basis, but still would like to keep, offline (either on another computer drive or on disc).

Should I use this "archiving" feature that my email software has? How does that work?

Some email packages offer an archiving feature. Before using this feature, you should check your email software documentation or check with your IT staff to determine how this feature works for your specific software. Some email clients archive older messages (you can determine what is considered "older"), by removing the messages from a centralized server and placing them on a local drive, usually in a proprietary file format. The user is able to retrieve these messages through the email client by looking in the "archive" folder. Most email clients will replicate the folder structure from your online filing scheme into this "archive" folder, thus one can maintain a standardized filing structure over time with little effort while removing older messages from your server space. A drawback to this approach to storing older messages is that subsequent email software may not be able to read your older files. If you archive messages you should check with your IT staff and make sure that your messages are going to a storage space that is consistently backed up.

I seem to accumulate a lot of email in my inbox. Do you have any suggestions for managing my inbox?

If you receive a lot of emails per day, it is easy for your inbox to become overwhelming. Some tips that help people manage a lot of emails in their inbox include:

- Delete some email messages immediately (spam, advertisements, informational notices)
- Rather than letting a large number of email accumulate, as you read each email make a decision about what to do with it. If you are overwhelmed by a large inbox, a filing strategy is probably a good idea for you. Many people find that if they file emails that they do not have to act upon and only keep those emails that require action or some sort of response in their inbox, they can more easily identify what tasks they need to accomplish.
 - If a message documents or provides evidence that you need to keep, file it in an appropriate folder. (For example: correspondence with Members over a term)
 - Be aware of when a message no longer has value and delete accordingly. There are some messages that you may only want to keep for a short period of time, such as meeting notices, or other messages of short-term value.
 - If you need to act upon an email message, you may want to either "flag" the message in your inbox, or store it in a "To-do" folder.
- Once you have acted upon a message, you should either delete the message or file it.
- Some people find reviewing their inbox or to-do folders at a specified time each week is useful.

Top Tips for Managing Email

10. Be careful when opening email from an unknown sender. The message could be spam or could contain a virus.
9. Use subject lines that are indicative of the content of your message and that the person who receives the email can use to retrieve it.
8. Use Institute-sponsored email systems sparingly to send or receive personal email. Use discretion when mixing personal and work-related messages.
7. Take time to compose a thoughtful response before sending an email. Proofread your email for spelling errors, grammar, and punctuation before sending it.
6. When sensitive issues need to be discussed, face-to-face conversation or a telephone call may be a better communication choice than email. Remember that the security of your email cannot be ensured.
5. Do not put anything in an email message that you would not want to see printed in tomorrow's newspaper or displayed on a bulletin board.
4. Manage email based on its content, not space quotas. Retain and dispose of email messages according to established records retention guidelines.
3. Everyone receives email that may pose personal or institutional risks. These emails should be removed from the email system as soon as possible and according to law.
2. For most people, much of the email that they receive is not too important, but everyone receives a small percentage that is. You should take special care with these important emails to make sure that they are secure, retrievable, and preserved over time.
1. Email does not manage itself. Be a proactive manager of your inbox and manage your messages in a way that is most effective for you. This may involve filing significant messages or a combination of filing in folders and using the inbox to store messages. See the Management FAQs for more suggestions.