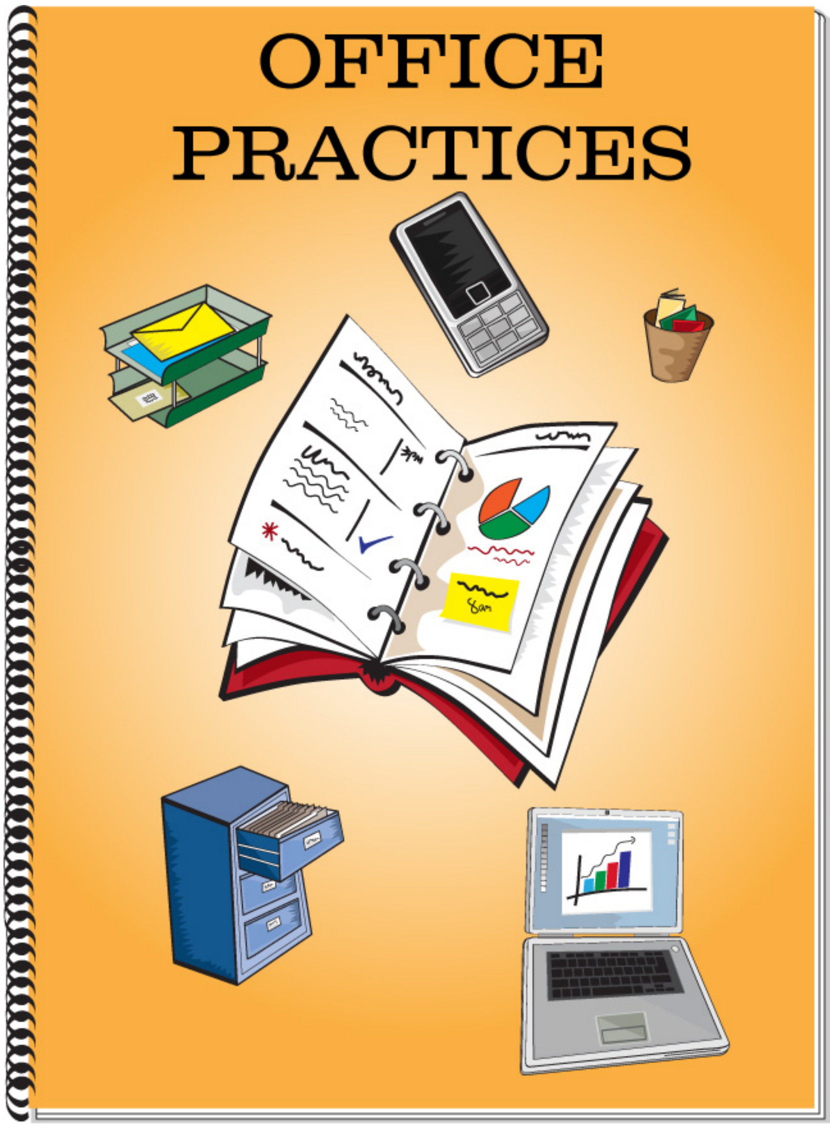
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Department of Human Resources
Workforce Planning, Test Research, & Appeals Division
3333 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 350, Los Angeles, CA 90010
24-Hour Jobline: (800) 970-LIST
http://dhr.lacounty.info



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Gloria Molina	Mark Ridley-Thomas	Zev Yaroslavsky	Don Knabe	Michael D. Antonovich
First District	Second District	Third District	Fourth District	Fifth District

Lisa M. Garrett, Director of Personnel

To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service

Table of Contents

Introduction

The County of Los Angeles Department of Human Resources is pleased to offer this office practices information guide.

The role and importance of office practices has changed dramatically over the years. Innovations in technology have changed the nature of office work from processing paperwork to planning and organizing multi-step assignments. Understanding contemporary office practices is essential to succeed in today's workplace.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide an introduction to office practices by presenting you with *general information* covering this subject area and to spark your interest for further exploration.

Objectives

The office practices information guide has been designed to help you

- understand the definition of office practices.
- complete office assignments.
- manage your time in the office.
- use electronic and paper filing systems.
- be aware of relevant office equipment, tools, and resources.

Disclaimer

The office practices information guide provides an introduction on this subject matter; further study of this subject and related concepts may be necessary to gain the understanding needed to achieve your learning and/or career goals. Although this guide presents useful and practical information from this subject area, there is *no guarantee* that someone who reads it will be able to perform better on the job or on a County examination. By merely using this guide, you consent to understanding and agreeing with this disclaimer.

Who Should Use This Guide?

This guide was written for those who are new to working in an office environment. However, it may be useful for anyone seeking to better understand fundamental office practices.

This guide covers common office practices used by most office professionals, regardless of the setting in which they work (e.g., health care services, protective services, human resources, information technology, etc.). It will not address the unique office practices related to a specific work setting.

The Definition of Office Practices

To ensure we have a shared understanding of what office practices are, we have provided a formal definition that will be used throughout this guide:

> **Office Practices** are the day-to-day clerical and administrative activities performed by office professionals to support work-related functions and organizational decision makers.

To provide further clarification, the components of this definition are explained below:

- **Day-to-day clerical and administrative activities** – a wide range of activities including:
    - Performing office tasks (e.g., responding to phone/email requests, making reservations, typing a memo, etc.).
    - Operating office equipment (e.g., computer, photocopier, fax machine, etc.).
    - Managing, organizing, filing, and storing paper and electronic documents.

- **Office professionals** – employees who work in a wide range of jobs that require knowledge of office practices as part of their job duties; however, this guide will focus on the office practices of entry-level clerical and support staff (e.g., clerks, staff assistants, adoptions assistant, etc.).

- **Work-related functions** – the major activities of the organization (e.g., provides heath care services, protects life and property, trains employees, etc.).

- **Organizational decision makers** – the directors, managers, and supervisors who make decisions for an organization. Throughout this guide, we will use the term *manager* to describe all organizational decision makers.

Completing Office Assignments

Introduction

What Would You Do?

Your manager asks to speak with you. You quickly grab a pen and paper and walk down the hall to her office. She explains, "Something just came up and I need your help." She then discusses the details of a challenging assignment. To complete the work, you will need to accomplish several different tasks.

- What is your first step?
- What will you do to accurately complete the assignment on time?
- How will you report your results?

Office professionals work on a variety of clerical (e.g., filing, organizing, data entry, etc.) and administrative (e.g., preparing reports, problem solving, collecting information, etc.) assignments. The complexity of these assignments may vary from one to two steps (e.g., photocopying 50 training manuals) to more challenging work that requires multiple steps (e.g., creating a tracking system for inventory, assignments, or documents). This section will discuss a 5-step process to successfully complete the complex, multi-step office assignments.

Five Steps to Completing Assignments

1) Understanding the Assignment
2) Creating an Assignment Plan
3) Taking Action
4) Reviewing the Work
5) Reporting the Results

Step 1: Understanding the Assignment

When you receive an assignment, the first step is to understand the purpose of the assignment and the expectations your manager has about the outcome. If you and your manager have a different understanding, it will likely result in the assignment not being completed properly. To ensure you fully understand the assignment, make sure you are

- **listening** to the instructions.
- **taking notes** on important information.
- **asking questions** if you need clarification.
- **summarizing** the details of the assignment.

Next, we will elaborate on each of these four topics. Carefully consider the following suggestions and think of ways to apply them in your work as an office professional.

Listening
Listening is the key to understanding and is crucial for office communication. To become a more effective listener, you should

- discontinue other activities and give the speaker your full attention.
- maintain good eye contact.
- avoid interrupting or jumping to conclusions.
- pay attention to the main ideas (i.e., the “big picture”) and the small details.

Taking Notes
It can be challenging for an office professional to remember detailed information while working in a busy office environment. Well written notes can serve as a reference to help you remember important information. When taking notes,

- write brief statements that cover the most important aspects of the instructions.
- write legibly so that you can read your notes at a later time.
- avoid focusing so much on writing that it affects your ability to listen.
- store your notes in an easily accessible place.

Helpful Tip:
Always have a pen and a pad of paper ready to take notes. You never know when your manager may ask to speak with you.

Asking Questions
You may need to ask questions to fully understand an assignment. Asking appropriate questions also demonstrates your attentiveness, professionalism, and commitment to your job and the organization. The table below provides examples of effective and less effective questions:

Less Effective Questions	Effective Questions
“What do *you* want?”	“How may I help you?”
“What do you want me to do?”	“Let me make sure I understand this assignment. I need to… Is this correct?”
“What is the point of doing this?”	“What are the goals and objectives of this assignment?”
“How much time do I get before I have to finish this assignment?”	“By what date would you like this assignment completed?”
“Who will see my work?”	“Who is the audience for this particular assignment?”
“Can I get someone to help me?”	“Are there any people, materials, or work samples that would be useful resources to help me complete this assignment?”

When asking questions remember that *how* you ask is just as important as *what* you ask. Non-verbal communication (e.g., body language, tone of voice, posture, etc.) can have a greater impact than verbal communication. For example, if a co-worker tells you she is listening to you (verbal), but reads an email (non-verbal) while you are speaking, then you are likely to feel that she is not actually paying attention. As the saying goes, “your actions speak louder than words.”

For additional information on communication skills, please refer to our *Customer Service Information Guide*, which is available on the County of Los Angeles Online Test Preparation System.

Summarizing

Once you have received an assignment, it is helpful to summarize your understanding of the information back to your manager. This will help you to fully understand your manager’s expectations, clarify any misunderstandings, and demonstrate your attentiveness. Be sure to ask additional questions if further information about an assignment is needed.

> **Helpful Tip:**
> **Newly hired office professionals need to become familiar with an office’s organizational chart, which provides an overview of the positions within the office and the reporting relationships between positions.**

Step 2: Creating an Assignment Plan

Once you understand the assignment, the next step is to develop a plan to complete it. An assignment plan is a document you create to outline the steps needed to complete an assignment. Assignment plans are most effective when they are documented electronically in a word processing or spreadsheet program. This allows you to visualize the steps, review the plan frequently, quickly update the plan accordingly, and easily provide updates to your manager. Be sure to include any important due dates. An example of an assignment plan is provided below:

ASSIGNMENT PLAN

Assignment: Make the preparations for a training meeting conducted by Sybil (manager) for 20 regional supervisors on Thursday, February 13th at 10am.

Step 1: Confirm the training date with Sybil
Step 2: Contact department secretary to schedule a conference room that can hold up to 25 people.
Step 3: Obtain and copy all training materials, handouts, and visual aids.
Step 4: Send out an email invitation to all attendees before January 12th and request confirmation of their attendance before February 1st.
Step 5: Send reminder email to attendees on February 6th.
Step 6: Email Sybil a status update (copies and confirmed attendees) on February 10th.

Identifying Resources

When formulating a plan to complete an assignment, you can save considerable time and effort by identifying existing resources, which may include anyone or anything helpful to completing the assignment (e.g., co-workers, supplies, software, meeting rooms, work space, etc.). Additionally, answering the following questions may help to identify the resources available to help you complete your assignment:

- Is anyone else working on a related or similar assignment?
- Are there any relevant policies, procedures, or forms?
- Are there files, templates, or examples of similar assignments?
- What other tools can I use (e.g., Internet, books, handouts, etc.)?

Understanding Departmental Policies and Procedures

Each office has a set of specific policies and procedures to maintain order and consistency within the organization. A *policy* is a guiding principle used to set direction in an organization, while a *procedure* is a set of instructions used to implement organizational policies into action. Generally, office policies and procedures are contained in the organization's procedural manual.

These policies and procedures will vary based on the office and its needs. As an office professional, it is important to familiarize yourself with these policies and procedures so that you can organize your assignment plans in accordance with the standards set by your office. Be sure to discuss any questions regarding departmental policies and/or procedures with your manager.

Step 3: Taking Action

Once you complete the assignment plan, the next step is to put the plan into action, though you may need to obtain your manager's approval before starting. Be sure to refer to the assignment plan to avoid forgetting steps or missing due dates. Remember to keep your manager's expectations of the outcome in mind to help you stay focused and on target.

Check your work along the way and make corrections as needed. Identifying and correcting problems early will save you valuable time and effort. For some assignments, you may want to ask co-workers to review your work and provide feedback, where possible.

Sometimes unforeseen problems arise when completing assignments. Depending on the nature of the problems, you may be able to resolve them on your own and inform your manager if they will affect the completion of the assignment. However, more complex problems will need to be discussed with your manager before you take action.

Helpful Tip:
Do <u>not</u> wait until the due date to communicate problems or concerns with your manager. Always inform your manager if another manager gives you an assignment.

Step 4: Reviewing the Work

It is important to review your work carefully and thoroughly before submitting it to your manager. Answering the following questions can help you to evaluate the accuracy and quality of your work:

- Did I complete the assignment according to the guidelines and due dates established by my manager (review notes from Step 1)?
- Did I follow and complete all the steps in the assignment plan?
- Does the finished work meet my manager's expectations of the assignment?
- Did I review my work to ensure it is accurate?
- Is there anything else I can do to improve the quality of this assignment before submitting it?

Proofreading is important when reviewing your written work. Do not rely on spelling and grammar check software functions because they do not identify all mistakes. For example, a spelling check function will not notify you when you use the word "there" instead of the word "their." To proofread your work, pay attention to the following three areas:

- Format: The overall appearance and consistency.
- English Usage: The accuracy of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Arithmetic: The accuracy of numbers and calculations.

It is helpful to review your documents on three separate occasions to check format, English usage, and arithmetic errors. Be sure to include the time to complete these reviews into your assignment plan.

Helpful Tip:
When proofreading, it is useful to quietly read the document out loud.

Step 5: Reporting the Results

Once you complete the assignment, the final step is to report the results to your manager in the requested delivery format (e.g., small report, gathered documents, short presentation, etc). When possible, keep an electronic copy of all documents related to the assignment in case the originals are misplaced. Remember to check with your manager before storing confidential or sensitive information.

When the assignment is finished, take a few moments to reflect on what you learned from the experience. What did you do well? What areas can be improved? Be open to feedback and suggestions from your manager. Remember, there are opportunities to learn and improve with every assignment you complete.

Section Summary

The beginning of this section presented a common situation faced by office professionals and highlighted the importance of being prepared. The five-step process we presented will help you to effectively respond to your manager's requests and develop the necessary skills to successfully complete office assignments.

Managing Office Time

Introduction

As an office professional, it is likely that you will be responsible for completing several different assignments at the same time. Effective time management will help you to successfully complete your assignments and meet established due dates, which will benefit you, your co-workers, your customers, and the organization.

Ways to Effectively Manage Your Time

- Create a Structured Time Management Plan
- Make a Realistic Schedule
- Control Your Time at Work
- Be Flexible

Create a Structured Time Management Plan

A structured time management plan can help you effectively organize and evaluate your work assignments to complete them on time. Your plan should be both structured and realistic to make the best use of your time, while being flexible enough to handle unexpected changes and interruptions. Finding this balance can be difficult; but once achieved, it can help to increase your effectiveness, reduce job-related stress, and improve job satisfaction. A basic planning strategy includes evaluating your use of time, creating assignment summary lists, and making daily “To Do” lists.

Evaluate Your Use of Time

Understanding how your time is spent is the first step to ensuring that you effectively manage it. This type of evaluation will help you identify realistic approaches to planning your work-related activities, potential problems or limitations, and alternative ways to perform specific tasks.

To evaluate your use of time, it is helpful to create a daily activity log of the tasks you performed for a given day. You should complete daily activity logs for at least a week to gain an understanding of your use of time. These logs can be created using a software program (e.g., MS Word or Excel) and should contain the following five items:

- Date
- Start time
- Task
- Whether the task was planned or unplanned
- Duration

Below is an example of a daily activity log:

DAILY ACTIVITY LOG			
DATE: October 6th (Thursday)			
TIME	**TASK**	**PLANNED**	**DURATION**
8:00 a.m.	Entered customer requests into the computer database	YES	90 mins.
9:30 a.m.	Attended a staff meeting	YES	30 mins.
10:00 a.m.	Break	YES	15 mins.
10:15 a.m.	Helped head secretary locate missing account invoice	NO	15 mins.
10:30 a.m.	Returned customer calls/emails	NO	90 mins.
12:00 p.m.	Lunch break	YES	60 mins.
1:00 p.m.	Pulled archived case files for the manager	YES	120 mins.
3:00 p.m.	Break	YES	15 mins.
3:15 p.m.	Copied and faxed various reports to field offices	YES	45 mins.
4:00 p.m.	Typed minutes from staff meeting	YES	60 mins.

Once you have documented your work activities for a week, review your daily activity logs to see how your time was spent and identify useful and problematic trends and/or patterns (e.g., tasks take longer to complete after lunch, staff meetings usually occur in the morning, customers call early in the week, etc.). Below are sample questions you can use to evaluate your daily activity logs:

- Which tasks take me the most time to complete?
- When does my manager typically give me assignments?
- When do staff meetings usually occur?
- What time of day do the most interruptions (e.g., unplanned calls, meetings, assignments, etc.) occur?
- What are the reasons for interruptions?
- Can I reschedule certain tasks to help me be more efficient?
- Can I combine certain tasks?
- What skills can I develop to become more efficient?

After evaluating your time, make specific plans to improve your use of time. Consider the following suggestions:

- Budget your time to anticipate high- and low-demand work periods (e.g., scheduling difficult tasks when you tend to have the fewest interruptions).
- Learn or enhance a skill to become more efficient (e.g., customer service, software programs, reading comprehension, note-taking, etc.).
- Develop a list of resources, procedures, and tips to resolve routine problems (e.g., create a list of frequently used phone numbers).

It may not be possible to consistently evaluate your use of time in this manner; however, it is recommended to periodically re-evaluate your use of time to ensure you are effectively and efficiently performing your work.

Creating Assignment Summary Lists

Another planning strategy includes the use of assignment summary lists. An assignment summary list is a brief description of all the assignments you have been given. Similar to the activity log, an assignment summary list can be created using a software program (e.g., MS Word or Excel). The list should contain the following seven items:

- Priority level of the assignment as determined by your manager (e.g., high, medium, low).
- Description of the assignment.
- Date the assignment is due (and time if applicable).
- Estimated amount of time needed to complete the assignment.
- Name of the person who gave you the assignment.
- Location where the assignment is to be delivered or the method to deliver it (e.g., email address).
- Date you received the assignment.

An example of an assignment summary list is provided below:

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY LIST

PRIORITY	ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE/ TIME	TIME REQUIRED	REQUESTOR	LOCATION/ METHOD	DATE GIVEN
High	Information gathering	11/15 at 5pm	1 week	Sybil (Manager)	Main Office	11/6
High	Customer service	11/7 at 5pm	1 day	Customers	Phone/Email	11/6
Medium	Office supply requisition	11/30 at 10am	2 days	Carlos (Purchasing Asst.)	Purchasing Dept.	11/5
Medium	Reorganize files	11/21	2 weeks	Judy (Head Secretary)	Email	11/5
Low	Meeting notes	11/30 at 9am	2 days	Sybil (Manager)	Main Office	11/2

Sort the assignments according to priority by placing the highest priority items at the top of the list. Update the list each time a new assignment is given or if significant change occurs (e.g., change in priority or if work assignment has increased in size or complexity). Whenever possible, increase your estimated time to complete an assignment by 10% to allow for unexpected delays or changes.

Helpful Tip:
Large assignments can be broken down into smaller, more manageable tasks.

Making Daily "To Do" Lists

A "To Do" list is created from the assignment summary list and includes the specific tasks needed to complete each assignment. At the end of each day, review your assignment summary list and write down the specific tasks you can do the following day to progress towards completing your assignments. Once you have written several tasks, organize them based on their importance with the highest priority tasks listed at the top. Start by working on the items at the top of the list and work your way down. An example of a daily "To Do" list is provided below:

DAILY "TO DO" LIST

DATE: December 6th (Thursday)

PRIORITY	ASSIGNMENT	TASK	COMPLETED
High	Information gathering	Search the Internet for available file storage services to house inactive purchase order files.	✓
High	Customer service	Return all calls and emails regarding customer inquires and requests.	
Medium	Supply requisition	Create MS Excel spreadsheet for office supply purchases and enter the information from each office.	
Medium	Reorganize files	Research new filing systems for all the customer files.	
Low	Meeting notes	Type meeting notes into a MS Word document and send to the main office.	
Low	Supply requisition	Remind team leaders to submit their office supply requests before Friday.	

Notice how the daily "To Do" list consists of the tasks required to complete the assignments mentioned in the assignment summary list.

Keep the daily "To Do" list in a highly visible area on your desk or workstation so you can review it frequently throughout the work day. Keeping the list visible will allow you to monitor your progress, make adjustments, and note when tasks are completed. At the end of the day, review your work and add any unfinished tasks to the "To Do" list for the next day.

Control Your Time at Work

To be an effective office professional, you will need to use your work time efficiently. It is impossible to eliminate all distractions and obstacles; however, with some preparation, you can greatly improve your ability to successfully complete your work assignments. There are two main techniques to improve your control over work time: 1) organize your work and 2) minimize the impact of interruptions.

Organize Your Work

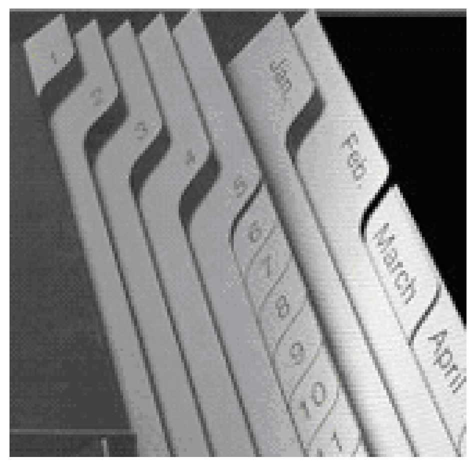
Organizing your workspace and materials is a powerful way to manage your time. Staying organized will help you remember critical pieces of information and quickly locate materials. The following suggestions provide ways to become more organized:

- Clear distractions and clutter from your workspace.
- Make important office equipment (e.g., phones, computers, fax machines, etc.) easily accessible, if possible.
- Organize essential office supplies and store them within close reach.
- Keep track of critical and frequently used documents by filing them daily (preferably in an electronic format).
- Create models and/or patterns from existing documents, memos, and forms (i.e., templates).
- Create a resource list of procedures and useful phone numbers.

> **Helpful Tip:**
> **When making a record of people you frequently contact, include the best time to reach them.**

Tickler Files

Tickler files are one way to organize your tasks and due dates so you can effectively control your use of work time. A tickler file is a basic filing system used to keep track of important information. It includes several well-organized folders containing all the relevant documents, forms, and instructions needed to accomplish the items on your "To Do" list and assignment summary lists.



A Sample Tickler File

When creating a tickler file system, office professionals can customize folders and content to meet their specific needs. Listed below is a five-step process to starting a basic tickler filing system:

Step 1: Obtain a set of 43 folders and labeling materials.

Step 2: Label the first 31 folders by number for each day of the month (e.g., 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.).

Step 3: Label the rest of the folders for each month of the year (e.g., January, February, March, etc.).

Step 4: Place the folders in a file drawer or bin.

Step 5: Organize the folders so that the day folders are in front of the month folders. For example, on January 1st, you would have folders 1-31 in front of the February folder.

After creating the tickler file system, the following suggestions can help you use and maintain it:

SUGGESTIONS	EXAMPLES
Place materials (e.g., documents, forms, instructions, etc.) in folders corresponding with the day you scheduled to work on them (not the due date).	It is January 15th and you have a form to complete and submit on January 20th. The form will take a few hours to complete. Place this form and all other related materials in the folder labeled "19th" so the form will be ready to submit on the following day.
File assignment materials scheduled in the future month(s) in the corresponding month folder.	It is January 15th and you have a form to submit in the middle of March. Place this form and all related materials in the folder labeled "March." Keep these documents together with a paperclip.
At the end of each month remove the contents from the next month's folder and place materials in the appropriate date folder for the next month.	It is January 31st, you take out the contents of the folder labeled "February" and find tasks that need to be completed on February 10th and 21st. Both tasks will take a few hours to complete. Put the materials for the 10th in the "9th" folder and the materials for the 21st in the "20th" folder.
Check the files daily and document tasks that need to be completed on the following day on your "To Do" list.	It is January 15th and you look into the "16th" folder and find information on a report that needs to be faxed on the 16th. You write down the task on your "To Do" list for the following day.
File task materials in a folder that will allow you sufficient time to complete the task before the due date.	It is January 15th and you have a report to complete by January 23rd. It will take you two to three days to complete. You place the materials in the "20th" folder.

These suggestions provide a brief summary of how a tickler file system works. Once a tickler file system is set up, review it periodically to ensure it is working effectively and make adjustments as needed.

Helpful Tip:
Whenever possible create a tickler file system on your computer using electronic folders. Another method is to use the MS Outlook task and calendar functions.

Minimizing the Impact of Interruptions

Interruptions are common and often necessary elements of the office professional's work environment. These unexpected activities may affect your schedule or workflow. They can occur during any part of the work day. Common interruptions include phone calls, unanticipated meetings with managers, and questions from a customer.

You can use your daily activity log to identify themes or patterns to the interruptions and then look for solutions to manage or minimize them. For example, if you frequently receive phone calls and emails regarding the procedure for submitting office supply requests, you can send out a memo outlining the directions and answering frequently asked questions. This may help reduce the number of calls and emails you receive regarding this issue.

Listed below are other suggestions to help reduce the impact of interruptions:

- Schedule a daily “quiet time” during which you do not respond to phone calls, answer email messages, receive visitors, etc. Be sure to discuss this option with your manager and obtain his/her approval before implementing.
- Refrain from lengthy telephone calls and excessive socializing with co-workers or customers.
- Be clear, concise, thorough, and provide demonstrations/examples when explaining detailed tasks (e.g., using office equipment, completing forms, submitting documents, etc.) to customers, co-workers, and/or managers. This will help reduce the need for re-training.
- Determine whether an interruption requires immediate attention or if you can schedule a more convenient, agreed upon time to resolve the issue.

It is important to use sensitivity and tact when managing interruptions. Be sure to consider the working relationship with customers, co-workers, and managers when developing strategies and discuss your plans with your manager before implementing them. Effectively and appropriately minimizing interruptions can help you make better use of your time at work.

Be Flexible

As changes in the office environment occur, it is important to adapt your time management approach to meet the needs of the situation. For example, an office professional working in a fast-paced, small office may use a different set of time management strategies than someone working in a larger office. Be sure to review your time management approach periodically to ensure you are getting the most out of your time.

Section Summary

Effective time management occurs with careful preparation, flexibility, and effort. By creating a structured time management plan, making realistic schedules, controlling your time at work, and being flexible, you can improve your ability to manage your time at work.

Managing Office Documents

Introduction

Document management is the process of receiving and storing office records and information. Typically, office professionals have the responsibility of maintaining, creating, and/or making recommendations regarding document management. This section will discuss

- different types of filing systems.
- strategies for managing paper and electronic documents.
- retention schedules and document storage.
- securing electronic and paper documents.

Types of Filing Systems

There are many different kinds of filing systems. Certain filing systems may be more appropriate than others depending on the situation. For this reason, an office may use a combination of several different filing systems.

There are five main document filing systems: alphabetic, numeric, subject, geographic, and chronological. Having a basic understanding of each system will help you effectively maintain a variety of documents. Listed below is a summary of these filing systems:

System	Characteristics	When to Use	Examples
Alphabetic	Arranged alphabetically from A to Z in this order: last name, first name, then middle name/initial	Use when organizing documents related to people.	Chang, Allison R. Coleman, Jill C. Jimenez, John Q., etc.
Numeric	Arranged according to code numbers (e.g., account number, ID number, invoice number, etc.)	Use when organizing confidential documents or when names are not available.	1001, 1002, 1003, etc.
Subject	Arranged alphabetically according to subject or topic	Use when organizing documents that have the same or related category.	Accounting Dept. Human Resource Dept. Information Technology Dept., etc.
Geographic	Arranged alphabetically according to location	Use when organizing documents by districts, regions, and/or jurisdictions.	Agoura Hills, Compton, Westwood, etc.
Chronological	Arranged according to date	Use when organizing documents in sequence or creating a timeline.	January, February, March, etc.

To illustrate the different filing systems, consider the following situation:

You have been assigned to organize the documents for a monthly workshop. To effectively manage the related documents, you create the following filing system:

- **Alphabetic**: You receive the names of individuals who will be attending the workshop. You create a file which contains a folder for each participant's registration information and arrange them alphabetically by the participant's name.

- **Numeric**: You must submit an inventory request form to order supplies for the workshops (e.g., markers, notepads, pens, etc.). This form contains a request number, and you create a file to organize the inventory request forms according to the request number.

- **Subject**: The monthly workshop covers a variety of topics (e.g., communication, time management, computer skills, etc.). You create a folder for each topic and label them accordingly.

- **Geographic**: Your department uses several different locations to conduct the workshops. You keep a separate folder containing relevant room information, directions, and contacts for each location.

- **Chronological**: You keep all the records for each monthly workshop in a file organized according to month. At the end of the year, the monthly files are archived in a file organized according to year.

General Guidelines and Standards for Alphabetical Filing

Alphabetical filing is the most common method for organizing documents. Its guidelines and standards are listed below:

Guidelines	Examples
1. For people, records should be filed alphabetically by last name, first name, then middle name/initial.	Chang, Allison R. Coleman, Jill C. Jimenez, John Q.
2. When people share the same last name, then order by first name then middle name/initial.	Simpson, Aaron Simpson, Charlie A. Simpson, Cynthia L.
3. For organizations, records should be filed by the first word of the organization's name.	Aaron Flores Graphic Design Accountants-R-Us Amber Consulting
4. When organization names have the same first word, order by second word.	West Coast Shipping Company West Coast Software West, Porter, & Associates
5. Numbers are filed sequentially before alphabetic characters.	5-Star Electronics 12 Good Lawyers Anderson Building Supplies
6. Follow the principle to file "nothing before something" (i.e., one-letter words are filed before words with two letters).	A to Z Bookkeeping Absolute Consulting Always-On-Time Accountants

Types of Documents

Documents can be either paper or electronic. Paper (i.e., hard-copy) documents may include any forms, records, receipts, or contracts kept in a file, folder, or binder. Electronic (i.e., soft-copy) documents may include computer files on a network, hard drive, external drive, or email. While paper and electronic documents can be identical in content, the storage management for each is quite different.

Managing Paper Documents

Despite advances in computer technology, paper documents still play an important role in the workplace. Office professionals frequently file, store, and retrieve paper documents. Effectively organizing these documents is critical to the success of an office. The following suggestions provide ways to help manage paper documents:

- Underline or write file labels on all documents (if possible).
- File documents daily to stay organized and avoid misplacing information.
- Use color coded file folders and labels to quickly identify and locate documents.

Managing Electronic Files

A majority of electronic files are stored on computers. Like paper documents, these files require careful organization and management. The following suggestions provide ways to help manage electronic files:

- Create electronic folders where you can store related documents.
- Be consistent in how you name files and folders. This will help you easily locate and identify files. For example, when updating a document that results in several versions, you should number each version in the filename (e.g., Office Practice Guide_v1, Office Practice Guide_v2, Office Practice Guide_v3, etc.).
- Periodically review your electronic documents to ensure your filing system is effective. Use judgment when making adjustments and discuss any major changes with your manager.

Retention Schedules

A retention schedule is an office policy that describes how long to keep documents on-site, when to transfer them to an off-site storage facility, and when to destroy them. The more documents an office uses, the more important it is to have an effective retention schedule. If you are involved in creating a retention schedule, there are several issues to consider:

- How often are the documents used, referenced, or requested?
- Are there any legal guidelines to consider?
- What are the potential long-term benefits to keeping the documents (e.g., research)?
- How much space is available for storage?
- How much will it cost to store the documents on-site versus off-site?
- Should documents that are no longer used be destroyed?

Considerations for Storing Office Documents

One important consideration is how often documents are accessed. For example, frequently used documents should be readily available, while seldom used documents can be stored in less accessible locations (e.g., storage facilities). Policies and procedures regarding document storage should be included in the retention schedule.

The storage of essential office documents is another important consideration. Essential documents (e.g., contracts, personnel records, and financial records) are items necessary to maintain business operation and include documents that are difficult to replace. During emergencies or disasters these documents would be critical to ensure the office is able to continue functioning.

The following are four examples of how essential documents are preserved:

- <u>Duplication</u>: Copying important documents and storing them in both electronic and paper formats.
- <u>Dispersal</u>: Storing duplicates at different office locations, if available.
- <u>On-Site Storage</u>: Securing documents in fireproof safes, cabinets, or vaults.
- <u>Off-Site Storage</u>: Storing documents in an off-site storage facility.

A final important consideration is to store documents in a neat and orderly manner. The following suggestions provide strategies on how to neatly store documents:

- Remove unnecessary items (e.g., rubber bands).
- File the most recent documents in the front of the folder.
- Place documents facing up with the top of the page at the left edge of the folder.
- Replace worn folders with new ones.
- Allow 3 to 4 inches of working space in vertical files.

Helpful Tip:
Whenever possible, office documents should be scanned and stored on a computer. This can provide better security of the documents and helps you be more organized. Check the office or department policy on document storage and scanning. Consult with your manager if you have any additional questions.

Maintaining Document Security

Maintaining the security of documents is an important part of protecting the information of an organization. Protecting confidential information is an ethical, and sometimes legal, responsibility of the office professional. The following suggestions provide information on how to secure paper and electronic files:

Securing Paper Files

- Place files in locked drawers/rooms when they are not in use.
- Secure the office and file keys.
- Monitor who uses the files and for what reasons by creating a check-out log.
- Follow the office retention schedule.
- Avoid leaving confidential information on desks, in the printer/fax output tray, or in the copy machine.
- Use secured interoffice envelopes, if available.

Securing Electronic Files

- Protect computer passwords by changing them frequently and by not posting them in your workspace.
- Lock, log off, or shut down the computer before leaving your workspace.
- Be cautious when opening email messages from people you do not know. Never open an email attachment unless you are sure of its content and sender.
- Only download files from trusted and/or approved sources.
- Establish a schedule for backing up important documents.
- Store backup copies off-site.

Never provide confidential information in either electronic or paper format to unauthorized staff or customers. Consult with your manager if questions arise.

Section Summary

This section provided methods to successfully manage office documents. As you continue to familiarize yourself with 1) the different types of filing systems, 2) the strategies for managing documents, 3) retention schedules and document storage, and 4) document security, you can improve your effectiveness as an office professional.

Using Office Equipment, Tools, and Resources

Introduction
Underlying the ability to complete assignments, manage office time, and manage office documents is the ability to operate office equipment. Being proficient with photocopiers, fax machines, scanners, computers, and other office equipment will directly impact your effectiveness on the job. This section will provide an overview of commonly used office equipment and computer software.

Office Equipment
Listed below are descriptions of some frequently used office equipment:

- **Photocopiers** – make paper duplications of documents.

- **Fax Machines** – transmit a copy of a document from one location to another.

- **Scanners** – convert a paper document into an electronic file (e.g., .pdf, .jpg, .bmp, etc.), which can make the document easier to access and also reduces paper volume.

- **Shredders** – destroy confidential documents by cutting them into very fine strips (strip-cut) or tiny paper chips (cross-cut). Cross-cut shredders are ideal for highly confidential documents because they cut the paper into small pieces that are difficult to put back together into the original form.

Computers
Computers are the most important equipment in today's office environment. They allow users to create, store, process, send, receive, and display electronic data. Office professionals use computers to perform many activities, such as:

- Writing letters, memos, and other documents.
- Storing and analyzing data.
- Managing records, forms, and other documents.
- Creating reports, presentations, handouts, and pamphlets.
- Communicating (e.g., email) and researching (e.g., Internet).

It is critical to stay current with technical advances in computer systems and programs. Office professionals should frequently assess their computer skills and take the necessary steps to further develop their proficiency.

Computers provide several tools that can help office professionals. Listed below are descriptions of the most commonly used software and tools:

Word Processing Software
Office professionals use word processing software (e.g., MS Word) to write, edit, and format office documents. Understanding this type of software is critical because nearly all paper correspondence is created using word processing software (including this information guide). Be sure that you are familiar with formatting functions (e.g., margins, page numbering, page breaks, etc.) so that you can quickly adapt to the layout and style used by any organization, department, and/or office.

Spreadsheet Software
Office professionals use spreadsheet software (e.g., MS Excel) to enter numerical or alphanumeric data, which can be organized or analyzed to obtain information. For example, spreadsheets are frequently used for monitoring budgets, tracking expenditures, and identifying trends.

Database Software
Office professionals use database software (e.g., MS Access) to store, sort, group, extract, manipulate, and filter data. This type of software is similar to a spreadsheet, but it allows you to use the information in more advanced ways. Consider using database software instead of spreadsheet software when

- there is a very large amount of data (e.g., thousands of entries).
- you need to link two different databases together.
- a unique report is needed to display data.

The Internet
Office professionals frequently conduct research using the Internet. Finding useful information quickly on the Internet is possible when you use the correct search tools and methods.

- *Web Search Engines* are websites designed to locate information on the Internet. Using them is one of the most effective ways to find specific information. When you enter a keyword or phrase into a web search engine, it provides a list of websites relating to that keyword or phrase. Some frequently used web search engines are:
    - Google.com
    - Yahoo.com
    - Ask.com
    - MSN.com

- *Online Encyclopedia/Reference Websites* are other useful tools for conducting online research. Unlike web search engines, online encyclopedia websites are specifically designed to provide factual information on a wide variety of topics. The following are some of the commonly used encylopedias/references websites:
    - Wikipedia.org
    - Thesaurus.com
    - Webster.com
    - Dictionary.com

When conducting an Internet search, always use more than one source. This will help ensure the accuracy of your work as each site may provide different information on the same topic. If you discover a useful website or search engine, you can use the "bookmark" feature in your Internet browser to easily access it again.

Email
Office professionals use email software (e.g., MS Outlook) to send, receive, and store email messages. It also offers functions for tracking work tasks and scheduling meetings and assignment due dates.

Please refer to the *Customer Service Information Guide* for a detailed discussion on the functions of and techniques for email communication.

Section Summary

Office equipment is a vital resource for office professionals. Your work performance can be affected by your knowledge and understanding of the functions of the various office equipment. This section provided an overview of the function of photocopiers, fax machines, scanners, and shredders. Additionally, this section discussed how computers are used in today's office environment.

Conclusion

Developing your understanding of office practices is essential for your success as an office professional. This guide provided an introduction to the guidelines and applications of office practices. It presented a general definition of office practices and strategies for completing assignments, managing time, managing documents, and using office equipment, tools, and resources in the context of an office setting.

Additional Resources

Reading this guide is a first step to helping you develop effective office practices. To help you gain a deeper understanding of office practices, you may consider seeking additional information about the topics presented in this guide. Other resources (e.g., books, workshops, seminars, Internet resources, etc.) are available to expand your understanding of office practices.

Feedback

In order to assist us in enhancing this document, we would greatly appreciate any feedback you would like to provide. Please email any suggestions to testprep@hr.lacounty.gov. In the subject line of your email, please write "Office Practices Guide." Thank you in advance for your response.

Bibliography

This guide was developed based on the education and experience of its authors, along with integrating the knowledge from the source listed below. This guide was developed for an applied setting, and we freely share it with all readers who may be interested in its contents.

Jaderstrom, S., Kruk, L., & Miller, J. (2002). *Complete Office Handbook* (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: Random House.

About the Authors

Cory J. Wilkin
Human Resource Analyst I – Test Research

Cory holds an M.S. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and an M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy. He has over four years of professional experience in public and private organizations. His human resource experience involves content validation studies, test development and analysis, strategic and workforce planning (e.g., leadership development, retention interviews, recruitment consulting, onboarding, etc.), examination administration, and recruitment.

Marc C. Shartzer
Principal Human Resources Analyst – Test Research

Marc holds an M.S. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and professional certificates in Human Resources Management, Project Management, Technical Writing, and Business Management. He has over ten years of professional experience in public, private, and consulting organizations. His areas of practice include selection research and test development for entry- through management-level positions, workforce planning program development, survey development and analysis, recruitment, training program development, compensation administration, and other human resource activities. He has presented at regional and international conferences and has been published in professional journals.

Angela C. Hunt
Human Resources Analyst IV – Test Research

Angela has nearly seven years of public-sector human resources experience involving examining, recruitment, selection, survey development, training program development, and other related human resources activities. She has presented at a regional conference sponsored by the International Public Management Association – Human Resources and been published in its publication. She holds a B.A. in Communication from the University of Southern California and is currently pursuing an MBA.

<u>Additional Contributors</u>

Lester Sapitula, Human Resource Analyst IV
Paul Pluta, Human Resource Analyst III
Erin Schlacks, Human Resource Analyst I
Sara Lupo, Human Resource Analyst I
Skye Knighton, Administrative Assistant