

Keep the Knowledge - Make a Record

Topic: Home Page

Welcome to the **Keep the Knowledge – Make a Record** eLearning module developed by the National Archives of Australia.

This module provides an introduction to what you need to know about managing records when working for the Australian Government.

This module will take approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

Lesson Objectives

Welcome to the **Keep the Knowledge – Make a Record** eLearning module.

By completing this module, you will be able to:

- describe what a record is
- understand why records matter
- describe your records management responsibilities
- understand the role of supervisors in supporting records management
- decide when to make or keep a record
- understand the importance of keeping records in the right locations

Topic: What is a record?

What is a record?

All information created, sent or received in the course of carrying out your agency's business is a record.

Records exist in many paper and electronic formats including:

- email
- websites and social media
- mobile device messages
- information in databases and business systems
- photographs and images
- letters and reports

Additional information

With government business increasingly conducted digitally, records such as email and records of web transactions are becoming central to our work.

Topic: Why records matter

Why do records matter?

Records are an essential part of an accountable and transparent government. They provide evidence, justify decisions and demonstrate the process followed.

The business of government operates within a framework that requires that we all make and keep records, including:

- **legislation**

The importance of records to accountable and transparent government is emphasised by legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act and the Archives Act (which provide for public access to government information) and other key legislation such as the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act, the Public Service Act and the Evidence Act.

- **codes of conduct**

Public sector values and codes of conduct (such as the APS Values and Code of Conduct) carry the same message – all Australian Government employees need to be accountable for their actions. Records support accountability.

- **efficiency and corporate memory**

Records ensure that information is available over time. By building corporate memory, records ensure agencies can carry out their business efficiently and effectively.

- **protection of rights and entitlements**

Records provide evidence of decisions about the rights and entitlements of individuals and companies. With adequate records, the government can explain its actions and decisions.

Why do records matter to you?

In your everyday work, making and keeping records helps to:

- find and use the information you need
- share information with colleagues
- reuse good work done in the past
- produce evidence when required to explain a decision

Records can also help protect you and your agency when something goes wrong or a decision or action is challenged.

Additional information

In the longer term, creating and keeping records helps future generations understand Australia's history, society, culture and people. The most valuable government records will be kept permanently in the National Archives as part of Australia's heritage.

Topic: Managing records

What are your records management responsibilities?

- Always make records of your work.
- Capture your records where your agency needs them to be kept.
- Give your records meaningful titles.
- Store and handle records according to your agency's procedures.
- Only destroy, delete, alter or remove records after appropriate authorisation.
- Take care with records to prevent them from being lost or damaged.
- Check protective markings on records and ensure they are managed appropriately.

What is the role of supervisors and managers in records management?

Supervisors and managers can help improve records and information management practices by promoting a culture of good records management.

If you are a supervisor or a manager, you should:

- **know your agency's records management requirements**

Supervisors and managers should understand and promote their agency's records management policies and procedures and consider records management issues within their teams.

- **provide training and guidance for staff**

Supervisors and managers should ensure staff have training and ongoing support to manage their records effectively.

- **support and encourage good team practices**

Practical things supervisors and managers can do include ensuring staff have time and resources available for records management, build records management into projects (so it is not left to the end) and include good records management practices in performance agreements.

Managing records at your desk

There are various items on your desk that could be records or could contain records that need to be managed, including.

- laptops and computers containing email, spreadsheets and other electronic records
- reports
- plans and maps
- telephone conversations
- post-it-notes containing work-related information
- letters
- mobile device messages
- paper files
- CDs, USB drives and other storage devices
- recordings on video and audio devices

Depending on the work you do, records can be in various formats.

When should you make or keep a record?

Records provide evidence of our actions, and link decisions and actions over time. Therefore you need to make or keep records to show:

- what happened, when it happened and who was involved
- what was decided or recommended and by whom
- what advice or instruction was given
- the order of events or decisions

Key message

Everyone working for the Australian Government – from entry level to heads of agencies – is required to make and keep records of his or her work. This includes non-ongoing contractors and consultants.

When should you make or keep a record?

If you are not sure whether you need to make or keep a record, ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I write, send, use or keep this in the course of my work?
- Am I (or is someone else) required to act on this?
- Will anyone need this information in the future?

If the answer was **yes** to any of the above questions, you should make or keep a record.

Additional information

Some records are automatically created, such as letters generated and sent out by a business system when an application for a licence or benefit payment is approved. Other records are created as a conscious decision.

When should you make or keep a record?

Common business activities you might need to make or keep a record of include:

- **work related phone calls and conversations**

When did the call take place, who was involved, what was discussed, and what key decisions, advice or information was given?

- **meetings**

When was the meeting, who attended, what were the key discussion points, decisions and action items?

- **advice or directions**

What advice or direction was given, by who, to whom and when?

- **approvals and decisions**

What approval or decision was given, by who, to whom and when?

Exercise your judgement about whether a record is required in the circumstances, and how detailed that record needs to be. **Records should also be detailed enough to suit the circumstances and be understood by others.**

Additional information

Making records of important work-related verbal communication ensures that the information is available if required. This is more reliable than recollection. Important information from phone calls and conversations can be recorded as file notes, entered into a database, or put into an email.

Activity: When should you make or keep a record?

Does this situation require you to make or keep a record?

- **I sent an approval to a client via email. Do I need to make a record?**
Yes, this is information that relates to your work – you need to make a record.
- **My supervisor will need to act on the information contained in this briefing. Do I need to make a record?**
Yes, this is information that someone is required to act on – you need to make a record.
- **The information in this document will need to be referred to at the next project meeting. Do I need to make a record?**
Yes, this is information that will be needed in the future – you need to make a record.
- **I received an email from a colleague about a barbecue on the weekend. Do I need to make a record?**
No, this is personal and does not relate to your work – you do not need to make a record.
- **An unsolicited advertising brochure arrived from a company. Do I need to make a record?**
No, material that is received on a 'for your information' basis only does not need to be kept.
- **I had a phone conversation with a client regarding problems with their case. Do I need to make a record?**
Yes, this relates to your work, and the information could be needed or acted upon in the future – you need to make a record.

Topic: Naming records

How should you name or title records?

Giving records good names or titles will point you and others to the information in the future, saving time and effort.

Make sure the names or titles you give:

- **are meaningful and easy to understand**

Everyone – not only those who were involved at the time – should be able to tell what the record is about by the title or name.

- **avoid vague terms like 'miscellaneous'**

Terms like 'miscellaneous', 'general' or 'correspondence' do not provide enough information to identify what the record is about, or the value it may contain.

- **distinguish between similar records**

Include additional information such as date or version.

- **spell out abbreviations and acronyms**

Abbreviations and acronyms can change or lose their meaning over time.

Additional information

Your workgroup or agency may have specific guidelines for you to follow, such as a file plan or naming conventions. Find out from your supervisor or records manager.

Activity: Titling and naming records

Are the following titles meaningful and easy to understand?

- **Personnel - Flex Sheets - Jane Smith 2009**

Yes, you can tell by the title of this record that it is for flex sheets for Jane Smith during 2009.

- **Software file**

No, this title does not have any unique information such as the name of the software, what it is used for or even a date.

- **Grants application from RAIA**

No, you can tell from the title that it is about a grant application, however spelling out the acronym would add further meaning. The title also requires other information such as date.

- **Allegations of fraud - J Smith**

No, it is unclear from this title whether J Smith made the allegation or whether the allegation was made against him or her. There may be more than one J Smith in the agency. There are important privacy issues with the name in this title – if inappropriately seen, this could damage the reputation of the individual involved. There is also no date.

Topic: Storing records

Where should you keep records?

Always keep records in corporate locations and systems approved by your agency where they can be:

- readily accessed by those who require them for their work
- secured from unauthorised access, tampering, deletion or loss
- related to other records which give them context
- backed-up or protected from corruption or damage

Where should you keep records?

Examples of corporate locations and systems approved by your agency might include:

- electronic document and records management systems
- business information systems such as human resource management, financial management, client relationship or case management systems
- paper registry files

Additional information

Speak to your supervisor or records manager about the specific locations in your agency where you need to keep records.

Storing digital records

Do not keep digital business information in locations such as:

- **personal email folders**

Records in the form of email, or email attachments are inaccessible to others if kept in your personal email folders.

- **computer hard drives**

Records saved to your hard drives are not accessible to others, and they may not be backed up.

- **laptop computers**

Records saved here are not accessible to others and are not backed up. There are also version control issues and laptop computers are at high risk of being lost or stolen.

- **portable storage devices such as USB drives, CDs, MP3 players**

USB drives, CDs, SD cards, digital cameras and other portable items are at high risk of being lost or stolen.

- **at home**

There is a risk that important or sensitive information can be accessed inappropriately.

Additional information

If using a laptop computer, make sure that you transfer any records or information to an approved location in your agency as soon as possible.

Can you delete or destroy records?

The destruction of records is governed by the Archives Act and other legislation.

Before you make decisions to delete or destroy records you must:

- find out which records you are responsible for keeping
- find out which records you can delete or destroy (some low-value records can be routinely destroyed after they no longer have business use)
- always follow authorised procedures
- ask your supervisor or records manager if you are not sure what to do

Additional information

If you keep records in corporate locations and systems approved by your agency, you do not need to worry about how long they need to be kept, as these records will be managed for you as long as they are required.

Topic: Email

How should you manage email?

It can be difficult to manage business related email due to the volume and speed at which they are created and received.

Some tips for managing email records include:

- Understand which email you are responsible for capturing
- Capture email in corporate locations and systems where they can be accessed and shared.
- Email titles need to be meaningful. Sometimes the 'subject' line of an email is not descriptive enough.
- Email that does not relate to business, such as personal messages or ones that are received for information only, do not need to be kept.

Topic: Access to records

When do you need to restrict access to records?

Information and records should be accessible within your agency, unless they relate to:

- national security
- privacy of individuals and organisations
- legally or commercially sensitive information

Records that need to be protected for these reasons must be given a classification rating and captured in an appropriate secure location or system.

Additional information

For more information about security classification and protecting records, contact your records manager, IT security adviser or agency security adviser.

Can you provide information to the public?

Approval of public access to government information is regulated by legislation, including:

- **Freedom of Information Act**

The Freedom of Information Act provides for public access to documents through a formal application process.

- **Privacy Act**

The Privacy Act sets out the safeguards Australian Government agencies must observe when collecting, storing, using and disclosing personal information.

- **Archives Act**

The Archives Act provides for public access to records more than 20 years old through a formal application process.

You can only disclose or distribute government information to the public in the course of your work with the approval of your agency.

Key message

In providing public access to government information you must follow your agency procedures and business processes. Refer requests to the appropriate person or area within your agency.

Topic: Knowledge check

Knowledge check

To complete this module, you will be asked to complete five review questions.

These questions are not a test, but a means for you to check the knowledge you have gained from this module.

If you have any trouble completing a question, a link to the relevant topic has been provided.

Question 1 - What is a record?

Is the following statement true or false?

Email sent to clients in the course of your work is a record.

The correct answer is **True**.

All information created, sent or received as part of your work for the Australian Government is a record.

Need assistance

See [What is a record?](#)

Question 2 - Records management responsibilities

Is the following statement true or false?

It is a core responsibility of Australian Government employees to create and manage records in accordance with records management requirements.

The correct answer is **True**.

All Australian Government employees must create and manage records in accordance with records management requirements.

Need assistance

See [What are your records management responsibilities?](#)

Question 3 - Why do records matter?

Is the following statement true or false?

Records do not help you produce evidence when required to explain a decision.

The correct answer is **False**.

Records do provide evidence of decisions and demonstrate the process followed.

Need assistance

See [Why do records matter to you?](#)

Question 4 - Where should you keep records?

Is the following statement true or false?

I should keep records I create where no-one else can see them.

The correct answer is **False**.

Information and records should be accessible within your agency, unless there is a need to protect them. Always keep records in approved locations where they can be readily accessed by those who need them for their work.

Need assistance

See [Where should you keep records?](#)

Question 5 - What is the role of supervisors and managers in records management?

Is the following statement true or false?

Supervisors and managers should ensure time and resources are made available for records management in their teams.

The correct answer is **True**.

Supervisors and managers can help improve records and information management practices by supporting and encouraging good team practices.

Need assistance

See [What is the role of supervisors and managers in records management?](#)

Topic: More information

Where can I go for more help or more information?

This module has provided general information from the National Archives about your responsibilities to make and keep records of your work.

For more specific information about the requirements, guidelines, processes and systems in your agency:

- speak with your supervisor, or
- contact your records or information management area.

Topic: Summary

Congratulations, module complete!

Having completed this module, you are now able to:

- describe what a record is
- understand why records matter
- describe your records management responsibilities
- understand the role of supervisors in supporting records management
- decide when to make or keep a record
- understand the importance of keeping records in the right locations