



Tennessee Archives Management Advisory

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GLOSSARY OF ARCHIVAL LANGUAGE FOR ARCHIVES IN TENNESSEE

This glossary is prepared to help non-archivists understand the language of archivists. It should also be used by archivists to remember that not everyone thinks or talks or writes the way they do, and archivists must sometimes interpret or translate their professional jargon into words or explanations that enable others to understand clearly the concepts and meanings we intend to convey.

Every profession and function has its own language, and sometimes the meanings of words change from one profession or function to another. This may cause confusion and misunderstandings. For example, the term “permanent record” is understood by some to mean “survival *up to* one hundred years”, whereas for archivists it means survival for centuries rather than mere decades. In another example, the term “permanent record” is applied by some people solely to those records that must be kept *in the agency or origin* indefinitely, whereas to archivists the term also includes records transferred to an archives for permanent retention and public inspection.

Access as a verb is to inspect, examine, comprehend,¹ read, see, or hear a public record, no matter what its medium or storage condition, so as to understand and use it for information or evidence; as a noun it is the means, opportunity, privilege, right, or effective accomplishment of such use of a public record. [See *public access*.]

Accession as a verb is for a government archives or other archives to receive and accept legal title, dominion, and custody of a record or other historical material, and it requires physical transfer and a formal record of the transfer of the material property of the record into the keeping and legal control of the archives; as a noun it is the accomplishment of such action, and it is also any discrete quantity of records from one records originator or successor received and accepted into the archives by one recorded transaction.

Acta (plural) is a formal term for documents that are officially-certified records of actions, transactions, and proceedings, usually of a governing authority, but also (by analogy) of individuals; they are also certificates attesting to the official recognition or sanction of a status, state of being, or condition, such as certificates of birth, marriage, divorce, death, education,

etc.; *acta* include both *muniments* and *warrants* (*q.v.*). Examples include minutes of meetings, registers of official actions, declarations, laws, regulations, oaths of office, ordinances, annotated dockets that record actions taken, bills of sale, mortgages, liens, leases, etc.

Active record is any record that is retained by an agency in its own immediate custody for ready reference in order to conduct current business. [Also called *current record*.]

Administrative value is the usefulness of a record to the current operations of an agency of government.

Agency is any department, division, board, bureau, commission, council, committee, authority, task force, instrumentality, or other separate unit of state or local government created or established by the constitution or by state law, county resolution, municipal ordinance, or pursuant thereto, including the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch of state or local government; it may also be used more loosely to refer to any entity or instrumentality that created a record for use as a tool in its work.

Agency of origin or agency of creation. [See *creating agency*.]

Appraisal [See *records appraisal*.]

Archival medium is a material recording medium that has been approved for archival use because it has been tested and proven to offer a high degree confidence in the permanent survival of the material and evidential integrity of a record.

Archival quality means that a medium in which matter is recorded meets national archival and international standards and that it does so consistently, thoroughly, and reliably.²

Archival record is the same as *permanent record* (*q.v.*). The term is redundant since all archives are records (though not all records are archives).

Archival value [See *permanent value*.]

Archive as a noun is any record or group of records having permanent value; as a verb it means to assure the permanent retention and preservation of a record or group of records in its original content, context, structure, and evidential integrity for use as reliable evidence.³

Archive writer is a [Kodak] trade name for a device that converts digital records to computer output microfilm.

Archives is (a) collectively, any body of permanent records kept for public inspection for the indefinite future, (b) an agency or institution charged with the management of such permanent records, (c) a building or other definable space in which such permanent records are kept and managed, and (d) collectively, a staff of personnel devoted to the management of such permanent records.

Archives administration is the same as *archives management*, although it often refers more narrowly and particularly to the administration of staff, budgets, facilities, logistics, and other support functions required for archives management.

Archives management is the management of acquiring and maintaining permanent records in an archives and making them available for public inspection.

Archivist is a person who manages archives or does archives work, particularly one who has been specially trained and certified to do such work.

Arrangement is an archival term for the sequential order of documents within files, files within series, and series within groups, and groups within an archives; it assists staff and users not only to find evidence but also to understand its structural and functional relationship to all other records of the same file, series, or group. It is also the work process of creating or perfecting such sequential order. One of the tasks of an archivist is to preserve, perfect, or establish the rational order that most accurately and appropriately reveals the functional purpose of the records and demonstrates most significantly their *evidential integrity* (*q.v.*).

ASCII is the acronym for American Standard Code for Information Interchange—a coding scheme that specifies bit patterns for individual characters for computer processing.

Closed record is any record that is deliberately protected from public inspection for any reason. [See *confidential record*. See also *open record*.]

Commercial value is the usefulness of a record or group of records as an item of trade. [See *intrinsic value*.]

Computer output microfilm (COM) is microfilm created directly from electronic records without going through an intermediary paper form.

Confidential record is any record that has been designated as confidential by statute or that includes information or matters considered to be privileged and to which public access has been generally denied by law and to which only government officials who need to use the information in the performance of their duties are permitted access.

Continuous custody is an archival principle of added value, holding that the continuous and unbroken retention of any record or set of records in the keeping and for the use of the corporate entity that created the record as a tool to perform work is conducive to trust and confidence in the authenticity, veracity, and reliability of the records (*i.e.* in their *evidential integrity*); and that (conversely) breaks in continuous custody cast doubt on the reliability and jeopardize the *evidential integrity* of any record or set of records. [See also *material integrity*.]

Corporate record is (a) a record of any private corporation or business enterprise, (b) a record of any duly incorporated institution, (c) a record of any church or religious organization, (d) a record of a professional, political, or social organization, or (e) a record of any other corporate entity under the law, including the records of an individual person in some cases.

Creating agency is an agency that produced or received and retained a record and that is responsible for such record's proper administration and disposition; also referred to as *agency of origin* or *originating agency*. [See *successor agency*.]

Current record. [See *active record*.]

Data is any form of information in any medium; in information technology it applies particularly to files that contain such material as database tables, text documents, images, or digitally-encoded audio or video.

Data archiving is a process of transferring information from on-line storage devices such as fixed magnetic disk drives to off-line storage media such as magnetic tape or optical disk, usually to protect the content information from loss or damage.

Data migration is process by which electronic data is copied from one medium format or one system to another, preserving its content and relationships so as to make it equally useful in the new format or system [See *migrate*.]

Description is an archival term for any label, list, inventory catalog, administrative history, biography, or other finding aid or writing that is composed by archivists to convey the identity, arrangement, and historical context of records to other archivists or to public users; it is also the function or work process of creating such finding aids.

Digitized records are records that have been converted to a digital image [see *imaging*].

Disposition [See *records disposition*.]

Docket is formal term for any agenda or schedule of proceedings of a court or other local government agency, which may include notes of actions or decisions of a court or meeting and may be deemed to have permanent value.

Dublin Core is an international *metadata* standard consisting of a 15-element set to describe a wide range of resources about the creation of a document.

Electronic record is a record that requires the use of a computer to create it, access it, work with it, delete it, or transfer it to another medium, invisible and indiscernible to a user until the system produces an image or sound.

Electronic records system is any electronic, electro-magnetic, optical digital, or magneto-optic system used to create, process, receive, keep, and retrieve records.

Enduring value [See *permanent value*.]

Essential record is any public record necessary to resumption or continuation of operations of state or local government, to re-creation of the legal and financial status of government, or to protection and fulfillment of obligations to citizens, and it is thereby a permanent record [see also *vital records*, which are different].

Evidential integrity is the inherent value of a record to instill public confidence in the authenticity, reliability, validity, and fidelity of a record to represent the government action, policy, or function that it records. [See *material integrity*.]

Evidential value is the inherent usefulness and reliability of a record as legal, fiscal, or historical evidence.

Fiscal value [See *evidential value*.]

Fond is a French archival term meaning “source”, and in archival work it refers to the entire body of records produced by one functional corporate activity; often referred to in the plural “*fonds*.”

Government record or **governmental record** is the same as public record.

Historical value is the usefulness of a record for the purpose of understanding history. [See *evidential value*, *informational value*, *intrinsic value*.]

Imaging is process of copying paper text to digital storage through the use of a raster-scanner device.

Inactive record is any record that is not an active record. Inactive records are usually transferred to records centers for economical storage and administration, or (if appraised as having permanent evidential value) they may be transferred to archives.

Informational value is the usefulness of content information in a record that is apart from, incidental to, or in addition to the primary purpose for which the record was created; for example, the usefulness of a record to convey information about persons, places, things, or matters dealt with by an agency, in contrast to documenting the agency’s organization, functions, and activities.

Intrinsic value is the inherent usefulness of the material property and the structure, contents, and context of a record as either marketable property, historical artifact, social icon, or cultural relic, or all of them together. Intrinsic value depends on *material integrity* (*q.v.*); damage to or destruction of material integrity damages or destroys intrinsic value.

Legal instrument is a deed of conveyance, court judgment, decree, or other similar public record of an official judicial, legislative, executive, or administrative action or other public transaction document that is authorized by law to serve as primary evidence of the action or transaction.

Legal value is the usefulness of a record as evidence before the law. [See *evidential value*.]

Long-term retention is retention of a record for at least twenty years, but usually not more than 100 years [see *permanent retention*; *short-term retention*; *mid-term retention*.]

Machine Readable Records are records that cannot be viewed or understood without help of some electro-mechanical device such as a computer.

Market value is the price that a record or group of records may fetch if offered for sale. [See *commercial value*; *intrinsic value*.]

Material integrity is the original shape, form, context, content, structure and substance of a record in the specific physical property and material form in which it was created. Damage to the material integrity of a record (tearing, blotting, melting, etc.) usually also damages the *evidential integrity* of the record. Transfer (or migration) of a record from one medium to another breaks the material integrity of the original record and requires extraordinary examination and care in the transfer process to assure that evidential integrity is not damaged or destroyed in the transfer process. Like *continuous custody*, maintaining original material integrity contributes to the confidence that the public may have in a record's *evidential integrity*.

Medium (plural: media) is the physical property and material form of recorded information, such as paper and ink, film, magnetic tape, electronic disk, etc.

Metadata is data that describes other data, such as data-set that describes the structure, attributes, processing operations, changes, access history, and the like of a database or file structure [metadata is an essential ingredient to maintain and display the structure, content, and context of any permanent record; metadata must be migrated (or transferred) inextricably tied to its related content information, from generation to generation of systems if a record is to retain its evidential integrity].

Mid-term retention is retention of a record for more than ten years but usually less than fifty years (overlapping with *long-term retention*).

Migrate is to transfer data, data sets, databases, etc., intact from one information system to another, to a successor system, or from one generation of a system to a new generation of the same system.

Minute book is a record of the actions of a court or governing body or an agency thereof, and it is usually appraised to be of permanent evidential value.

Monetary value is the commercial, insurance, or market value of a record expressed in terms of monetary currency. [See *commercial value*; *intrinsic value*.]

Muniments is an old-fashioned term for documents that confer authorities, rights, or privileges, and they are used as evidence by which those authorities, rights, or privileges may be asserted, claimed, maintained, defended, and carried out. Examples include deeds, constitutions, charters, appointments to office, and certificates that endow people or institutions with titles, status, rights, authorities, or privileges.

Official record is the same as *public record (q.v.)* as construed in Tennessee Code Annotated §10-7-301.

Open record is any record that is open to public inspection.

Open standards are computer operating standards that permit inter-communication and migration of data among different kinds of proprietary systems.

Original order is an archival principle that requires records to be kept in their original filing system and—document-by-document, file-by-file, series-by-series—so as not to destroy the intended functional relationships (context) among the records; sometimes referred to as “sanctity of the original order.” Damage to or destruction of original order damages or destroys the evidential integrity of a series or group of records. [See *arrangement*.]

Original record is a record that remains in the same content, context, and structure that it was created. [See *evidential integrity* and *material integrity*.]

Originating agency is the same as *creating agency* (*q.v.*).

Permanent retention is retention of a record indefinitely, for centuries rather than mere decades.

Permanent value means that a record is of such enduring usefulness that it justifies the public cost to preserve it in an archival medium such as paper or microfilm, and administer its use for the indefinite future, measured in centuries rather than decades, for the purpose of public inspection.

Personal papers are the records or archives of a private individual or family.

Private records are the records of any non-governmental corporate entity or individual.

Proprietary information is information that is the exclusive property of a single owner and may not be used without the permission or license of that owner [e.g., copyright information is proprietary].

Proprietary software is data processing software that is obtained under a license and that is protected by copyright or trade secret laws.

Proprietary system is a system that is exclusive to and relies solely upon the support of a single vendor and that may very well not be compatible with any other system or software.

Provenance means the origin or source of a person, place, or thing, including its ownership and location over time; in archives work it is a principle that records are to be kept, arranged and described according to their origins, and that the records from one functional unit, office, agency, institution, or other corporate entity shall not be intermixed or confused with those of another so as not to destroy the intended functional relationships (context) among the records. Damage to or destruction of provenance damages or destroys the evidential integrity of a record or groups of records. [See also *continuous custody*.]

Public access means that the public has the means and opportunity to inspect a public record;

it also means the right or privilege of such opportunity.

Public record, collectively or individually, is any record that details the organization, functions, transactions, or activities of public government business and that is made or received pursuant to law, resolution, or ordinance or in the transaction of official business by any governmental agency whether it be information, document, file, or database, that is created, recorded, communicated, or received in any format or medium in the course of public government business by any legislative, executive, or judicial agency, court, or instrumentality or official of state, county, or municipal government; and it includes all papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, microfilms, electronic data processing files and output, films, sound recordings, or other material regardless of physical form or characteristics. Also called *government record*, *official record*, *state record*, etc. See Tennessee Code § 10-7-301.

NOTE: It is the public ownership of the record that makes it “public”, not whether it is accessible to public inspection. Some public records are protected from public inspection by laws that protect privacy and confidentiality.

Publication most generally construed is the act or process of making a record or records available to public inspection (*i.e.* deliberately making them “public” instead of reserving them in inaccessible storage); more narrowly construed it is the act or process of broad distribution in multiple copies of a specific record or body of records to the public in general, and it is also any discrete package of information that is so distributed, no matter what the medium of packaging and distribution may be (print, film, audio-recording, electronic mail, etc.).

Published public record is any public record in any medium, whether print, electronic format, motion picture, audio recording, video recording, or the like, that has been prepared for widespread public distribution or broadcast with the intent of informing the general public, including information that aims to inform any specific segment of the general population.

Record means any recorded information produced or received in the initiation, conduct, or completion of an institutional or individual action or transaction and that comprises *content*, *context*, and *structure* sufficient to provide evidence of that activity.

(1) “Content” means information or matter conveyed by intelligible text.

(2) “Context” means the auspices, authority, or purpose of a record; the relationship between any given record and other records from the same source or agency; and the activity or circumstances in which the record was created.

(3) “Structure” means how the record and its content information is recorded, including use of symbols, format, layout, or medium.

Record book is a well-bound, durable book or ledger into which record copies of legal instruments and record copies of other records are registered or entered. Such record book is sometimes referred to as a transcript book or register.

Record copy is a complete and faithful copy of a legal instrument or other record that is carefully prepared and certified by meticulous inspection and collation to be a true copy so that it may be and in fact is officially authorized to serve as a valid and reliable representation of the original document and be suitable for submission in evidence.

Record group is a body of records that emanate from one agency or institution that has a discrete and specified function, hires and fires its own staff, has a discrete budget, and sends and receives correspondence in its own name.

Record series is a sequential series of files of records that document the activities of one specialized function within a larger agency or institution; a subset of a *record group* (q.v.).

Recorder is a municipal official whose duties and functions include preservation of the minutes of a municipal governing body, ordinances, and other important municipal documents.

Records administration is the same as *records management* (q.v.).

Records appraisal is the inspection of records to determine their value, and particularly to decide how long they should be retained and kept in the public interest; it is also the conclusion or decision that results from such inspection.

Records center is an interim storage and retrieval facility where inactive records of more than one agency may be administered on behalf of such agencies and may be stored and retrieved conveniently, economically, and in good order and inventory control until their final disposition and yet remain under the access and disposition control of their originating agencies.

Records creation means the recording of information on or in any medium.

Records disposition is what is done with records, whether that be retention and preservation of a record in whole or in part, by photographic or other reproduction processes, in active files of agencies, in records centers, archives, or other institutions, or whether it be outright destruction of the record.

Records disposition authorization is the formal, recorded approval of a decision to retain or to destroy a record or set of records, together with the justification for that decision; and, it is the official document used by an agency head to request authority for the disposition of records.

Records disposition schedule is a list of records or record series and the terms for which each must be retained in the control of their originating office before being transferred to the archives or destroyed, depending on the appropriate records disposition authority.

Records management is the application of management techniques to the creation, use, maintenance, retention, preservation, and disposal of records in order to reduce costs and improve efficiency of record-keeping and in order to assure the survival and protection of vital, essential, and permanent records for public inspection, and it is the orderly, systematic, accountable, creation, processing, communication, storage, retrieval, and authorized disposition of public records. Records management includes design, analysis, and management of records retention schedules, files and information retrieval systems, microfilm information systems, correspondence and word processing systems, records centers, forms, reports, and publications.

Records management program is the systematic, accountable application of records

management to the records of any state or local agency.

Records manager or **records officer** is a person designated to be responsible for carrying out an agency's records management program.

Records migration is the transmission of records from one electronic processing system to another, whether from a prior system to a successor system or from one contemporary system to another.

Records retention is the holding or keeping of records and maintaining them in good condition and readily accessible for agency use and/or public inspection. Records are retained in the original custodial office so long as they are useful for immediate evidence and reference in the daily work of the office. Thereafter, records must continue to be retained, whether temporarily in a records center or permanently in an archives, for so long as the specific records disposition authorization for those records requires.

Records retention term, also called **records retention period** is the designated lifetime of a record or record series prescribed by law or by a public records commission in a records disposition authorization. Records retention terms may be: *short-term*, i.e. less than ten (10) years; *mid-term*, i.e. ten-to-fifty (10-50) years; *long-term*, i.e. twenty-to-one-hundred (20-100) years; and *permanent*, i.e. indefinitely into the future.

Records transmission is any transfer, communication, broadcast, or publication of any record, any part of any record, or any group of records or any simulations or copies thereof by any means from one person, agency, or records system to another or to any citizen or group of citizens.

Redaction is editing done to sensitive documents before release to the public in order to comply with legal requirements for privacy or confidentiality.

Register is a record book; it is also the county official charged with keeping record copies of legal instruments such as property deeds and other records.

Replevin is a formal term for the legal process undertaken to recover and return to its proper custody the physical property of any record that has been unlawfully removed.

Respect des fonds is a French, archival term for the principle that the integrity of records from one functional source must not be broken, and that records from one source shall not be intermixed with those of another. [See *provenance*.]

Retention is to keep and maintain a record for its useful life. See *short-term retention*; *long-term retention*; *mid-term retention*; and *permanent retention*..

Short-term retention is retention of a record for less than ten (10) years.

State record is the same as *public record* (q.v.).

Successor agency is an agency that is authorized by law to accept and maintain the legal title, custody, and dominion of records that were created by another agency. A successor agency is usually a new agency that has assumed the functions of a former agency, or may be an archives to which records are transferred.

Temporary record is a record that may be disposed of in a short period of time because it is of limited, short-term value in documenting the accountable functions of an agency and that may be authorized for disposal by approved records disposition schedules after completing its useful retention term without unduly debasing or depleting the collective evidential value of the public archives.

Transcript book is the same as record book.

Vital records are records on whose evidence the personal identity of individual citizens before the law depends, such as records of fetal deaths, births, adoptions, legitimations, naturalizations of citizenship, marriages, divorces, and deaths, and amendments thereto. [See also *essential record*, which is different.]

Warrant is a formal term for documents that certify, authorize, and/or justify the accomplishment or prevention of an action, or the creation or destruction of a condition, and they grant authority to take a particular action or general class of actions. Examples include wills, licenses, allocations of funds, commissions, appropriations, orders, decrees, permits, etc.

Working paper is information or documentation created to serve as input for final reporting and its evidential value generally expires upon completion of the object report, including electronic data and/or computer output microfilm, and those records that become obsolete immediately after agency use or publication; however, a working paper may be deemed a permanent record if it contains evidence that justifies permanent retention in the public interest, and the designation “working paper” alone may not be used to justify the destruction of any record that has permanent value.

¹ “comprehend” is used here with the intent of including Braille and other means of making information known for the blind.

² Archival standards that are widely accepted are published as representing the consensus of market and professional experts by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the Association for Image Information Management (AIIM).

³ The term is also conventionally (and confusingly and misguidedly) used to mean the transfer of electronic data from the system in which it was created or resides for current operations to a separate storage system or medium, the which is *not* “archival” because (according to scientific testing and competent archival and records management authorities) it *cannot* assure long-term survival or durability of the evidential integrity of the record.