



Keeping documents and records

Introductory notes for instructors

Legal life skills outcomes

Knowledge:

- importance of staying organized

Skills:

- recordkeeping
- notetaking
- organization
- working in groups

Personal capabilities and circumstances:

- making time at the end of the workday to record information
- having or getting access to a computer and printer



CLEO

Community Legal Education Ontario
Éducation juridique communautaire Ontario

Information about documents

What is a document?

A document is any type of written information that someone gives to you, or that you give to someone. For example, if your employer gives you something in writing, such as an employment contract, that is called a “document”.

A document related to your work can also be something that someone else gives you, such as:

- A letter from a doctor saying that you can't work for a certain period of time
- A work permit

This can be on paper, or by email.

Why should I keep documents?

It's a good idea to keep a copy of any document that your employer gives you – or any document that you give your employer. This includes emails as well as paperwork. That's because if a problem comes up for you at work, it is usually better to have something written to prove that there is a problem. Examples of problems that might come up are:

- Not getting paid for all the hours that you worked
- Being told that your work hours are going to be reduced
- Being told that another employee has a complaint about you

Also, if your employer tells you something important about your work verbally, you can ask them to put it in writing and then keep that document.

What are some other reasons to keep documents? On the next page are some examples of common documents related to work, and why it's a good idea to keep them.

What type of documents should I keep?	Why is this important?	Example?
<p>Your employment contract (if your employer gave one to you in writing)</p>	<p>To make sure your employer is doing everything they promised In case a problem comes up in the future, so that you can get information and help about your rights</p>	<p>You start a new job. Your employer promised to pay you \$14 per hour. However, on your first paycheck, you notice that you only got \$13 per hour.</p>
<p>Notes you made about your employment contract (if your employer did not give you an employment contract in writing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try to write down what you remember about your conversation as soon as possible • send a note or email to the employer summarizing what you understood 	<p>To make sure your employer is doing everything they promised In case a problem comes up in the future, so that you can get information and help about your rights</p>	<p>You start a new job. Your employer promised that you would not have to work on weekends. However, in your second month there, your employer starts giving you shifts on Saturdays.</p>
<p>Your paystubs (proof of what you got paid)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you get paid by cheque, these should be attached to the cheque • If you get paid by direct deposit to your bank account, your employer should give these to you 	<p>To check whether your employer paid you for all of the time that you worked In case a problem comes up in the future, to prove what your employer paid to you</p>	<p>You just got a paycheck, but it seems smaller than you expected. When you check your calendar to see the hours that you worked, things don't add up.</p>
<p>Any important letter that your employer gives you about your work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your employer sends you an email, it's a good idea to print off a copy if you can 	<p>In case a problem comes up in the future, so that you can show someone the letter if you need advice</p>	<p>You have been coming to work on time every day, but one day you got held up and were half an hour late. The next week, your employer gives you a letter saying that you always come to work late.</p>

What type of documents should I keep?	Why is this important?	Example?
<p>Any letter that you give your employer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you send your employer an email, it's a good idea to print off a copy if you can 	<p>In case a problem comes up in the future, to prove that you asked your employer to do something</p>	<p>You want to ask your employer for two of your regular days off because you have family commitments.</p>
<p>Receipts for anything that your employer asked you to buy and bring back to the office for them</p>	<p>To prove to your employer how much you spent To help you ask your employer to pay you back</p>	<p>Your employer sends you out to buy coffee and muffins for a meeting at your office. They say "I have no petty cash right now – can you pay and we'll pay you back?"</p>
<p>A copy of any "expense report" or request to get paid back for money that you spent</p>	<p>To prove that you asked your employer to pay you back</p>	<p>You write an expense report to get your money back that you spent on the coffee and muffins.</p>

Information about records

What is a record?

A **record** is a thing that contains information about something that happened in the past.

For example, you can “keep a record” of your work hours by writing down the number of hours that you have worked every day when you get home. Even if you “punch in” or record your hours at your workplace, you might want to keep a separate record for yourself — because you might not be able to get a copy from your employer.

Some ways you can keep records about your work hours are:

- set up a Google calendar to keep track of your hours
- use the calendar app on your phone – or download the Google Calendar app – and make a note of your hours
- buy a date book and write down your hours OR
- download *free calendar sheets* and print them off

Also, if you have to ask your employer for something, you might want to keep a record by writing a letter or email to them after you’ve asked them. Examples of this are:

- Asking for time off work
- Asking for a change to your work schedule
- Asking a question about your paycheque

TIP

If you’re nervous about having to ask your employer for something, you could practice in advance with a friend. Or, you can write down what you want to say in case you think you might forget something.

Or, you can take notes about what you asked your employer for. Record the date and time that you asked your employer for something, and write down what they told you.

And, if your employer tells you anything important about your job, but does not give you a letter or document, write down what they said to you as soon as possible.

TIP

If you get paid in cash, ask your employer to provide you with information about **deductions** — or amounts of money that your employer has to hold back from your paycheck for taxes or Canada Pension Plan (CPP) contributions. If they don’t give you this information, you can make up a receipt confirming what you got paid and ask them to sign that.

Small group activity: Why keep documents and records?

Now that you have read some information about documents and records, please answer these questions. You can look back at the information if you need to. Pick one member of your group to write down the answers for the whole group.

1. What are some of the reasons to keep **documents** that you get from your employer?
2. What are some reasons that it's important to make a **record** of things that your employer tells you?
3. What are some ways that you can keep information about what you got paid? Can you think of any other ways besides the examples in the reading?
4. The reading above says that it's a good idea to make a record of important things your employer tells you, even if you ask them to put it in writing and they tell you they are going to. Can you think of your own reasons why this is a good idea?
5. Do you think that keeping records and documents about other things besides work could be helpful? What types of things, and why might it be helpful?

Information about storing and organizing documents and records

You have now learned about documents and records and why it is important to keep documents and records related to your work. The next step is deciding how to store and organize them.

Why should I store my documents and records?

Storing documents and records means keeping them in one place so you can find them.

It is very easy to leave documents and records in different places, depending on when you get them. For example, many people forget to take their pay stub out of their purse or pocket, and then lose it or throw it away.

Storing documents can be as simple as using a kitchen drawer or a shoebox to keep important information.

TIP

Try to keep information related to your work separate from mail, documents, and records you might have that are related to other things.

Why should I organize my documents and records?

Organizing documents and records means keeping them in an order that makes them easy for you to find if you need them. Some people call this “keeping a file”.

Organizing documents is important because:

- it makes it easier to find specific documents if you need them
- if you ever need help or advice about a problem at work, it makes it easier for the person helping you to read and understand the information quickly

How should I organize my paper documents and records?

First, pick something that you can keep the information in so that it stays in one place. Some examples that you can find at home or at the dollar store are:

- A shoebox
- Large envelopes — pick an envelope big enough to hold many documents
- Large binder clips — you can use those to keep your pay stubs and other important documents together
- A binder
- File folders

Try to keep your documents in good condition, so that they will still be readable if you need them. If you want to protect your documents from damp or crumpling, you can buy plastic document covers at a dollar store. Or, you can buy divider tabs that help keep documents separate.

One way that many people organize documents is to keep them in order by the date that is on the document. For example, if you keep your paystubs in order by date, it's easy to find the specific pay period if you think your employer made a mistake.

You can also keep different kinds of information in different folders or places. For example, you might want to keep your pay stubs separate from other types of documents, such as emails that you write to your employer.

TIP

You can use either **chronological order** (oldest information on top, and then newer information) or **reverse chronological order** (newest information first, and then by older information).

What happens if I lose documents that I need?

You can ask your employer to give you new copies of your documents. If you need to do this, you can make a list of the documents you need in your letter or email.

In the next exercise, you can practice organizing some sample documents and records related to work. However, what matters the most is finding a system that will work for you and that you can easily stick to.

How should I organize my online documents and records?

Depending on where you end up working, a lot of your documents might exist only in computer versions.

- If some of your documents and records are emails, print them off and keep them together. This will help make sure that important information is not lost if you lose access to your email account for some reason.
- If some of your records are in text message format, make notes about what the texts said on a piece of paper, or take screenshots of the messages on your mobile phone and print out the photos.
- If you do not have a printer at home, you can go to your local public library and print documents and records for a small charge per page
- You can also organize your documents and records using folders in your email program, or using a free online service such as Google Drive. Ask your instructor if you have any questions on how to use folders in email and Google Drive (to use Google Drive, you will need to set up an account)

Teaching notes and answer keys

Some of the exercises below prompt the students to give examples from their own lives. If you feel that your students are shy and not likely to give examples from their own lives up front, consider sharing your own examples to start off the conversation.

Answers

Small group activity: Why keep documents and records?

Now that you have read some information about documents and records, please answer a few questions. You can look back at the information if you need to. Pick one member of your group to write down the answers for the whole group.

1. What are some of the reasons to keep documents that you get from your employer?

Examples for teaching notes

- In case you end up having a problem at work down the road
- So that you know the terms of your employment and can review them if you have questions about what you are entitled to for holidays, sick time and other benefits
- So that you know what your responsibilities are, for example, how much notice you have to give if you want to ask for vacation time
- It keeps things less stressful if you need to find information

2. What are some reasons that it's important to make a record of things that your employer tells you?

Examples for teaching notes

- To make sure that everyone is on the same page and that you know what your employer expects of you
- To make sure that if you don't remember important information or dates, you can find it without having to ask your employer or coworkers
- In case of future problems

3. What are some ways that you can keep information about what you got paid? Can you think of any other ways besides the examples in the reading?

Examples for teaching notes

- Bank statements showing direct deposits
- T4 slips

4. The reading above says that it's a good idea to make a record of important things your employer tells you, even if you ask them to put it in writing and they tell you they are going to. Why might this be a good idea?

Examples for teaching notes

- They might not actually put it in writing as promised
- To have your own record in case what the employer puts in writing is different to what you understood
- To have your own record in case what the employer puts in writing changes since you spoke

Also, given that people can have different understandings of verbal conversations, it might be a good idea for the employee to send a note or email to the employer confirming what the employee understood from the conversation.

5. Do you think that keeping records and documents about other things besides work could be helpful? What types of things, and why might it be helpful?

Some examples:

- landlord/ tenant documents
- appliance manuals
- tax paperwork
- paperwork related to social assistance or social housing
- traffic or parking tickets and any related paperwork
- correspondence from kids' school
- paperwork related to the job readiness training program
- health records
- documents related to renewing ID documents and licences

Large group activity: Organizing documents and records

You can hand out 15-20 sample documents per learner as provided by CLEO – a variety of four to five different documents – and two or three file folders each. Before beginning the activity, you could show a sample of each of the types of documents and briefly describe what they are.

Here are some questions for the larger group to consider:

1. How did you find organizing the documents and records? Was it hard? Easy? Did it make sense?
2. What kind of system to organize documents has worked for you in the past, or what kind of system do you think would work well for you? Give examples.
3. What other types of documents in your life do you think it would be useful to organize? Do you organize other types of documents at home? (instructor to give a couple of examples)

Extension activity: Storage and security of electronic documents

This is a potential activity to link to “How can I keep track of an email that I send to my employer?”, above. You could discuss the following issues with your students:

- How to set up the “read receipt” function on email (where possible)
- How to set up and use Google Drive for saving and storing documents
- How to use email and Google Drive folders
- How to store passwords in case you forget them
- How to set up a separate email account for corresponding with your employer or corresponding more formally about other issues (for example, use a variant of your own name rather than PartyAnimal123@gmail.com)

This could also be an opportunity to discuss briefly social media presence and the fact that many employers would check to see if you have Facebook or Twitter accounts and what you post. It could lead to a good discussion about privacy concerns and the importance of avoiding posting certain types of content.

Free companion resources:

PLE Toolkit Module 1 — “Helping your clients find good legal information”

[http://www.plelearningexchange.ca/toolbox/
helping-your-clients-find-reliable-legal-information/](http://www.plelearningexchange.ca/toolbox/helping-your-clients-find-reliable-legal-information/)

Legal information for learners:

CLEO “Your Rights at Work” — <http://www.cleo.on.ca/en/publications/rightswrk>

To order free copies of “Your rights at work” for your class, you can use the online order form at <http://cleo.on.ca> or call 416-408-4420.

CLEO Steps to Justice website:

<http://stepstojustice.ca/category/legal-topic/employment-and-work>