

## § 1.3

## The Client File

### *Learning to Maintain a Classification Folder*

#### CRITICAL SKILL-SET

It is highly recommended that students purchase a classification file (if not provided by your program) to create and maintain a file for assigned clients. Keep all materials, including notes, prepared documents, and copies of relevant cases and statutes in the appropriate panels of the file.

While every law firm has its own system of file maintenance, there are some general guidelines. Most law firms use either standard legal files with panels for the various documents, or expandable files in which individual folders contain the documents. Some firms even use a combination of traditional legal files and expandable files. The most common file is the classification file or folder. Some have only one insert, which results in four panels.

The more common classification file used by law firms has two inserts, resulting in six panels, each with a two-pronged bracket at the top.

While the form and organizational order may vary, most arrange the material within the files into the same elements. Each element is organized in its own panel of the file.

Consider purchasing the following:

- a legal-size classification file with two inserts and six panels; they usually come in packets of five so one packet will serve several students
- *expandable files, which may be found at most office supply stores (not required)*
- *a two-hole punch (very helpful)*
- *if purchasing your own folder, also purchase small labels for naming each panel*



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**PANEL 1.**

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## Correspondence

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Letters, copies of faxes, and copies of emails should be collected as a group under correspondence. Attempt to organize it by date, with the older correspondence on the bottom so new material can simply be added on top. Most firms do not use indexes for correspondence, but it is a good idea to do so, since an index acts as a document inventory.

Examples:

- *Letters to and from the client*
- *Copies of particularly important emails and faxes*
- *Letters to opposing counsel, witnesses, and others*

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**PANEL 2.**

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## Instruments

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This panel is for contracts, wills, leases, titles, and other such material. **Never punch holes or staple original documents.** Instead, consider using a hanging pocket to hold the documents. Create a hanging pocket with a 9 x 12-inch envelope. Leaving the top flap open, create a two-hole punch, then insert the envelope into the Instruments panel.

Examples:

- *Attorney's Letter of Retainer*
- *Contracts and leases that may become evidence*
- *Automobile and property titles*
- *Relevant receipts*

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**PANEL 3.**

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## Work Product

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Material created as part of the litigation process, such as handwritten and typed notes, messages, internal office memoranda, and other similar material are collected in this panel.

Examples:

- *Notes taken in a meeting with your supervising attorney*
- *Legal research notes and copies of relevant cases or statutes*
- *Drafts of motions, pleadings, discovery, etc.*

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**PANEL 4.**

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**Exhibits**

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Material that will be presented to the court. Never punch holes in exhibits. Use a hanging pocket, as described in the discussion of the Instruments panel above. Exhibits that are too large to be kept in the client file should be maintained in a separate expandable folder or other location, with a reference to that location in the client file.

Examples:

- *A contract that will be presented at trial*
- *Photographs that will be presented at trial*
- *Expert reports*

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**PANEL 5.**

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**Pleadings**

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Collect all pleadings, motions, orders, proposed orders, and anything else filed with the court in this panel of the file. Keep a comprehensive pleading index.

Examples:

- *Complaint, Answer, Counterclaim, etc.*
- *Motions, Notices, Orders*

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**PANEL 6.**

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**Discovery Documents**

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Collect all discovery requests and responses in this section. An index is critical. You may also want to create a sign-in and sign-out sheet.

Examples:

- *Discovery requests and responses*
- *Deposition questions and transcripts*

## ORGANIZATIONAL HINTS

*Use an index as often as possible.*

Creating individual indexes for the Correspondence, Pleadings, and Discovery Panels is strongly advised. One index per panel at the top of each stack so it is the first thing seen when that panel is opened.

*Keep the file up-to-date.*

File and index all materials as soon as they are created or received to avoid loss, removing them only when you are ready to turn them in.

*Use pencils, not ink*

If writing on a document, do so only in pencil.

*Do not alter or mutilate original exhibits, evidence, or instruments*

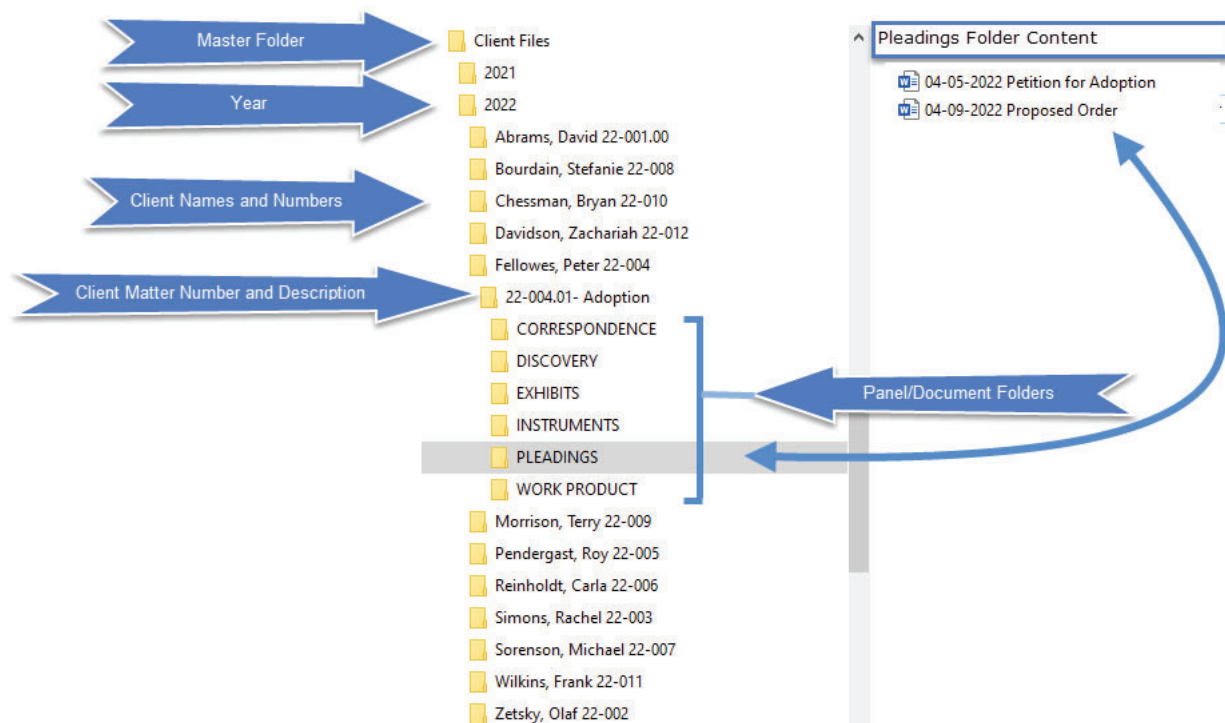
Never write on an exhibit or instrument, either in pen or pencil. If a notation is needed, use a sticky note attached to the exhibit or a paper clip with a sheet for notes.

*Where is that document?*

Since some original files will still be required by the court, a physical file will still be needed for instruments and exhibits. Consider scanning them in the appropriate digital folder for easy reference.

## THE DIGITAL CLIENT FILE

Some law firms, especially small to medium size firms, are using digital folders instead of physical client files. If your instructor prefers you to use this version of a client file, consider this organizational structure:



## CLIENT NUMBER

Every law firm or corporation will likely have their own filing system in place when you arrive for your first day of work, and it would make no sense to try to teach you multiple forms of filing. However, it will be good for you to have a common frame of reference by gaining experience with at least one excellent filing system. To that end, students will be expected to create and maintain a client file folder for the written assignments in this program.

To start with, a Client number will be needed. Typically, your firm's document clerk will assign the number. For example:

### Client Number 22-135.002

In the above example:

- 22-** is the year the client first opened a file with the firm
- 135** is the client number assigned by the firm
- .002** is the "Matter Number." In this instance, it appears that this is the second legal matter the firm has handled for Client 135.

## ASSIGNMENT § 1.3(A) | YOUR CLIENT'S NUMBER

Your first assignment is to select one of the following client numbers or create one of your own.

- Client Number 22-264.001
- Client Number 20-095.004
- Client Number 19-148.001

**Write your client number here:** \_\_\_\_\_

## ASSIGNMENT § 1.3(B)

### MAINTAIN YOUR CLIENT'S FILE THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAM

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Using the above guidelines create and maintain a client file. Students are expected to insert returned written assignments into the file and to keep up each index where appropriate. Students may be asked to turn in or show their client file at the end of the program for review. When applying for jobs, students should take the file with them to interviews. (It is recommended that students reprint assignments with no grades.) The file will act as a "portfolio" demonstrating acquired skills. *This is an ongoing assignment for the remainder of the program.*