

On screen: The National Archives logo, an eagle with its wing outstretched, appears on screen with the title, "Word of the Week: Nonrecord."

Narrator: Our word of the week is nonrecord.

On screen: A black and white 1940s vintage photograph shows a man drawing with pen and ink on a topographic map.

Narrator: Records help us document our work. They contain the information we need to serve our customers, support our mission, and understand our history.

On screen: A modern photograph of three women sitting together around a desk. All three are filling out paperwork.

Narrator: In the Federal government, records are made or received by a Federal agency (or someone working on behalf of the agency) in the course of government business. Records belong to the agency, and the amount of time each type of record is kept must be approved by the National Archives.

On screen: A group of men stand around a table. They are looking at documents in a file folder.

Narrator: Records come in all kinds of formats, and we need those documents, drawings, maps, databases, videos, and other materials to help us get our work done. But not all the information we work with is a record.

On screen: A pile of papers grows and grows until it fills the screen.

Narrator: We're creating and collecting more information than ever before. In many cases, at least part of the volume that's taking up all that space in our e-mail boxes, networks, and desks is not record material.

Narrator: In the Federal government, nonrecord materials usually fall under one of the following types.

On screen: The words, "Nonrecords fail to meet the conditions of records status." An e-mail message appears on screen. The message reads, "To: Records dot lady at N A R A dot gov. From: Prince Waldo at a land far far away. Subject: Greetings! Most magnificent friend, I bring you greetings and a timely opportunity to assist your dear friend in an effort that will bring you great wealth."

Narrator: Nonrecord materials fail to meet the general conditions of record status. In other words, they just don't quite rise to the level of a record. I'll give you an example. I received an e-mail message from Prince Waldo. He says that he's a member of the royal family in a land far, far away, and he has a wonderful financial deal for me. He says that if I'll just send him some money, he can make me very wealthy. Now, if I worked for a Federal agency that was investigating the Prince and his moneymaking schemes, that e-mail message might have value, but I don't, and this message is clearly junk mail. In this case, I have a nonrecord. In fact, I have a nonrecord that I'm going to delete right now. <click>

On screen: The e-mail message disappears.

On screen: The words, “Extra copies of documents used for reference.” A document with the word Policy appears at the top. As the narrator speaks, a second copy of that document appears, then disappears.

Narrator: Extra copies of documents can also be nonrecords, especially when those copies are made just for reference purposes. Let’s say I have an important policy document that explains how to buy a toner cartridge for our office printer. The original copy of that document – the official record – is on file with an office at our Headquarters. Right before my printer ran out of toner, I printed out a copy of that document, and that’s a good thing, because the printer really needs more toner, and now I need to figure out how to order some. My printout is a convenience copy of that official policy. I’m using my nonrecord copy for reference, and as soon as I’ve figured out all those steps and ordered the new toner, I’ll be able to recycle my copy, because I won’t need it for reference any more. If you have an information or reference copy of a document, and you’re not adding to it or taking action on it, you probably have a nonrecord copy.

On screen: A photograph of a round table with piles of colorful printed newsletters and publications. The words “Stocks of publications” appear.

Narrator: Stocks of publications and processed documents are nonrecords. If your office publishes an annual report or creates a flyer or brochure to give away to visitors, you’ll want to have a record copy on file to document your work, but those 500 other copies you have stacked on the front desk for people to pick up are nonrecords.

On screen: The words “Library material and museum exhibits” appear. As the narrator speaks, a photograph of a stack of library books appears.

Narrator: Library and museum material that is used only for reference or exhibit purposes will also fall under that definition of nonrecord material. For example, your office might purchase some business directories to help you identify companies and groups you need to contact, or you might subscribe to a professional journal so you can stay current on new developments in your field. Those materials are useful and helpful, but they’re not documenting our government work. They’re reference materials, and we’ll keep them in our office library until they’re no longer needed.

On screen: A photograph of a display in an office appears. There are several standing panels that feature black and white photographs arranged as an exhibit.

Narrator: Or let’s say you establish a display highlighting your agency’s history, and you make a copy of the founding documents that established your office. Those original documents are records, and they still need to be maintained. In fact, they probably need to be transferred to the National Archives as part of our nation’s history, but the copies you made to display in your exhibit are nonrecords.

On screen: A white screen fills with images of various newsletters, catalogs, and other publications.

Narrator: Nonrecords include things like office supply catalogs, professional and business journals, training catalogs, e-mail announcements, newsletters we receive from other organizations, copies of the Code of Federal Regulations, and other published materials like that.

On screen: Three bullet points reading “Stocks of Publications,” “Library and museum materials,” and “Extra copies used for reference.” Images of colorful publications and an image of a man holding a large, framed photograph of President Nixon with Elvis Presley.

Narrator: So, to summarize, nonrecords are things that don’t meet the definition of a record, stocks of publications and blank forms, library and museum materials used only for reference or exhibition, and extra copies of documents that are used only for reference.

On screen: The words, “Consider what the information is, and how it’s being used.” As the narrator speaks, four identical images of a blueprint appear.

Narrator: There are some times when things get a little more complex. When you’re identifying records and nonrecords, you need to consider what the information is, and how it’s being used. Here’s an example: There are times when several copies of the same document may all be records. One document can have multiple lives (so to speak). Let’s say an engineer is designing a product. She creates a record copy of the drawings and specifications for her project file. The engineer then sends a copy of that specification to the Purchasing department, because Purchasing is going to find someone to supply the parts. Purchasing has its own record - a procurement file - to document the work it’s doing as it places orders and spends money. The Manufacturing department and the Inspector who quality-checks the final product may also end up with copies of the specification in their own files. Each department may need to retain its files for a different period of time, depending on that department's business needs. When we’re trying to determine whether something is a record, we need to look at what that item is, and how it is being used.

On screen: “When in doubt, treat it as a record.” The four identical pictures of maps are now faded and gray, with a gray question mark in the center of the four images.

Narrator: If you’re not sure about a document, treat it as a record and contact your records liaison, records manager or Records Officer. He or she can help you figure it out.

On screen: Three pictures appear, one after another, as the narrator speaks. The first picture shows large wooden shelves in a garage. The shelves have records overflowing from them, and some of the shelves have collapsed. In the second picture, stacks of library books appear all over a floor. In the third picture, three men in suits stand next to a 1940s style car and look at a cardboard box while checking a clipboard.

Narrator: In the Federal world, nonrecord materials do need to be managed so they don't overtake our servers, inboxes, and desktops. When we do need to keep nonrecords, we want to be sure that they are not intermixed with our official files. That way, it's easier to find the information we need and easier to preserve our important records for the right amount of time. It's also important to weed out nonrecord materials that are obsolete or no longer useful. A little regular maintenance can help us keep our networks and our offices running more smoothly.

On screen: The National Archives logo appears with the words, "For more information about the U.S. National Archives and records management, visit www.archives.gov."

Narrator: If you'd like more information about managing your records and nonrecords, visit us online at archives.gov.

On screen: A black screen with the National Archives National Records Management Training Program appears.