



NATIONAL ARCHIVES *and* RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
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Subject-Numeric File Hints

[Unless otherwise noted, all examples are derived from the 1965 version of the filing manual issued for the Subject-Numeric File. That manual applies to the records from 1964 to 1973. The same principles apply to the 1963 segment of the files.]

The Department of State's Subject-Numeric File, in use from 1963 to 1973, is a pre-arranged subject filing system. The filing of documents was based on the use of alpha-numeric subject designators and alphabetic country designators that were combined to build a file designation. The file manuals issued by the Department of State are the most basic guide to using those files. The manuals, however, may lead researchers to a false sense of certainty as to the location of documents of interest. The files are split into the following time segments: February-December 1963, 1964-66, 1967-69, and 1970-73.

To most effectively use the Subject-Numeric File, one must understand how the documents were categorized and filed. The Department of State instructed Foreign Service Posts to limit each reporting document to one discrete subject in order to facilitate indexing, filing, and retrieval. This was not always possible to do at the most detailed level so the filing system provided for levels of specificity and the indexers in the Department aimed to file documents at the appropriate level of detail/specificity with regard to both subject and country in a given document. To accommodate documents covering more than one subject or country, the Department's file custodians made liberal use of cross reference notices to point the way to documents of interest.

Subject Designations

The records are arranged by primary subject in seven broad subject matter areas. A mnemonic symbol is assigned to each subject. Those symbols are from one to four letters long and were chosen because of their obvious relationship to the full subject name. Unlike the Central Decimal File which is largely arranged by subject class and thereunder by country, the Subject-Numeric File is arranged by primary subject and thereunder by country. This means that research in the Subject-Numeric Files generally involves review of more files that are generally smaller in scope as compared to the Central Decimal File.

When researching a topic that is a sub-file of a broader topic, researchers should be sure to examine the documents in the higher-level (more general) file categories in addition to the file "on" a given topic. This is especially true for the records under file categories that do not accumulate a significant volume of records. For example, the filing manual indicates that documents on black

marketing will be found under the primary subject "Economic Affairs (General)" file designation "E" under "E 8-4 [country designator]." The hierarchy of file numbers leading to that topic, however, is:

- Primary Level• E Economic Affairs (General)
- Secondary Level• E 8 Economic Conditions
- Tertiary Level• **E 8-4 Black Marketing**

While you would expect to locate documentation dealing with black marketing at the tertiary level under "E 8-4 [country designator]", in many cases, especially where there is not a significant amount of documentation on the subject covered by the tertiary level, the documents of interest will be filed at the more general secondary level, in this case " E 8 [country designator]."

While most records are filed by country, some are arranged by organization names, and still other records are filed using only the basic file designation (i.e. without a country or organization designation). Documents in those files are the most general in nature and often document American policy decisions at the most basic level.

Country and Organization Designators

Records are further broken down by the country or region or organization. Unlike the country number system used for the Central Decimal Files where the countries were assigned numbers based on geographic location or colonial relationship, the country, region, and organization designators in the Subject-Numeric File are strictly alphabetical in nature. Country, region, and organization names may be spelled out in full ("INDIA" for India) or they may be abbreviated using the first few letters of the name ("POL" for Poland and "KOR N" for North Korea), or a common abbreviation ("USSR" for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, "LA" for Latin America, and "UN" for the United Nations).

To locate documents relating to a specific country, the country designator is combined with the subject designator and subject number to develop the file designation under which documents of interest are filed.

If interested in oil exploration and development in Saudi Arabia, for example, join the country designator for Saudi Arabia ("SAUD") with the subject designator for petroleum ("PET") and the subject number for oil exploration ("10-2") to determine that the appropriate file for oil exploration and development in Saudi Arabia is "PET 10-2 SAUD". The documents found there will generally deal only with Saudi Arabian exploration and development matters, but, as with the subject numbers, there are country designators that might lead to other files with pertinent records. Documents of a more general

nature will be filed using the country designator for the Middle East (" NEAR E") in file "PET 10-2 NEAR E". Such documents are likely to discuss petroleum matters with a more regional perspective, putting the issues relating to Iran into a regional context.

The National Archives prepared a comprehensive list of the known country designators over time; it is available in the Archives II Research Room.

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