Outline of today’s lecture

1. The purpose of documents
2. The nature of documents
3. Documents in context

What are documents?

We are surrounded by documents

‘There is barely a moment in our waking lives when we are not engaged in either creating new documents or accessing existing ones.’

1. What are documents used for?
   - to communicate professionally and personally
   - to conduct business
   - to establish our rights and obligations
   - to entertain ourselves

1a. Document intent
   - to inform (ie to convey knowledge)
   - to communicate
   - to entertain
   - to authorise

1a. Document intent
   - to control or regulate relationships between people
   - to provide evidence
   - to certify an action or deed
1c. Some documents are found:

- tree rings
- fossils
- forensic evidence

1d. Intentional documents

Information products are intended for publication:

- books
- music CDs
- signs
- published photographs
- commercial films
- political leaflets
- websites

1e. Intentional documents

Information by-products are created as records or evidence:

- private letters & diaries
- receipts & statements
- official records

1e. Intentional documents

Information by-products serve different purposes for different users.

- You may throw your receipt away, but can a shop afford to be so cavalier with its records of sale?
- What different information by-products might be generated by the sale of the following item?

2. A document is

- a representation of knowledge and/or
- recorded evidence of an action and/or
- a captured communication

2a. A document has attributes as

- Stored information
- Retrievable information
- Accessible information
2b. Document as **stored** information

- a physical object that can inform us (information-as-thing)
- it ‘stores/holds’ information
  *and we can in turn*
- store it in an information system

2c. Document as **retrievable** information

- stored in an information system, documents need to be available for retrieval
- how we classify a document can play a crucial role in allowing us to retrieve it when we need it

2d. Document as **accessible** information

- once retrieved, documents must be accessible
- ie, in a format that can be readily used

2f. A traditional definition of a document

'a record on a more or less flat surface'

S. R. Ranganathan
(a key figure in 20th century information management)

2g. A Document can take the form of

- **Text**
  - writing, numbers, musical notation
- **Moving and still images**
  - film and video, paintings and photographs, diagrams etc.
- **Recorded sound**
  - speech, music etc.

2h. Documents can assume various media

- Documents can be represented, captured, stored, retrieved and accessed:
  - as marks, signs, sound waves, images or bits
  - on paper, card, vinyl, film, magnetic tape or CD
2i. Elements are documentary forms

- The medium (on or in which it carries its information content and structure)
- The technolog(ies) used to create and/or access it
- Structure - elements and organisational features characteristic of the form

3. Contextual information

**Information about a document:**
- who created it?
- why was it created?
- under what circumstances?
- in what system?
- for which audience?

3. Document habitats

- The workplace
- The home
- The Internet

- Purpose for which it was created
- Content - information unique to a particular document
Can an antelope be a document?


‘But some documents are:
– the photographs and the catalogues of stars,
– stones in a museum of mineralogy, and
– animals that are cataloged and shown in a zoo.’

Suzanne Briet (1951)
(another key figure in 20th century information management)

Next lecture:
Searching for information/Document analysis

4. Further reading