

**NAME OF SYSTEM:**

**Office Files Coordinate Index**

**ORIGINATOR:**

**Office of Scientific and  
Technical Information**

**Office of Aerospace Research**

**Department of the Air Force,  
Washington, D.C. 20330**

**OBJECTIVE.** To evaluate several nonconventional document reference systems, with a view toward implementing the method that shows the best promise of improving office-level document identification and retrieval processes.

**BACKGROUND.** The Office of Aerospace Research is a separate operating agency answering directly to the Headquarters, United States Air Force. It conducts and supports research relating to the Air Force's operational capabilities. It can therefore be seen that the proper handling of office correspondence and technical documents is most important to the overall effectiveness of this organization. Its scientifically-oriented document collection mainly includes professional papers, technical reports and proposals, and journal articles on research matters.

The conventional hierarchical subject classification system was not particularly well suited to the needs of the office, and therefore it was decided to explore other techniques for organizing the files. It was concluded that a rather simple nonconventional coordinate indexing system would satisfy this goal. It was further decided to attempt to use regular office personnel to operate the system, although systems of this type customarily employ professional indexers. To determine the feasibility of this, a period of on-the-job evaluation of coordinate indexing methods was conducted using available office personnel—clerks, stenographers, and secretaries—to perform all tasks. The test was successful, and the Office of Scientific and Technical Information established a columnar card, coordinate indexing system on a permanent basis.

**THE NEW METHOD.** The physical elements of this columnar card system consists of an overprinted 5 x 8 inch index card and a loose-leaf binder containing a vocabulary of commonly used words (indexing terms). The columnar index cards, called word-cards, contain ten vertical columns numbered consecutively from 0 to 9 for use in entering the numbers of the accessioned documents. The last digit of the document's number determines the column to which that number is posted. The only purpose of the columnar format is to assist in scanning for identical document numbers. The vocabulary is a form of translation dictionary that contains words commonly known and frequently used in correspondence or by searchers in describing desired correspondence, with cross references for synonyms. A word-card is placed in the card file for each authorized indexing term contained in the vocabulary.

The input processing sequence is relatively easy to learn, and in the case of this system is usually performed by an office secretary. Each incoming document is first reviewed to determine whether it should be accessioned or discarded. If retained, it is assigned a document number. It is then scanned or read to identify key terms. The key terms thus selected are checked against the approved vocabulary word-list to determine, in each instance, what term should be used for actual indexing purposes. The columnar word-cards representing these approved terms are then withdrawn from the card file and posted to show the newly accessioned document's identity number. The document is then placed in the serially numbered document file and the columnar word-cards are returned to their alphabetical position in their file.

In the retrieval process, a secretary is usually given several descriptive words pertaining to the document sought by the user. Through use of the vocabulary word-list, she translates those initial words, where necessary, into the actual indexing terms used in the system. She withdraws the cards representing these terms from the columnar word-card file and compares document numbers on

all cards, column-by-column, for coinciding document numbers. The material thus identified is withdrawn from the document file and given to the requester.

**REMARKS.** This columnar card, coordinate indexing system well serves the objectives of the sponsoring office. The method represents the simplest and least expensive of the nonconventional reference systems in

terms of equipment and maintenance costs. In this particular situation, regularly assigned office personnel were able to quickly learn the principles and procedures required to handle and index office correspondence.

With proper planning, conversion from a conventional, multisubject filing system to a coordinate system of this type can be accomplished with little disruption in day-to-day operational effectiveness.

## OFFICE FILES COORDINATE INDEX

