

MEASURE

Reliability and Integrity of Case Files **6**

DEFINITION

The percentage of case files that can be retrieved within established time guidelines and that meet established standards for completeness and accuracy of contents.

PURPOSE

Readily available case files that are complete and accurate are fundamental to the effectiveness and efficiency of daily appellate court operations as well as to the fairness of judicial decisions. The integrity of case files affects not only the decision-making process, but also has a direct impact on the organizational effectiveness of an appellate court. This measure provides information regarding

- **AVAILABILITY** — how long it takes to locate a case file
- **RELIABILITY** — the correspondence between the information in the physical file and information in the court’s case management system
- **INTEGRITY** — the organization and completeness of the file

Appellate courts have direct control of the petitions, notices, briefs and other documents filed with the court. These materials are recorded and placed in the appellate *case file*. The *case record*, which is critical to the appellate review process, is constructed by the trial court or agency from which the appeal is taken. This construction of the *case record* is commonly shaped by the parties in the original case being appealed, within parameters set by statute and/or the court. Appellate courts have a duty to ensure and maintain the integrity of the case record once received, at which point it becomes part of the appellate court’s case file for the purposes of this measure. Many appellate courts that use electronic case files will need to modify this measure to correspond to the court’s electronic records system.

AVAILABILITY

Availability is measured by reviewing a random sample of case files and individually documenting the amount of time it took to retrieve each one.

METHOD

The actual times are then compared to the court’s desired or established objective, e.g., 95% of all case files should be available within 15 minutes of the request for the file. Varying objectives can be established for pending, closed (on-site), and closed (off-site) case files, as appropriate. A random sample of 50 files for each case category/subcategory is suggested.



File Location Data Collection Form

Case Type:

Appeal by
Permission-Criminal

Sample Size:

50

File Type (check one)

- Pending
 Closed, On-site
 Closed, Off-site

Random
case #'s

A10754
A10621
A10560
A10012

A10998
A10296

Total files

Time required to locate file

0-15
minutes

16-30
minutes

31-60
minutes

61+
minutes

Not
found

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

40

6

2

2

0

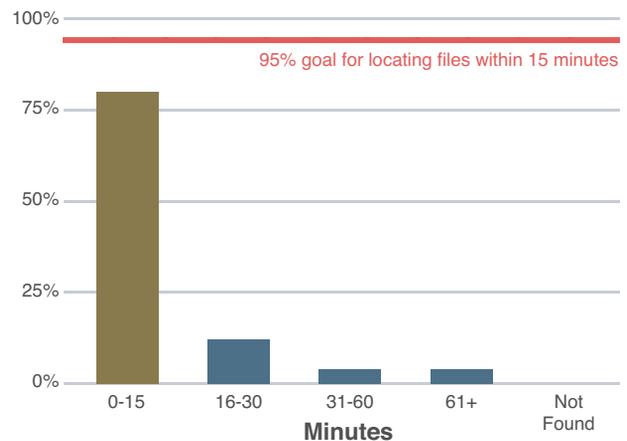
ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

In this example, the court determines that 100 percent of the Pending, Appeal by Permission-Criminal files were located. Of those, 80 percent (40 case files) were located within the court's time standard of 15 minutes. Court staff and management need to evaluate why the remaining files could not be located within that time frame and determine if this result suggests the need for changes in the court's records management practices.

Courts should establish a high standard for locating case files within their established time standard and measure their performance against that standard.

Evaluating different categories of records (on-site, off-site, closed, pending) will ensure that records management practices are consistently effective throughout the court's operations.

Percent of Case Files Retrieved for Pending, Appeal by Permission-Criminal



RELIABILITY

METHOD

Reliability is measured by determining the extent of agreement between the case file summary contained in the court's case management system and the physical case file's contents. The content of the case file summary (also referred to as the case docket, case file register, register of actions) varies across jurisdictions, but generally includes a complete listing of the documents filed with the appellate court for each case. To make this comparison, entries on the case file summary are compared to the actual documents in each file. Conversely, documents in the file are compared to the case file summary. Results are evaluated against an established goal or standard.

For each case in the sample of files examined in the first element of this measure (Availability), review the case file summary and case file contents. For each case file, record the answers to the following questions:

- Does every document-related entry on the case file summary have a corresponding document in the case file?
- Is every document in the case file listed as an entry in the case file summary?

Count the number of cases according to the answers to these questions. Calculate the percentage of cases for which “Yes” was answered to both questions.

Content Reliability Data Collection Form

Case Type:	Random case #'s	Every document-related entry on the case file summary has a corresponding document in the case file?		Every document in the case file is listed as an entry in the case file summary?		Total Yes/Yes Responses
		Yes	No	Yes	No	
Appeal by						
Permission-Criminal	A10754	X		X		X
	A10621		X	X		
Sample Size:	A10560	X			X	
50	A10012	X		X		X
File Type (check one)						
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pending	A10998	X			X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Closed, On-site	A10296	X		X		X
<input type="checkbox"/> Closed, Off-site						
Total files		45	5	48	2	43

In this example, of the total of 50 files examined, a total of 45 files have an entry for each document in the file. A total of 48 files have a document for each entry. Thus, not all entries have documents and not all documents have entries. To compute the overall percentage of files meeting the Reliability goal of Yes/Yes, divide the total Yes/Yes (43) by the total number of files examined (50). The result is 86 percent.

$$43 \div 50 \times 100 = 86\%$$

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

In the following example, the court has set a content reliability standard of 98% correspondence between the case file summary list of documents and the presence of the documents themselves in the file for all case categories. This standard applies to both pending and closed files and to files stored on site or off site in archives. In this example, the court’s active management of files when they are pending ensures that the reliability goal is maintained across all case categories except Death Penalty appeals, which fall short. Some of the closed, off-site files are becoming less

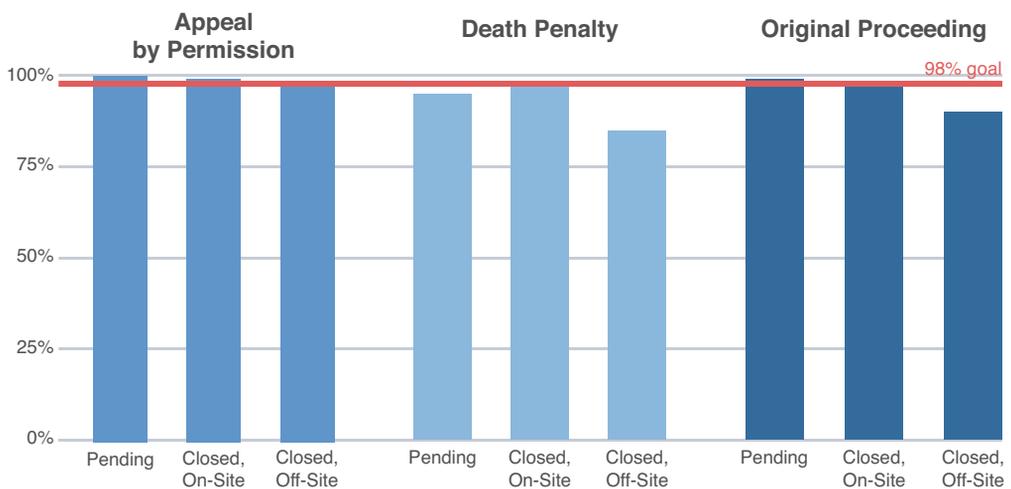
MEASURE

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6

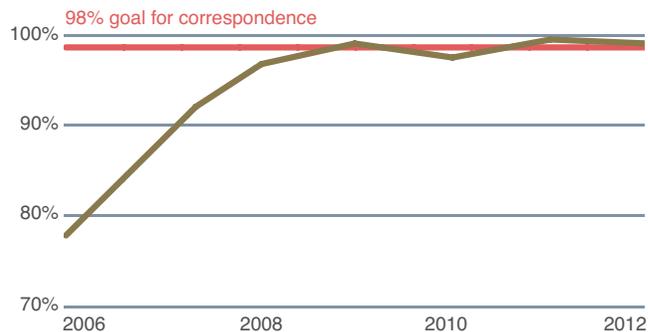
reliable, possibly because the court makes those files available upon request for review and copying of documents, and documents are being lost somewhere in that process. The court should evaluate controls in place to ensure files retain their reliability.

Correspondence Between Case File Summary and Contents



Data can also be analyzed over time (e.g., annually) to see if performance is consistent, improving, or declining. In the example below, all case categories are collapsed into a single, global measure for all Closed, Off-site files. After reviewing the data above in its first year of measurement, the court has improved its records management practices and maintained a high level of performance.

Correspondence Between Case File Summary and Contents for Closed, Off-site Files



INTEGRITY

METHOD

The third element of this measure explicitly investigates whether documents are missing from both the file and summary. If this were true, the previous element (Reliability) would not reveal this problem. The first step is to identify 5 to 7 appropriate criteria for mandatory file contents and organization. Criteria might include the presence of specific documents in the file, if the documents were submitted and processed correctly (e.g., correctly captioned, date stamped), and if documents were placed in the correct location and file sequence.

Once the criteria are defined by the court for the relevant case categories, the same random sample of 50 files used for the first two elements of this measure is examined and results of evaluating the case files for integrity are recorded on a data collection form.

File Organization and Completeness Data Collection Form

Case Type:	Random case #'s	Organization			Completeness		
		Confidential Documents	Date/ Time Stamp	Correct Caption	Leave to Appeal	Proof of Service	Appellant's Brief
Appeal by Permission-Criminal	A10754	X	X	X	X	X	X
	A10621	X	X	X	X	X	
Sample Size: 50	A10560	X	X		X		X
	A10012	X	X	X	X	X	X
File Type (check one) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pending <input type="checkbox"/> Closed, On-site <input type="checkbox"/> Closed, Off-site	A10998	X	X	X	X		X
	A10296	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Total files	50	50	48	50	46	49

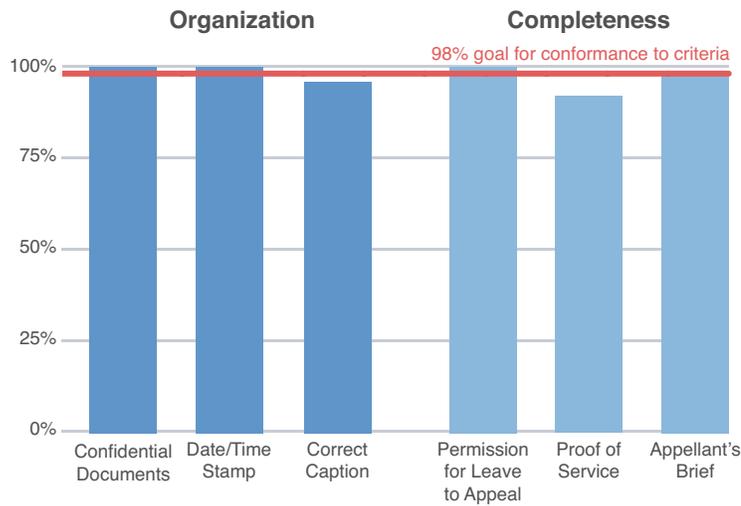
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In the example above, all 50 files examined contain correctly identified and sealed Confidential Documents. All 50 files have documents with the correct Date/Time Stamp, and a total of 46 files contain a Proof of Service. To compute the percentages, divide the total number of files in each column by the grand total number of files examined (50), multiplied by 100. For example, the Confidential Documents percentage is 50 divided by 50 multiplied by 100, or 100 percent; for Proof of Service, the percentage is 46 divided by 50 multiplied by 100, or 92 percent.

$$46 \div 50 \times 100 = 92\%$$

These results are shown below in a bar graph. Here the court's standard for integrity is shown as the red 98 percent line. Interpretation of the results of this element of the measure depends on the nature of the specific criterion and the importance of each to the court's records management system and judicial process. Where incompleteness creates delay, the court may wish to take corrective action.

Conformance to Criteria



Terms You Need to Know

Case file: The file of the appellate case containing the petitions, notices, briefs, and other documents filed with the court in the course of the appellate proceeding. In the broadest sense, this file incorporates the case record as part of the record of the appellate proceeding.

Case record: The record of the original proceeding that is being appealed. This record is constructed by the trial court or agency from which the appeal is taken, and its contents are commonly shaped by the parties in the original case being appealed, within parameters set by statute and/or the court.

Closed cases: Cases that have been disposed by the court, regardless of the manner of disposition.

Off-site case files: Case files that are stored in a facility other than the site of the court responsible for those case files.

On-site case files: Case files that are stored in the same building as the court responsible for those files.

Pending cases: Cases that are awaiting disposition by the court.

Random sample: A sample chosen that minimizes bias in the selection process. For example, a random sample of files can be generated from a list of file numbers by picking an arbitrary starting point on that list, then taking every *n*th file. Thus, if the total number of files on the list was 1,500, and the desired sample size was 150, then every fifteenth file could be selected until the desired number of 100 was reached ($1,500/100=15$).

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